Felix Gonzalez-Torres: A Three-Part Exhibition

May 5, 2016 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

The work of artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who was lost to AIDS in 1996, is being celebrated in a three-part exhibition in New York, Milan and London. The New York exhibition at the Andrea Rosen Gallery runs from now through June 18, featuring painted word portraits.

The late Cuban-born artist was one of five Cuban-born artists I highlighted in 2015 as curator of a featured gallery for Visual AIDS. As a first-generation Cuban American, I related to all of them, but perhaps to the work of Gonzalez-Torres the most.

As his biography on Visual AIDS states: Employing simple, everyday materials (stacks of paper, puzzles, candy, strings of lights, beads) and a reduced aesthetic vocabulary reminiscent of both Minimalism and Conceptual art to address themes such as love and loss, sickness and rejuvenation, gender and sexuality, González-Torres asked viewers to participate in establishing meaning in his works.

And as The Wall Street Journal states: In a work such as “Untitled” (USA Today), audiences are encouraged to take candies individually wrapped in red, silver, and blue cellophane from a pile, subverting, in the process, the notion of permanence and the anticipated relationship of the viewer to a work of art. And, as such a work can never be exactly replicated, especially when compared to the relatively static nature of a painting or photograph, it forces the issue of interpretation and responsibility in recreating these works from show to show.

Click here and here to see additional examples of his work. And click here for a 2013 blog post I wrote about a billboard exhibition depicting his work.

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