

# FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES

## Sweet Revenge



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. *"Untitled" (Revenge)*, 1991. Blue candies in clear wrappers, endless supply. Overall dimensions vary with installation. Ideal weight: 325 lb. Installation view: *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Sweet Revenge*. Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain. 27 May. – 12 Oct 2026. Cur. Alejandro Cesarco and Nancy Spector. Photographer: Roberto Ruiz © Estate Felix Gonzalez-Torres

**DATES:** 27 May 2026 – 12 October 2026

**LOCATION:** Sabatini Building, Floor 1

**ORGANISER:** Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

**CURATORS:** Alejandro Cesarco and Nancy Spector

**COORDINATED BY:** María Castillo and Fernando López

The exhibition *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Sweet Revenge* represents the first large-scale presentation of the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957–1996) in Madrid. The exhibition draws on the paradox of “sweet revenge” to understand how the artist used beauty in his work as a form of resistance, oscillating in his practice between celebration, critique, and defiance.

The artistic production of Gonzalez-Torres took place within a specific historical and geographical context: the United States, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. This exhibition revisits and reinterprets that political, social, and emotional environment from a contemporary perspective. The unsettling affinity between that period and our present cultural moment is undeniable, as is the lasting influence that Gonzalez-Torres’s work continues to exert on new generations of artists.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. “Untitled” (*Revenge*), 1991  
Blue candies in clear wrappers, endless supply.  
Overall dimensions vary with installation. Ideal  
weight: 325 lb.

Installation view: *El Jardín Salvaje [The Savage Garden]*. La Fundación Caja de Pensiones, Madrid.  
22 enero – 10 marzo de 1991. Cur. Dan Cameron.  
Photographer: Javier Campano

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As the exhibition’s curators, Alejandro Cesarco and Nancy Spector, point out, “as is often the case when presenting exhibitions devoted to artists who have entered the canon of art history—however unstable or contested that notion may be—the question inevitably arises: why Felix Gonzalez-Torres again, and why here and now? The urgency of our current geopolitical moment, its resonances with the neoliberal conservatism of the late 1980s and 1990s, and the way his work allows us to reconsider, reframe, and position ourselves in relation to those conditions, is one way of justifying the re-presentation of his work.” Likewise, they highlight the artist’s “unyielding faith” in “the potential of art to promote change for the better, something that seems particularly crucial today.”

*Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Sweet Revenge* can be visited from 27 May to 12 October 2026 on Floor 1 of the Sabatini Building at the Museo Reina Sofía. Across multiple interconnected galleries within an exhibition space architecturally adapted for the occasion, visitors will be able to experience more than fifty works showcasing Gonzalez-Torres's practice, with loans from institutions such as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Glenstone, Potomac, Maryland, among others, as well as from private collections.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. "Untitled" (Madrid 1971), 1988. C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag and wall lettering. Three parts; 15 x 18 inches overall. One part: 9 1/2 x 7 1/2 inches. One part: 7 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches. One part: 1/2 x 3 inches.

Installation view: *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Sweet Revenge*. Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain, May 27 to Oct. 12, 2026. Cur. Alejandro Cesarco and Nancy Spector. Photographer: Roberto Ruiz.

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Madrid was an emotionally complex place for Gonzalez-Torres. In 1971, he was sent to Spain as part of a program aimed at relocating children from Cuba to distance them from the regime. He remained here for a brief period before moving to Puerto Rico and later to New York, where he would spend most of his adult life. He did not return to the city until 1991, on the occasion of a group exhibition. Recalling that first return, he wrote: "...I returned to Madrid almost twenty years later—sweet revenge—."

Under this notion of "sweet revenge," the exhibition proposes, in the words of its curators, "an understanding of the powerful use of difference, contradiction, and paradox across the various bodies of work it brings together." In this sense, they note that "the central framework of *Sweet Revenge* is to demonstrate how Gonzalez-Torres's work consistently sustains multiple, often seemingly opposing conditions at once. The tension between these terms is not incidental but fundamental to the way the work activates critical reflection."

Gonzalez-Torres's work both attracts and unsettles at the same time, sharing while holding back. This duality is expressed in his generosity, evident in works such as paper stacks or piles of candy that viewers are invited to take and that can be endlessly replenished, as well as in his light strings, textual portraits, and billboards, which allow for mutability. Although the work offers itself to the viewer, it also demands active engagement: it calls on visitors, collectors, and curators to participate in the creation and transmission of a meaning that is constantly shifting and dependent on context.

In the context of the AIDS crisis, and as a gay man living with HIV, Gonzalez-Torres's work is deeply marked by the loss of his partner, Ross Laycock in 1991. Through pairings of like objects (mirrors, clocks, light bulbs), the artist alluded to erotic union and queer love, often circumventing censorship through the strategic use of abstraction.

Moreover, he reinterpreted the visual languages of Arte Povera, Conceptualism, and Minimalism from an unstable, participatory, and deeply personal perspective. Aware of the imminence of his own death from AIDS, Gonzalez-Torres anticipated the future of his work and left an influential legacy in which seemingly simple aesthetic forms become carriers of intense emotional and political charge.

## Method

Felix Gonzalez-Torres's works operate within a set of principles, instructions, and possibilities. Personal experience and political commentary are often suggested in the parenthetical parts of his titles, which almost always follow "Untitled". Certain works are produced for each presentation. These "manifestable" sculptures are created according to a set of parameters described by the artist that those responsible for presenting the works reinterpret before and during each exhibition.

These decisions take into account the production variables of the exhibition site, as well as the interpretive value and the social, political, and aesthetic contexts in which it takes place. The candy works and most of the paper stacks are infinitely replenishable, their composition varying according to public participation, and curator' decisions, entertaining the possibility of their complete disappearance. Similarly, the textual portraits are mutable; the person or institution that owns the portrait may modify its content, as well as those responsible for exhibiting it, if given permission. A new version of a portrait does not invalidate previous versions, and some of his works can be shown in multiple places at once.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. "Untitled" (Passport), 1991. Paper, endless supply. 10 cm [4"] ideal height. x 60 x 60 cm [23 5/8 x 23 5/8"].

Installation view: *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Sweet Revenge*. Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain, May 27 – Oct. 12, 2026. Cur. Alejandro Cesarco and Nancy Spector. Photographer: Roberto Ruiz

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All of this points to a performative aspect in Gonzalez-Torres's practice: a set of rights and responsibilities that are interpreted and enacted by the owners of the works, the curators who present them, and those in charge of their maintenance. At the same time, public participation is essential for the work to fulfill its potential for circulation and interpretation over time. In doing so, the artist challenges notions of authorship and permanence, offering instead flexibility and openness to interpretation.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. *"Untitled" (Revenge)*, 1991. Blue candies in clear wrappers, endless supply. Overall dimensions vary with installation. Ideal weight: 325 lb. Detail of the work.

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## ***Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Sweet Revenge, a Personal and Participatory Journey***

Following a carefully designed architectural adaptation of the exhibition space on Floor 1 of the Sabatini Building, the exhibition *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Sweet Revenge* unfolds across a sequence of ten galleries, featuring more than fifty works in which visitors occupy a central role as active participants, invited to engage with many of the pieces.

### **Room 1**

The exhibition begins with the work “*Untitled*” (*Revenge*), 1991, a sculpture composed of blue candies in clear wrappers, which Gonzalez-Torres presented in 1991 when he returned to Spain for the first time as an artist to take part in the group exhibition *El Jardín Salvaje* [*The Savage Garden*] at the Fundación Caja de Pensiones in Madrid, and which functions as a leitmotif or central thesis of the current presentation.



Installation views of *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Sweet Revenge*. Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain, May 27 – Oct. 12, 2026. Cur. Alejandro Cesarco and Nancy Spector. Photographer: Roberto Ruiz

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## Room 2

This gallery reveals the artist's more personal, even biographical side through a word portrait, *"Untitled"*, 1989, often perceived to be a self-portrait, as well as early work influenced by Gonzalez-Torres's time in Madrid, such as the photographic puzzle *"Untitled"* (*Madrid 1971*), 1988, and reference to a circa 1979 video (not included in the exhibition or the artist's mature oeuvre), in which Gonzalez-Torres performatively contemplates his political exile from Cuba to Spain as a child. The stack of white sheets of paper, *"Untitled"* (*Passport*), 1991 references ideas of travel as well as forced relocation. The gallery reflects the artist's distrust of linear methods of writing history and conventional representations of identity.

## Room 3

The exhibition continues with more works that reflect Gonzalez-Torres's embrace of the political, the relationship between the public and the private, and how these issues affect people's lives—recurring themes throughout the show, here embodied in works such as *"Untitled"* (*Public Opinion*), 1991.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres. "Untitled", 1988. C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag. 20 x 24 cm.

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Public opinion is, in the artist's words, a "fragile truce," a temporary convergence of varied attitudes seeking to articulate a shared conviction within the collective sphere. For centuries, those in positions of power have influenced populations to think and act in uniform ways. In ideal circumstances, public opinion is formed organically, from the ground up, when systems of values align and lead to collective action. It is a powerful tool. In today's

environment, saturated by mass media and social networks, public opinion is easily manipulated by algorithms and disinformation campaigns.

#### **Room 4**

In this gallery, visitors can experience works such as the twelve part light string “*Untitled*” (*North*), 1993, and “*Untitled*” (*Portrait of Austrian Airlines*), 1993, which convey the artist’s ideas around circulation and displacement as well as his passion for ideas of travel. This presentation marks the first time that this portrait, originally presented in billboard form, is presented as a frieze and updated by the curators to reflect sites of siege around the world in 2026 along with the years that global tech companies went public. In this work, place names abound, memories are invoked, and the imagination is stimulated.

Gonzalez-Torres’s art literally circulates; it is distributive. Sculptures composed of stacks of paper and candies are offered to visitors for free consumption. More broadly, his practice reflects on the physical, moral, and psychological implications of movement, transgressing boundaries, shifting locations.



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## Room 5

Gonzalez-Torres's work is filled with suggestions of love, and particularly of queer love. In this gallery we find works that present pairings—two full-length mirrors placed a whisper apart, a double grave, dancers performing a duet—that allude to romance, erotic union, the joy of loving, and the fear of loss and discrimination. Objects paired in this way cannot easily be censored, prosecuted, or erased. Gonzalez-Torres did not, however, seek to assign a fixed meaning to these forms, but rather to reveal their possible poetic associations and their capacity for personification.

Yet with love also comes the possibility of loss and pain. In Gonzalez-Torres's elegiac universe, the death of his partner, Ross Laycock, from AIDS was central to his poetics. The artist publicly mourned his loss as much as he celebrated their love.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. "Untitled" (Arena), 1993. 60 light bulbs, porcelain light sockets, electrical cord, and dimmer switch. Overall dimensions vary with installation

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## Room 6

Gonzalez-Torres's art does not distinguish between the personal and the political, and it erases the boundaries between these spheres, moving fluidly between personal and collective histories, revealing the interconnectedness of these dimensions. This becomes all the more relevant in a context in which authoritarian control is increasing in various parts of the world, and private behaviors are increasingly monitored and legislated.

His work also makes clear that history is never linear. It is always unfolding, looping back on itself, renewing its relevance, and eluding capture. This is evident in his “manifestable” sculpture “*Untitled*”, 1990, composed of a stack of red paper in which the names Himmler and Helms coexist.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. "Untitled", 1990. Print on red paper, endless copies. 28 inches at ideal height x 28 3/4 x 22 1/4 inches (original paper size). Photographer: Lance Brewer

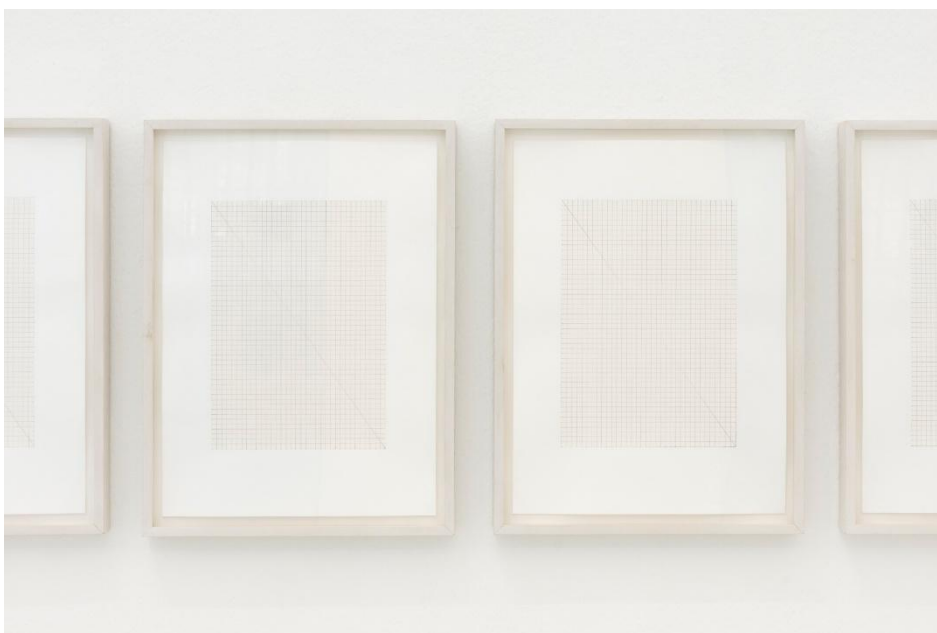
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## Room 7

Gonzalez-Torres resisted mimetic representation and instead turned to different forms of abstraction. The body is omnipresent in his art, though it is rarely visible as such. His strategic use of abstraction destabilizes identity as a fixed position and disrupts predetermined readings.

His word portraits precisely acknowledge that an individual's life is inseparable from the historical events that precede it and those that traverse its present. Because they are alterable, they invite an ongoing reconsideration of how the private and the public intertwine within any person's history.

Diagrams translate data into visual forms, as in the artist's bloodwork graphs with barely visible diagonal lines, either ascending or descending to track the body's physical health. Gonzalez-Torres's beaded curtains— especially the one presented here, "Untitled" (Chemo), 1991, evoke biomedical themes which are at once literal and metaphorical representations of passages: between rooms or between physical states.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. "Untitled" (*21 Days of Bloodwork - Steady Decline*), 1994. Gouache and graphite on paper. Overall dimensions vary with installation Twenty-one parts: 16 1/2 × 12 3/8 inches each

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## Room 8

*Sweet Revenge* is a way of holding contradictions, paradoxes, or differences in tension. In doing so, it dismantles the reductionism of binary thinking and suggests other realities or modes of being.

Gonzalez-Torres revisited—and often subverted—the strategies he himself had established for his art. For example, he created a billboard that could only be installed once, unlike the others, which can be reproduced infinitely. He also produced stacks of paper whose sheets are not meant to be taken, and others whose sheets are literally double-sided. He further collaborated with other artists to disseminate their work through his freely circulating paper stacks.

For instance, on the occasion of a 1994 commission from *Parkett* magazine for a multiple accompanying an issue in which he was featured, Gonzalez-Torres created a photographic billboard, limited to an edition of eighty-four, each example of which can only be installed once. Unlike all his other billboards, which can be endlessly replicated with their owners' permission, each edition of "Untitled" (*For Parkett*), 1994, cannot be refabricated once it is installed in a particular location. Its first location is, essentially, its last.

The Museo Reina Sofía, through Fundación Museo Reina Sofía, acquired the work for its collection to be specifically installed in this exhibition.

## Room 9

*“Untitled” (Beginning)*, 1994, a penetrable green curtain that graces the entry to this gallery, evokes ideas of thresholds—exceptional events, moments of uncertainty, and open possibilities. To begin again as a form of sweet revenge is to be caught between what is palpable but imperfect and what is absent but alluring, between the insistence of the actual and the hopeful promise of a (better) future.

The systems and structures Gonzalez-Torres put in place anticipate the migration of the work into the present tense—a present that would outlive him. The protocols Gonzalez-Torres created choreograph viewers and caretakers of his work to enact, among other things, the depletion and replenishment of symbolic forms. While exhibitors have specific decision-making rights and responsibilities, the audience plays its own role.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. *“Untitled” (Beginning)*. 1994. Strands of beads and hanging device. Dimensions vary with installation, and *“Untitled”*, 1992/1993, Print on paper, endless supply, 8” at ideal height x 44 ¼” x 33 ½” (original paper size)

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## Room 10

The question of time manifests in various ways in Gonzalez-Torres's work. The photographic, which points to its passage and to memory, is also deeply intrinsic to his practice, as demonstrated by framed prints, puzzles, and billboards, but also by mechanically reproducible paper stacks. It is also literalized in the photographic albums that, if filled, can function as palimpsests of lives well-lived.

In this gallery, different everyday uses of photography are presented: a curtain that functions as a filter and tints the light; a list of cultural events and personal experiences that appear intermittently on a monitor as linguistic snapshots portraying an indeterminate subject; with two chairs placed in front of the monitor, inviting a shared viewing experience.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (*Loverboy*), 1989. Sheer blue fabric and hanging device. Dimensions vary with installation and "Untitled" (*Beautiful*, in conjunction with Lousie Lawler), 1990. Print on paper, endless copies.

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The exhibition ends with a section dedicated to ephemera including textual sources for Gonzalez-Torres's quotes, which appear in wall texts throughout this exhibition, and diverse examples of printed matter related to exhibitions and installations during his lifetime. Some of this ephemera reflects the unique rhetorical framing devices that Gonzalez-Torres developed for a select number of invitations, press releases, artist statements, and publications. Some of the material acknowledges design templates of the institutions with which he worked.

While Gonzalez-Torres purposefully used distinct methodologies for the types of materials he designed specifically in relation to installations of his work, the tactical deployment of abstraction, obliquity, citation, and scale in his artworks is echoed in the design of this printed matter. However, and just as in the work itself, the tone is not uniform, or unified; at times it is declarative, agenda-driven, and factual, and at other times it is intimate, vulnerable, and poetic.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled", 1989. Framed silkscreen on paper. 16 ½ × 21 ¾ inches. Edition of 250, 10 Aps. Published by Public Art Fund, New York

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## ***Sweet Revenge Beyond the Museum***

For Gonzalez-Torres, the presence of his work and its interrelation with public space were essential. In this sense, the exhibition extends beyond the Museum to expand across the city of Madrid through the installation of one of billboards, made possible by the provision of spaces by the company JCDecaux, located in several metro stations such as Cuzco, Guzmán el Bueno, Retiro, O'Donnell, Legazpi, and Tirso de Molina.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. "Untitled", 1992. Billboard. Dimensions vary with installation.

Installation view in Metro de Madrid as part of Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Sweet Revenge. Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain, May 27 – Oct. 12, 2026. Cur. Alejandro Cesarco and Nancy Spector. Photographer: Roberto Ruiz

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## Collaboration with the Fundación Museo Reina Sofía



Felix Gonzalez-Torres. “Untitled” (For Parkett), 1994. Billboard on Appleton coated stock. Dimensions vary with installation. Maximum dimensions: 125 × 272 inches. Edition of 84, 15 Aps. Published by Parkett-Verlag, Zurich. Fundación Museo Reina Sofía, 2026. Gift Familia Butinof

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La Fundación Museo Reina Sofía, in alignment with its mission to support the Museum, has acquired in 2026—thanks to a donation from the Butinof family—the work “*Untitled*” (*For Parkett*). On the occasion of a commission by the magazine *Parkett* in 1994 for a multiple accompanying an issue in which the artist was featured, Gonzalez-Torres created a photographic billboard in a limited edition of eighty-four copies, each of which may only be installed once. Unlike his other billboards, which can be reproduced indefinitely with the authorization of their owners, each edition of “*Untitled*” (*For Parkett*) cannot be remade once it has been installed in a specific location. Its first placement is, in essence, also its last.

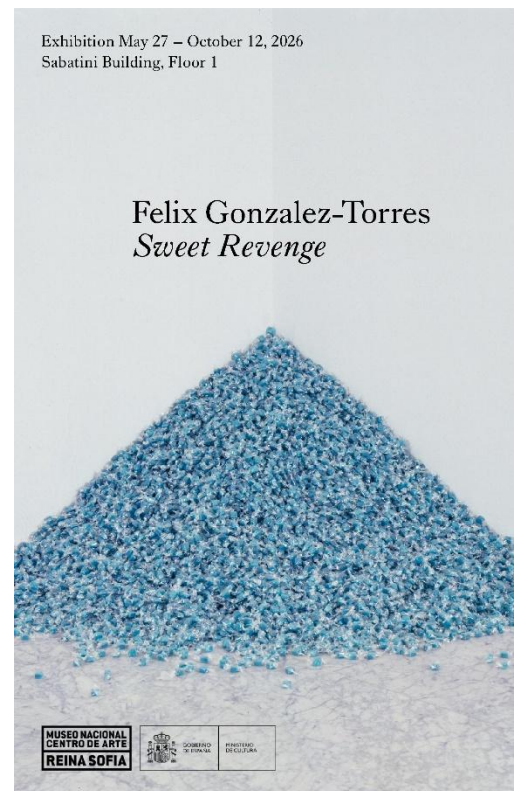
## Inaugural talk

On Tuesday, May 26 at 7:00 pm, the inaugural talk will take place between the curators, Alejandro Cesarco and Nancy Spector, moderated by the Museum's Director, Manuel Segade, in Auditorium 400 of the Nouvel Building.

These inaugural talks, which are part of one of the main lines of work of the Public Programs Department, aim to delve deeper into the content of the exhibitions organized by the Museum from the perspective of artists, curators, and specialists.

## Publications

On the occasion of the exhibition, a digital brochure has been produced featuring texts by the curators and quotes from the artist, which can also be seen in the exhibition, and which includes a complete list of the works on display. It will be available at this [link](#) or in the galleries through a QR code, in both Spanish and English.



## About Felix Gonzalez-Torres

**Felix Gonzalez-Torres** (American; b. 1957, Guáimaro, Cuba; d. 1996, Miami, USA, due to complications from AIDS) was one of the most significant artists to emerge in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Gonzalez-Torres began his art studies at the University of Puerto Rico before moving to New York City, where he attended the Whitney Independent Study Program, first in 1981 and again in 1983. He received his BFA from Pratt Institute, New York, in 1983 and his MFA from the International Center of Photography and New York University in 1987. From 1987 to 1994, Gonzalez-Torres was a part of the artist collective Group Material, whose collaborative, politically informed practice focused on community engagement and activist interventions.

Gonzalez-Torres's first institutional solo exhibition was presented at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1988). Other major solo presentations of Gonzalez-Torres's work during his lifetime included *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA (1995), which traveled to Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain (1995), under the exhibition title *Felix Gonzalez-Torres (A Possible Landscape)*; and to the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France (1996), under the exhibition title *Felix Gonzalez-Torres (Girlfriend in a Coma)*; and the three-venue exhibition *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Traveling*, presented at Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., USA; and The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Chicago, USA (1994).

Gonzalez-Torres is one of only two artists to have posthumously represented the United States at the Venice Biennale, in 2007.

Major exhibitions of Gonzalez-Torres's work have been presented at the National Portrait Gallery and Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., USA (2024-2025); Dia Beacon, Beacon, NY, USA (2024-2025); Bourse de Commerce, Paris, France (2022); Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto, Toronto, Canada (2022); Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), Barcelona, Spain, (2021); Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2016); Metropolitan Arts Centre, Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom (2015); PLATEAU and Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea (2012); a six-part traveling retrospective organized by WIELS Contemporary Art Center, Brussels, Belgium,

traveling to the Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland, and Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany (2010-2011); Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (2008); Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, Germany (2006-2007); and Serpentine Gallery, London (2000).

Work by the artist is held in significant institutional collections worldwide, including: The Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland; Pinault Collection, Paris; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Fondation Beyeler, Basel; Tate, United Kingdom; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas; Dia Beacon, New York; La Colección Jumex, Mexico City; Pola Museum of Art, Hakone, Japan; Astrup Fearnley Museet for Moderne Kunst, Oslo; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, among many others.

### **About Alejandro Cesarco**

**Alejandro Cesarco** is a Uruguayan artist, publisher, and curator. He is also Professor at Malmö Art Academy (Sweden) and Director of the New York based non-profit organization A.rt R.esources T.ransfer. Earlier this year he opened LAWRENCE, a small art-bookstore in Madrid, where he lives and works.

### **About Nancy Spector**

**Nancy Spector** is a curator, writer, and art historian. She most recently organized *Helter Skelter: Arthur Jafa and Richard Prince* for the Fondazione Prada, Venice. She serves as International Advisor to the Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris and was previously Artistic Director and Chief Curator of the Guggenheim Museum, where she organized an exhibition of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's work in 1995, which travelled to Santiago de Compostela and Paris. Her new monograph on the artist will be published by Phaidon Press in this fall.

**Madrid, May 26, 2026**

**In collaboration of:**

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**Press material**



**For further information**

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