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	MoMA Exhs.	1623.20

The Museum of Modern Art

PRESENTS: FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES

May 16 - June 30, 1992

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

MoMA exh. # 1623, 5/16/92-6/30/92

Project #34

Central to much of Gonzalez-Torres's art is his interest in exploring the permeable boundaries that separate private experience from public realities, and the collapse of conventional distinctions between these two realms. The artist's billboard-scale image of the rampled bed, clearly saturated with the trace of human presence, is an image without words, stark and direct, rather than precious, leaves an overwhelming impression. By omitting caption or text, Gonzalez-Torres leaves the picture's significance open-ended, responding to the varied nature of his audience.

Posted on the Museum's gallery wall, the picture is accompanied by a printed guide to the billboards in situ, which provides Museum visitors with a key to the piece as a whole. This shifts the emphasis from the image's private content and its personal connotations to its public impact. Posted in twenty-four different locations, the artist's billboard image of the bed reveals the view of the surrounding space from a unique perspective.

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The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
May 1992

PROJECTS: FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES

May 16 - June 30, 1992

Beginning May 16, 1992, the work of American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres is on view at The Museum of Modern Art and at various sites throughout New York City. Organized by Anne Umland, curatorial assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, PROJECTS: FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES consists of a single enlarged photographic image -- that of his own empty, double bed -- displayed at the Museum and on twenty-four city billboards. The exhibition is on view through June 30, 1992.

Central to much of Gonzalez-Torres's art is his interest in exploring the permeable boundaries that separate private experience from public realities, and the collapse of conventional distinctions between these two realms. The artist's billboard-scale image of the rumpled bed, clearly imprinted with the trace of human presence, is an image without words, where absence, rather than presence, leaves an overwhelming impression. By omitting caption or text, Gonzalez-Torres leaves the picture's significance open-ended, responding to the varied nature of his audience.

Pasted on the Museum's gallery wall, the picture is accompanied by a printed guide to the billboards in situ, which provides Museum visitors with a key to the piece as a whole. This shifts the emphasis from the image's private content and its personal connotations to its public context. Posted in twenty-four different locations, the black-and-white image of the bed remains the same as the surrounding urban landscape changes.

-more-

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Ms. Umland writes in her essay for the brochure accompanying the exhibition, "Given the vitality of these places, it becomes almost impossible to keep our eyes on the photograph and that is the artist's intention....Yet at the same time as city and image vie for our attention, the urban landscape serves as a colorful foil against which the photograph's absolute reticence and interiority are starkly revealed."

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was born in Cuba in 1957, moved to Puerto Rico when he was eleven, and now lives and works in New York City. He received his BFA degree from Pratt Institute (1983) and MFA degree from the International Center for Photography/New York University (1987). The artist is a recipient of several grants and fellowships, most recently from the Gordon Matta-Clark Foundation (1991), the Lannan Foundation in conjunction with INTAR Gallery, New York (1990), and the National Endowment for the Arts. In addition to his representation in numerous national and international exhibitions, Gonzalez-Torres is a member of *Group Material*, an art collaborative dedicated to cultural activism.

The PROJECTS series is made possible by generous grants from The Bohen Foundation, The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Contemporary Arts Council provided additional support for this exhibition. Next in the series is **PROJECTS: ERIKA ROTHENBERG** (July 11 - August 25, 1992).

* * *

No. 35

For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.

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felix gonzalez-torres

projects



The Museum of Modern Art
New York
May 16–June 30, 1992

"caption" or "dateline" pieces, the artist runs apparent non sequiturs such as "Pol Pot 1975 Prague 1968 Robocop 1987 H Bomb 1954 Wheel of Fortune 1988 Spud" in white type across the bottom of black sheets of paper. Here he asks the viewer to consider not only the correlations of the events or things named, but also the historical or conceptual gaps between them.

In an analogous manner, Gonzalez-Torres invites people to take away pieces of his candy-spill and paper-stack sculptures, activating the literal physical terrain between audience and art object, rather than the conceptual space of history. By focusing on the public implications of a private individual's actions, Gonzalez-Torres complicates conventional distinctions between the two realms.

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The Museum of Modern Art
invites you to attend
a reception to celebrate
the exhibition

Like many other artists of his generation, Gonzalez-Torres's concerns extend beyond the self-contained boundaries of the art object to encompass the circumstances that surround it. At issue here is not only the artist's choice of subject (a bed) and medium (photography) but also the question of where and how to display the picture (on billboards scattered across New York City, repeated twenty-four hours a day, enlarged to superhuman scale). The exhibition focuses not only on the photograph's personal content but also on its social context and on the inextricable connections between the two.

As in previous works Gonzalez-Torres has taken fragments from the public discourse—newspaper snippets for example—and isolated them in the center of large sheets of paper. In this work the process is reversed. Rather than clipping fragments from the mass media and repositioning it within the hallowed space of a work of art, he makes the photograph the bed the informational fragment, and collages it into a broad and varied pattern of the contemporary landscape.

The artist has explained that by "taking a little bit of information and displaying this information in absolutely illogical meetings," he hopes to reveal the real issues. The juxtaposition of an image that we are used to reading as private and a space usually conceived of as public is what Gonzalez-Torres would describe as an "illogical meeting." When we call something illogical, we are really saying that it runs counter to our expectations. For instance, a bed might most simply be defined as the smallest amount of space that we can call our own. Gonzalez-Torres presents his audience with something different—a bed that has been recast in a new, everyday form. Some of our most basic associations with this familiar piece of furniture—its human scale, its function—are upset.

By placing his work not only within the relatively intimate space of the museum but also outdoors, the artist challenges another assumption. Most of this exhibition is not in a museum—where we naturally expect it to be—but in the gallery contains only keys to the whole: a billboard, an enlargement of the photograph of the bed, identical to those posted throughout the city, and this brochure, which documents the billboards in situ and guides viewers to their sites. Museumgoers enter the gallery only to find that the artist wants to send them back out into the world.

By presenting this work in twenty-four different locations

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Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough.

Wallace Stevens,
from *Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour*

These lines from a Wallace Stevens poem describe a fictive space, a dwelling place constructed from imagination. Upon rereading these words in late 1991, the artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres realized that some deep memory of them lay behind his decision, earlier that year, to photograph his own empty double bed. Closely cropped, Gonzalez-Torres's photograph, which is displayed here in the Museum's Projects gallery and on twenty-four billboards throughout New York City, is an intensely private image that recalls the intangible space Stevens described.

Gonzalez-Torres came across *Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour* in a book of Stevens's poetry given to him by his lover, Ross, in 1988. Between the time of this gift and the present moment lie not only years, but irrevocable loss. In 1991, Ross, whom Gonzalez-Torres has referred to in the past as his only audience, his public of one, died of AIDS. His illness and, ultimately, his early and tragic death permeate the panorama of Gonzalez-Torres's art.

Two risks are taken in introducing the topics of homosexual love and death at the outset of this discussion. First, there is a chance this work will be misinterpreted as being only about AIDS. And second, there will always be those who find in such subjects cause for discomfort. Yet the risks are intentional. For as the artist himself has said "[My work] is all my personal history, all that stuff . . . gender and sexual preference. . . . I can't separate my art from my life."

In striking this intimate note, then, the aim is not to limit our perception of Gonzalez-Torres and his work, but to ground it in reality. It is to begin with the artist's own story about the origins of the image of this vast bed. It is also to emphasize what is really at issue here: not private revelations—of personal history and sexual preference—but what happens to such revelations when they are placed in a public context. Much of Gonzalez-Torres's art questions what we mean when we describe things as "private" or as "public." Are we referring to private lives, for example, or private thoughts? To private property or to private spaces? Are we responding to how these meanings conflict, intersect, and draw significance from their apparent opposite, that which is "public"—public personas, public opinions, public art, public space?

The artist uses diverse formal means to explore this territory; he works with billboards and books, words and images; he uses materials that range from candies and cookies to jigsaw puzzles and stacks of paper; he takes advantage of commonplace techniques such as offset printing and photography to make his art. In so doing, he creates work that can adapt, chameleonlike, to whatever a particular set of circumstances requires.

One way to think about Gonzalez-Torres's art and about the questions of public versus private is to think about the conceptual and physical spaces in between things. In his

"caption" or "dateline" pieces, the artist runs apparent non sequiturs such as "Pol Pot 1975 Prague 1968 Robocop 1987 H Bomb 1954 Wheel of Fortune 1988 Spud" in white type across the bottom of black sheets of paper. Here he asks the viewer to consider not only the correlations of the events or things named, but also the historical or conceptual gaps between them.

In an analogous manner, Gonzalez-Torres invites people to take away pieces of his candy-spill and paper-stack sculptures, activating the literal physical terrain between audience and art object, rather than the conceptual space of history. By focusing on the public implications of a private individual's actions, Gonzalez-Torres complicates conventional distinctions between the two realms.

Like those of many other artists of his generation, Gonzalez-Torres's concerns extend beyond the self-contained boundaries of the art object to encompass the circumstances that surround it. At issue here is not only the artist's choice of image (his bed) and medium (photography) but also the decision of where and how to display the picture (on billboards, scattered across New York City, repeated twenty-four times over, enlarged to superhuman scale). The exhibition focuses not only on the photograph's personal content but also on its social context and on the inextricable connections and differences between the two.

Whereas in previous works Gonzalez-Torres has taken elements from the public discourse—newspaper snippets for instance—and isolated them in the center of large sheets of paper, here the process is reversed. Rather than clipping something from the mass media and repositioning it within the clean smooth space of a work of art, he makes the photograph of the bed the informational fragment, and collages it into the broad and varied pattern of the contemporary urban landscape.

The artist has explained that by "taking a little bit of information and displaying this information in absolutely ironic and illogical meetings," he hopes to reveal the real meaning of issues. The juxtaposition of an image that we are inclined to read as private and a space usually conceived of as public is what Gonzalez-Torres would describe as an "illogical meeting." When we call something illogical, we are essentially saying that it runs counter to our expectations. A bed, for instance, might most simply be defined as one of the smallest amounts of space that we can call our own. But Gonzalez-Torres presents his audience with something quite different—a bed that has been recast in a new and extraordinary form. Some of our most basic associations with this familiar piece of furniture—its human scale, its domestic location—are upset.

In displaying his work not only within the relatively intimate space of the museum but also outdoors, the artist challenges yet another assumption. Most of this exhibition is not here in the museum—where we naturally expect it to be—but elsewhere. The gallery contains only keys to the whole: a billboard-scale enlargement of the photograph of the bed, identical to those posted throughout the city, and this brochure, which documents the billboards in situ and guides viewers to their sites. Museumgoers enter the gallery only to find that the artist wants to send them back out into the world.

By presenting this work in twenty-four different loca-

tions, the artist shifts emphasis away from the photograph's content to its context. Through its reiteration, what becomes distinctive is not the image, but what surrounds it. The white, undifferentiated surface of the gallery wall is supplanted by the variegated features of industrial, residential, and commercial zones. Given the vitality of these places, it becomes almost impossible to keep our eyes on the photograph. This is the artist's intention. The viewer is encouraged to note the contrasts between the rich colors and textures of the local scene and the gray and white tones of the photograph. The artwork and peripheral phenomena (passing cars, architectural details, advertisements, and signs) trade places, slipping back and forth between the center and margins of our focus.

Yet while city and image vie for our attention, the urban landscape serves as a colorful foil against which the photograph's absolute reticence and interiority are revealed. Set high above the street, the image of the bed is literally remote from the viewer. Thus what may at first seem to be an act of self-revelation—the placing of one's bed on public display—ultimately gives nothing away. Rather than being confronted, as we might anticipate, with intimate clues to the artist's presence, we are instead presented with overwhelming absence.

Absence shadows Gonzalez-Torres's work in every way. Rumpled bed sheets and dented pillows are presented both as evidence of and as a sign for two absent human bodies. Ghostly contours are all that is left of beings who are no longer there. Pasted to and inseparable from both gallery wall and billboard surface, the image hugs its supports rather than taking up space. To remove the picture is to destroy it. Awareness of this fact heightens our consciousness of the physical fragility that inhabits the work as a whole.

Also absent are human touch, which is banished by the use of photography, and color, which is eliminated by the use of black-and-white film. In addition, there is no original. No "unique" art object is presented, and the "whole" of this work can never be seen all at one time. In each instance, what is visible is defined by the invisible. Presence, whether of bodies in bed or of art in a gallery, becomes only a mirror of things unseen.

When Gonzalez-Torres's photograph is compared to other billboard displays, it becomes clear that something else is missing. There is no language, no logo or label. Through the omission of caption or text, Gonzalez-Torres leaves the picture's significance open-ended, responding to the varied nature of his audience—wanderer, worker, commuter, city-dweller, all those who will pass the billboards by—and to the wide range of associations they may bring to the work.

Surrounded by the predominantly vertical structures of New York City, Gonzalez-Torres's bed is resolutely recumbent. An empty bed invites us all to "climb in," no matter who we are—gay or straight, male or female, black or white. Thus, the artist establishes a common ground. At the same time, one of the merits of art like this is that it reminds us that no one work of art, no single image, means the same thing to everyone.

Unmade beds with tousled sheets may provoke sexual fantasies for some, and evoke painful memories for others. Nearly all of us were born in beds, and many of us know

people who have died in them. Between these moments of birth and death, beds are a place where we can rest. And in this city with its huge homeless population, the image of a bed reminds us of something lost.

For Gonzalez-Torres, the bed suggests not only personal and social realities, but another reality, which is the law. To him, one of the most important meanings to be attached to this work returns us to the question raised at the start: what do we consider public and what do we deem private? While most of us might prefer to think our beds are private, the artist insists they are anything but, and the law concurs.

In the 1986 case *Bowers versus Hardwick*, the Supreme Court determined that the zone of privacy—that area which in principle we can call our own—does not encompass a private individual's right to engage in certain sexual acts. This decision frames Gonzalez-Torres's perception of the bed: for him it stands as a legislated and socially contested zone. For him private space no longer exists.

This said, Gonzalez-Torres is uncomfortable with the label "political," fearing that the larger meanings of his work will be impoverished. Yet his art is far from political in the limited sense of the word. It does not simply illustrate a programmatic message at the expense of form. It is not, in other words, *about* politics. If anything, it seeks to act as politics, to trigger action of some sort, any sort, inspired by the artist's fundamentally romantic desire to "make this a better place for everyone."

Action for Gonzalez-Torres is not an abstract matter. Nor need it take place on a grand scale. Everything begins with the individual, in this case with the museum visitor who leaves, ready to cast a fresh eye upon her or his surroundings. What is important is the idea of passage, from museum to street, from the personal (the loss of a loved one) to the political (the loss of privacy), from private to public, and then back again. At issue are notions of change and renewal, the idea that meanings are not static but shift according to who we are and where we are at any given moment.

These billboards will remain in place only through the end of June. Twenty-four in number, they commemorate the date of the death of the artist's lover, Ross. At the end of June, they too shall pass, torn down to make way for new images, new messages, new meanings. In the photographic print from which they were generated, however, lies the potential for hope. A photograph promises the possibility of replication, of reemergence in a different time and under different historical circumstances, a moment when this poignant image of "a dwelling in the evening air" may come to mean very different things.

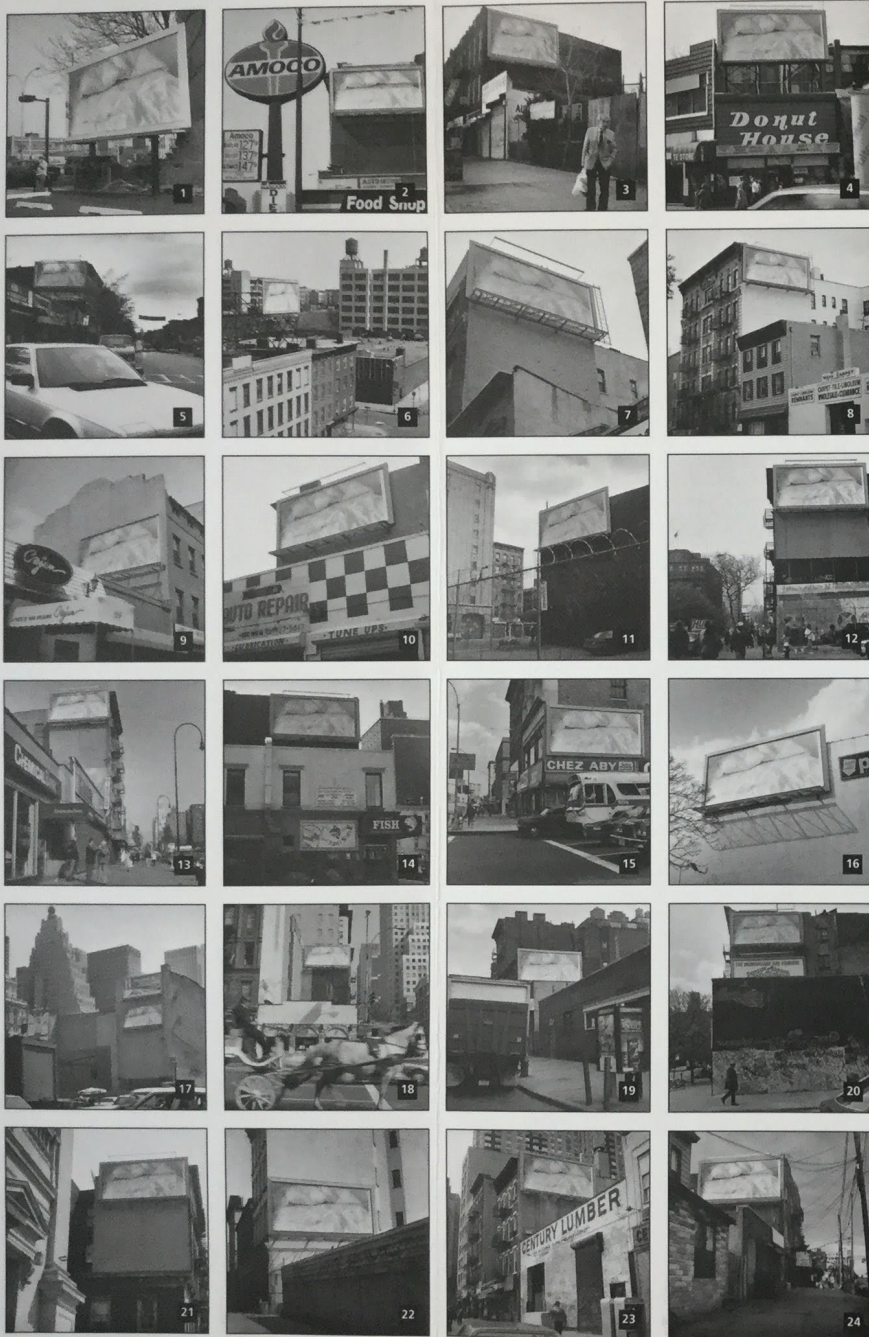
Anne Umland, Curatorial Assistant

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was born in Güaimaro, Cuba, in 1957 and now lives and works in New York City. He has exhibited extensively in recent years in both national and international exhibitions, and is a member of Group Material, an art collaborative dedicated to cultural activism. Further information on the artist is available at the Museum's Information Desk.

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Billboard locations

Each billboard image is 10'5" high and 22'8" wide.
Unless otherwise noted, the billboards are in Manhattan.

1. 2511 Third Avenue/East 137th Street, Bronx
2. 144th Street/Grand Concourse, Bronx
3. 157 Kings Highway/West 13th Street, Brooklyn
4. 30 Dekalb Avenue/Flatbush, Brooklyn
5. 412 Fifth Avenue/8th Street, Brooklyn
6. 47-53 South 5th Street/Berry Street, Brooklyn
7. 765 Grand Street/Humboldt Street, Brooklyn
8. 656 Metropolitan Avenue/southeast corner Leonard Street, Brooklyn
9. 133 8th Avenue/West 16th Street
10. 1886-88 Park Avenue/East 129th Street
11. 31-33 Second Avenue/East 2nd Street
12. 27 Cooper Square/northeast corner East 5th Street
13. 520 East 14th Street
14. 2060 Second Avenue/southeast corner East 106th Street
15. 77-79 Delancey Street/southeast corner Allen Street
16. 275 West Street/Desbrosses Street
17. 254 West 42nd Street/between 7th and 8th Avenues
18. 365 West 50th Street/between 8th and 9th Avenues
19. 310 Spring Street/Renwick Street
20. 950 Columbus Avenue/West 107th Street
21. 13 Carmine Street/northeast corner Bleeker Street
22. 504 West 44th Street/between 10th and 11th Avenues
23. 1873 Second Avenue/East 97th Street
24. 31-11 21st Street, Queens

The projects series is made possible by generous grants from The Bohen Foundation, The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Contemporary Arts Council provided additional support for this exhibition.

Cover: Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Untitled. 1991. Black-and-white photograph. Dimensions vary depending on installation.

Billboard photographs © Peter Muscato and Alessandra Mannoni, 1992

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felix gonzalez-torres

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The Museum of Modern Art
New York

May 16-June 30, 1992

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Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough.

plan

Wallace Stevens,
from *Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour*

These lines from a Wallace Stevens poem describe a fictive space, a dwelling place constructed from imagination. Upon rereading these words in late 1991, the artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres realized that some deep memory of them lay behind his decision, earlier that year, to photograph his own empty

"caption" or "dateline" pieces, the artist runs apparent non sequiturs such as "Pol Pot 1975 Prague 1968 Robocop 1987 H Bomb 1954 Wheel of Fortune 1988 Spud" in white type across the bottom of black sheets of paper. Here he asks the viewer to consider not only the correlations of the events or things named, but also the historical or conceptual gaps between them.

In an analogous manner, Gonzalez-Torres invites people to take away pieces of his candy-spill and paper-stack sculptures, activating the literal physical terrain between audience and art object, rather than the conceptual space of history. By focusing on the public implications of a private individual's actions, Gonzalez-Torres complicates conventional distinctions between the two realms.

projects 34

felix gonzalez-torres

The Museum of Modern Art
invites you to attend
a reception to celebrate
the exhibition

Friday
May 15, 1992
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
11 West 53 Street
New York

The exhibition is on view through June 30 at the Museum and on twenty-four billboards in New York City.

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This reception is made possible by The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art.

This card admits two.

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As in previous works Gonzalez-Torres has taken from the public discourse—newspaper snippets for and isolated them in the center of large sheets of paper. In this process the process is reversed. Rather than clipping from the mass media and repositioning it within the narrow space of a work of art, he makes the photograph a bed the informational fragment, and collages it into a broad and varied pattern of the contemporary landscape.

The artist has explained that by "taking a little bit of information and displaying this information in absolutely illogical meetings," he hopes to reveal the real issues. The juxtaposition of an image that we are used to read as private and a space usually conceived of as public what Gonzalez-Torres would describe as an "illogical meeting." When we call something illogical, we are really saying that it runs counter to our expectations. For instance, might most simply be defined as the smallest amounts of space that we can call our own. Gonzalez-Torres presents his audience with something different—a bed that has been recast in a new, ordinary form. Some of our most basic associations with a familiar piece of furniture—its human scale, its function—are upset.

By placing his work not only within the relatively intimate space of the museum but also outdoors, the artist challenges another assumption. Most of this exhibition is not in the museum—where we naturally expect it to be—but in the gallery contains only keys to the whole: a billboard enlargement of the photograph of the bed, identical

to those posted throughout the city, and this brochure, which documents the billboards in situ and guides viewers to their sites. Museumgoers enter the gallery only to find that the artist wants to send them back out into the world.

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Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough.

Wallace Stevens,
from *Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour*

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The artist uses diverse formal means to explore this territory; he works with billboards and books, words and images; he uses materials that range from candies and cookies to jigsaw puzzles and stacks of paper; he takes advantage of commonplace techniques such as offset printing and photography to make his art. In so doing, he creates work that adapt, chameleonlike, to whatever a particular set of circumstances requires.

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Gonzalez-Torres came across *Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour* in a book of Stevens's poetry given to him by his lover, Ross, in 1988. Between the time of this gift and the present moment lie not only years, but irrevocable loss. In 1991, Ross, whom Gonzalez-Torres has referred to in the past as his only audience, his public of one, died of AIDS. His illness and, ultimately, his early and tragic death permeate the panorama of Gonzalez-Torres's art.

Two risks are taken in introducing the topics of homosexual love and death at the outset of this discussion. First, there is a chance this work will be misinterpreted as being about AIDS. And second, there will always be those who find in such subjects cause for discomfort. Yet the risks are intentional. For as the artist himself has said "[My work] is all my personal history, all that stuff . . . gender and sexual preference. . . . I can't separate my art from my life."

In striking this intimate note, then, the aim is not to limit our perception of Gonzalez-Torres and his work, but to ground it in reality. It is to begin with the artist's own story about the origins of the image of this vast bed. It is also to emphasize what is really at issue here: not private revelations—of personal history and sexual preference—but what happens to such revelations when they are placed in a public context. Much of Gonzalez-Torres's art questions what we mean when we describe things as "private" or as "public." Are we referring to private lives, for example, or private thoughts? To private property or to private spaces? Are we responding to how these meanings conflict, intersect, and draw significance from their apparent opposite, that which is "public"—public personas, public opinions, public art, public space?

The artist uses diverse formal means to explore this territory; he works with billboards and books, words and images; he uses materials that range from candies and cookies to jigsaw puzzles and stacks of paper; he takes advantage of commonplace techniques such as offset printing and photography to make his art. In so doing, he creates work that adapts, chameleonlike, to whatever a particular set of circumstances requires.

One way to think about Gonzalez-Torres's art and about the questions of public versus private is to think about the conceptual and physical spaces in between things. In his

"caption" or "dateline" pieces, the artist runs apparent non sequiturs such as "Pol Pot 1975 Prague 1968 Robocop 1987 H Bomb 1954 Wheel of Fortune 1988 Spud" in white type across the bottom of black sheets of paper. Here he asks the viewer to consider not only the correlations of the events or things named, but also the historical or conceptual gaps between them.

In an analogous manner, Gonzalez-Torres invites people to take away pieces of his candy-spill and paper-stack sculptures, activating the literal physical terrain between audience and art object, rather than the conceptual space of history. By focusing on the public implications of a private individual's actions, Gonzalez-Torres complicates conventional distinctions between the two realms.

Like those of many other artists of his generation, Gonzalez-Torres's concerns extend beyond the self-contained boundaries of the art object to encompass the circumstances that surround it. At issue here is not only the artist's choice of image (his bed) and medium (photography) but also the decision of where and how to display the picture (on billboards, scattered across New York City, repeated twenty-four times over, enlarged to superhuman scale). The exhibition focuses not only on the photograph's personal content but also on its social context and on the inextricable connections and differences between the two.

Whereas in previous works Gonzalez-Torres has taken elements from the public discourse—newspaper snippets for instance—and isolated them in the center of large sheets of paper, here the process is reversed. Rather than clipping something from the mass media and repositioning it within the clean smooth space of a work of art, he makes the photograph of the bed the informational fragment, and collages it into the broad and varied pattern of the contemporary urban landscape.

The artist has explained that by "taking a little bit of information and displaying this information in absolutely ironic and illogical meetings," he hopes to reveal the real meaning of issues. The juxtaposition of an image that we are inclined to read as private and a space usually conceived of as public is what Gonzalez-Torres would describe as an "illogical meeting." When we call something illogical, we are essentially saying that it runs counter to our expectations. A bed, for instance, might most simply be defined as one of the smallest amounts of space that we can call our own. But Gonzalez-Torres presents his audience with something quite different—a bed that has been recast in a new and extraordinary form. Some of our most basic associations with this familiar piece of furniture—its human scale, its domestic location—are upset.

In displaying his work not only within the relatively intimate space of the museum but also outdoors, the artist challenges yet another assumption. Most of this exhibition is not here in the museum—where we naturally expect it to be—but elsewhere. The gallery contains only keys to the whole: a billboard-scale enlargement of the photograph of the bed, identical to those posted throughout the city, and this brochure, which documents the billboards in situ and guides viewers to their sites. Museumgoers enter the gallery only to find that the artist wants to send them back out into the world.

By presenting this work in twenty-four different loca-

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tions, the artist shifts emphasis away from the photograph's content to its context. Through its reiteration, what becomes distinctive is not the image, but what surrounds it. The white, undifferentiated surface of the gallery wall is supplanted by the variegated features of industrial, residential, and commercial zones. Given the vitality of these places, it becomes almost impossible to keep our eyes on the photograph. This is the artist's intention. The viewer is encouraged to note the contrasts between the rich colors and textures of the local scene and the gray and white tones of the photograph. The artwork and peripheral phenomena (passing cars, architectural details, advertisements, and signs) trade places, slipping back and forth between the center and margins of our focus.

Yet while city and image vie for our attention, the urban landscape serves as a colorful foil against which the photograph's absolute reticence and interiority are revealed. Set high above the street, the image of the bed is literally remote from the viewer. Thus what may at first seem to be an act of self-revelation—the placing of one's bed on public display—ultimately gives nothing away. Rather than being confronted, as we might anticipate, with intimate clues to the artist's presence, we are instead presented with overwhelming absence.

Absence shadows Gonzalez-Torres's work in every way. Rumpled bed sheets and dented pillows are presented both as evidence of and as a sign for two absent human bodies. Ghostly contours are all that is left of beings who are no longer there. Pasted to and inseparable from both gallery wall and billboard surface, the image hugs its supports rather than taking up space. To remove the picture is to destroy it. Awareness of this fact heightens our consciousness of the physical fragility that inhabits the work as a whole.

Also absent are human touch, which is banished by the use of photography, and color, which is eliminated by the use of black-and-white film. In addition, there is no original. No "unique" art object is presented, and the "whole" of this work can never be seen all at one time. In each instance, what is visible is defined by the invisible. Presence, whether of bodies in bed or of art in a gallery, becomes only a mirror of things unseen.

When Gonzalez-Torres's photograph is compared to other billboard displays, it becomes clear that something else is missing. There is no language, no logo or label. Through the omission of caption or text, Gonzalez-Torres leaves the picture's significance open-ended, responding to the varied nature of his audience—wanderer, worker, commuter, city-dweller, all those who will pass the billboards by—and to the wide range of associations they may bring to the work.

Surrounded by the predominantly vertical structures of New York City, Gonzalez-Torres's bed is resolutely recumbent. An empty bed invites us all to "climb in," no matter who we are—gay or straight, male or female, black or white. Thus, the artist establishes a common ground. At the same time, one of the merits of art like this is that it reminds us that no one work of art, no single image, means the same thing to everyone.

Unmade beds with tousled sheets may provoke sexual fantasies for some, and evoke painful memories for others. Nearly all of us were born in beds, and many of us know

people who have died in them. Between these moments of birth and death, beds are a place where we can rest. And in this city with its huge homeless population, the image of a bed reminds us of something lost.

For Gonzalez-Torres, the bed suggests not only personal and social realities, but another reality, which is the law. To him, one of the most important meanings to be attached to this work returns us to the question raised at the start: what do we consider public and what do we deem private? While most of us might prefer to think our beds are private, the artist insists they are anything but, and the law concurs.

In the 1986 case *Bowers versus Hardwick*, the Supreme Court determined that the zone of privacy—that area which in principle we can call our own—does not encompass a private individual's right to engage in certain sexual acts. This decision frames Gonzalez-Torres's perception of the bed: for him it stands as a legislated and socially contested zone. For him private space no longer exists.

This said, Gonzalez-Torres is uncomfortable with the label "political," fearing that the larger meanings of his work will be impoverished. Yet his art is far from political in the limited sense of the word. It does not simply illustrate a programmatic message at the expense of form. It is not, in other words, *about* politics. If anything, it seeks to act as politics, to trigger action of some sort, any sort, inspired by the artist's fundamentally romantic desire to "make this a better place for everyone."

Action for Gonzalez-Torres is not an abstract matter. Nor need it take place on a grand scale. Everything begins with the individual, in this case with the museum visitor who leaves, ready to cast a fresh eye upon her or his surroundings. What is important is the idea of passage, from museum to street, from the personal (the loss of a loved one) to the political (the loss of privacy), from private to public, and then back again. At issue are notions of change and renewal, the idea that meanings are not static but shift according to who we are and where we are at any given moment.

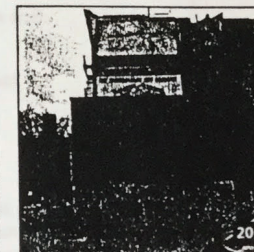
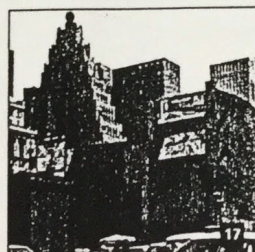
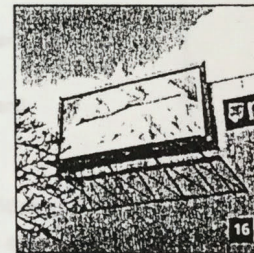
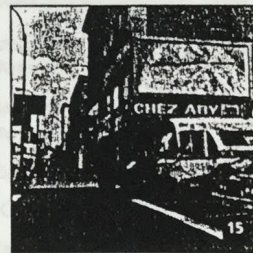
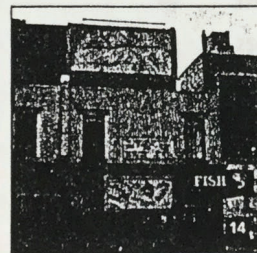
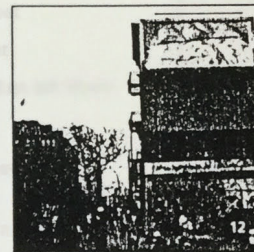
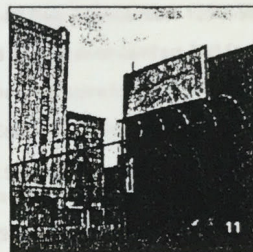
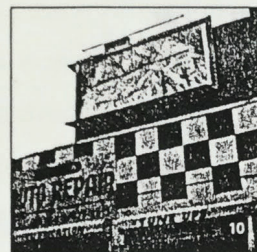
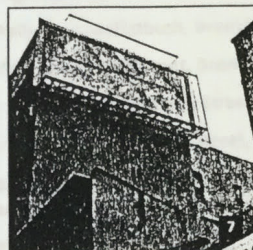
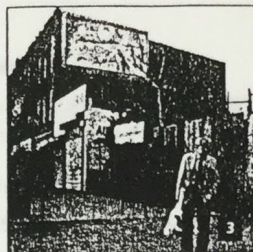
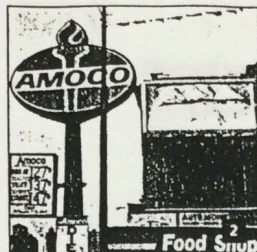
These billboards will remain in place only through the end of June. Twenty-four in number, they commemorate the date of the death of the artist's lover, Ross. At the end of June, they too shall pass, torn down to make way for new images, new messages, new meanings. In the photographic print from which they were generated, however, lies the potential for hope. A photograph promises the possibility of replication, of reemergence in a different time and under different historical circumstances, a moment when this poignant image of "a dwelling in the evening air" may come to mean very different things.

Anne Umland, Curatorial Assistant

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was born in Gūaimaro, Cuba, in 1957 and now lives and works in New York City. He has exhibited extensively in recent years in both national and international exhibitions, and is a member of Group Material, an art collaborative dedicated to cultural activism. Further information on the artist is available at the Museum's Information Desk.

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Billboard locations

Each billboard image is 10'5" high and 22'8" wide.
Unless otherwise noted, the billboards are in Manhattan.

1. 2511 Third Avenue/East 137th Street, Bronx
2. 144th Street/Grand Concourse, Bronx
3. 157 Kings Highway/West 13th Street, Brooklyn
4. 30 Dekalb Avenue/Flatbush, Brooklyn
5. 412 Fifth Avenue/8th Street, Brooklyn
6. 47-53 South 5th Street/Berry Street, Brooklyn
7. 765 Grand Street/Humboldt Street, Brooklyn
8. 656 Metropolitan Avenue/southeast corner Leonard Street, Brooklyn
9. 133 8th Avenue/West 16th Street
10. 1886-88 Park Avenue/East 129th Street
11. 31-33 Second Avenue/East 2nd Street
12. 27 Cooper Square/northeast corner East 5th Street
13. 520 East 14th Street
14. 2060 Second Avenue/southeast corner East 106th Street
15. 77-79 Delancey Street/southeast corner Allen Street
16. 275 West Street/Desbrosses Street
17. 254 West 42nd Street/between 7th and 8th Avenues
18. 365 West 50th Street/between 8th and 9th Avenues
19. 310 Spring Street/Renwick Street
20. 950 Columbus Avenue/West 107th Street
21. 13 Carmine Street/northeast corner Bleeker Street
22. 504 West 44th Street/between 10th and 11th Avenues
23. 1873 Second Avenue/East 97th Street
24. 31-11 21st Street, Queens

The projects series is made possible by generous grants from The Bohen Foundation, The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Contemporary Arts Council provided additional support for this exhibition.

Cover: Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Untitled. 1991. Black-and-white photograph. Dimensions vary depending on installation.

Billboard photographs © Peter Muscato and Alessandra Mannoni, 1992

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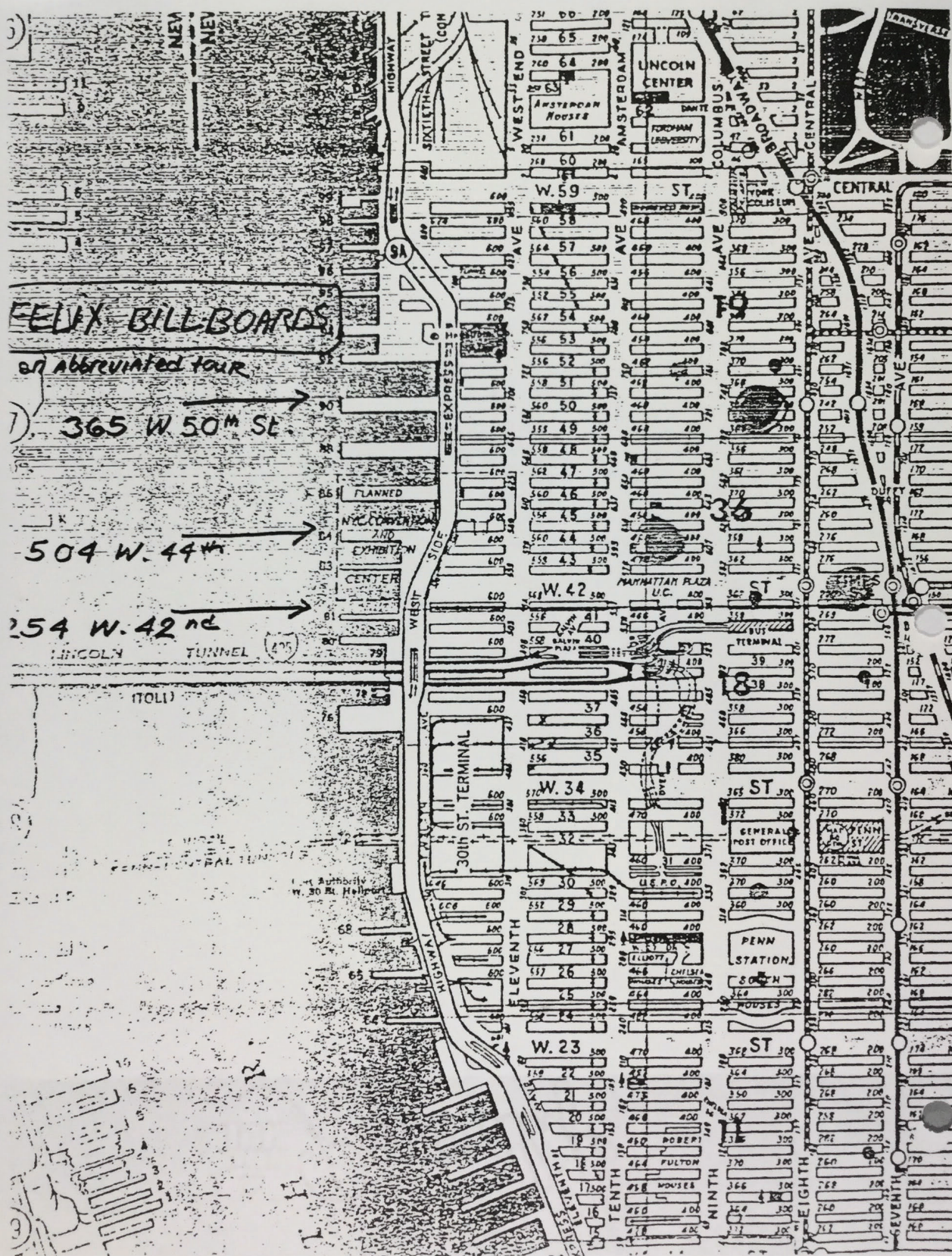
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19. 365 West 50th Street/between 8th and 9th Avenues
20. 310 Spring Street/Renwick Street
21. 13 Carmine Street/northeast corner Bleecker Street
22. 504 West 44th Street/between 10th and 11th Avenues
23. 1873 Second Avenue/East 97th Street
24. 31-11 21st Street, Long Island City

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1991 ANNUAL REPORT 1992

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PAGE 40

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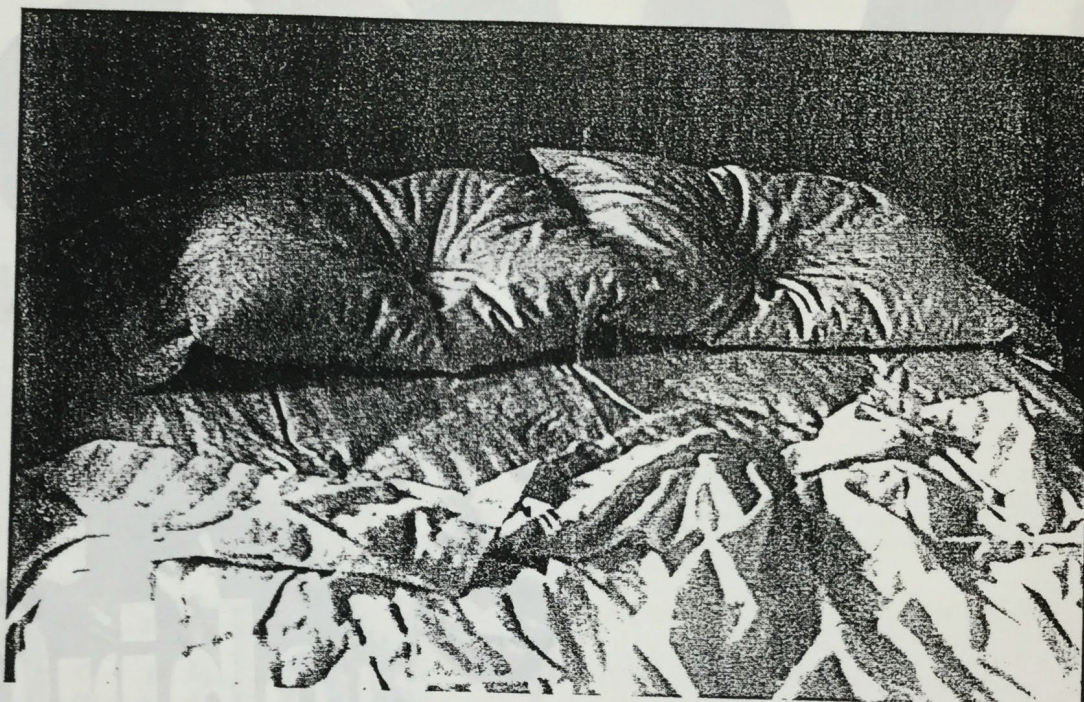


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(Laura Cottingham's) **ART** ATTACK

A love story is the meta-narrative that runs through Felix Gonzalez-Torres' work; his love, and subsequent loss, of Ross, who died of AIDS last year, is the primary influence on his art. As one of the most visible artists in the current gay renaissance, Gonzalez-Torres has been exhibited around the world. In New York, his work first began to appear in group shows in the mid-'80s; he now shows regularly with the Andrea Rosen Gallery and is currently the subject of a "Projects Room" at the Museum of Modern Art.

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LESBIAN / GAY PRIDE DOUBLE ISSUE

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No. 35 • July 5, 1992 • \$2.00
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Pride

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GUS VAN SANT
SUSIE BRIGHT
MICHAEL MUSTO
TAMMY WYNETTE
BILLY NORWICH
DENNIS COOPER
URVASHI VAID
BILL CLINTON
MICHELANGELO SIGNORILE
ANDREW SULLIVAN &

SANDRA TAKES THE PLUNGE



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But MoMA is not the actual location: There is nothing in the museum gallery except a brochure that lists the locations of the 24 billboards that comprise the show. Gonzalez-Torres keeps refusing to blindly participate in the banal circulation of objects that constitutes conventional art-making. He's always coming up with new ways to make art that is something other than *a thing*; acknowledging the bankruptcy of things as things, he wants most to give us *thoughts*. Memories and feelings, after all, are the constituents and meaning of life: Things, in and of themselves, are without value, or rather, things are valuable only to the extent that, through our thoughts, we value them. The circulation of thoughts through things is one of the basic considerations behind Gonzalez-Torres' work; his sensitivity to the artistic, political and personal interplay between ideas and actions, between the mental and the physical, is what makes his art so interesting.

Often, his work looks like nothing much: stacks of paper, piles of colorfully wrapped candy, lightbulbs, the color blue. And even when the objects appear to call forth art-historical associations, the artist is quickly destroying them. His concern with history is grounded in its use value to alter the future. His paper stacks, for instance, look like simulations of any number of minimalist sculptures. But unlike the stern fiberglass, asonite or steel rectangles of Robert Morris or Donald Judd, those of Gonzalez-

Torres are composed of sheets of variously printed paper. Viewers are encouraged to take the papers, so that the art object becomes not a permanent monument to the future but a temporary gift to the present. Similarly, his candy spills—mounds of wrapped candies, usually piled in a corner—refer to earlier conceptual and minimalist works but significantly depart from those previous strategies. The candy heaps are a spoof on the minimalist's insistent production of objects of intimidation: What could be friendlier than some take-home sweets?

His 24 billboards, now on display throughout the five boroughs, commemorate the date of Ross's death, on June 24. Each of the billboards display the same image: a black-and-white photograph of an empty double bed.

The two pillows are each crushed in the center, indented where two heads once rested—but now there is none. At its various sites, this image of intimacy stares out from the barren sterility of the urban landscape. It is near a gas station, above a donut shop, behind a lumber company, over a tenement house. The empty bed quietly calls forth the comfort of sleep, the bliss after orgasm, the finality of death.

Although the image may seem to be devoid of any homosexual content, it is not its absence of explicit sexuality that should be at issue. The empty, slightly tussled bed documents presence as much as it indicates absence. It is a bed for everyone, every pair of two people; it isn't coded, like the bed imagery so often found in advertising and television, for heterosexual use only. In fact, it is a representation of the actual bed Gonzalez-Torres shared with his lover. The emptiness it suggests is the specific loneliness the artist feels; the absence it portrays is the now-permanent absence, through death, of his lover. It doesn't matter that not everyone can see this in a glance: The bed is this.

Billboard Locations Until the end of June)

1. 2511 Third Ave./E. 137th St., Bronx
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7. 765 Grand St./Humboldt St., Brooklyn
8. 656 Metropolitan Ave./S.E. corner, Leonard St., Brooklyn
9. 133 Eighth Ave./W. 16th St., Manhattan
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13. 520 E. 14th St., Manhattan
14. 2060 Second Ave./S.E. corner E. 106th St., Manhattan
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23. 1873 Second Ave./E. 97th St., Manhattan
24. 31-11 21st St., Queens

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dump a money loser. A single commercial hauler, Stephen D. DeVito Jr. Trucking Inc., was taking 400 tons daily to garbage incinerators in Maine and Massachusetts.

Last year, after lowering the commercial dump fee to \$49 a ton, the state's Rhode Island Solid Waste Management Corp. decreed that all the state's commercial trash had to go to a state-licensed disposal site, for all practical purposes; Central Landfill is the only one.

DeVito Trucking sued, saying its business was being ruined. U.S. District Court Judge Ernest C. Torres agreed, issuing a preliminary injunction last July against the regulation. The judge said the rule violated the U.S. Constitution's commerce clause, which reserves to Congress the power to regulate interstate commerce. The state has appealed.

Federal courts have also struck down state laws around the nation banning the importation of trash and hazardous waste, saying they violate

Does all the badmouthing hurt business? Probably not. The company says business is good in California and elsewhere. In San Diego and Ventura counties, Waste Management was trying to win approval for dump sites, which usually stirs nasty battles. Seattle, after its 1989 report, hired Waste Management to dispose of its trash—in Oregon.

Odds and Ends

BLISS makes Browning-Ferris frown. The first test of the company's dumps-through-democracy siting approach, in which it tries to persuade towns to stop worrying and welcome landfills, is voted down, 311 to 299, in Bliss, N.Y.

NIMBYS, not in my back yard, have always opposed LULUs, locally undesirable land uses. Now, they have their ultimate credo: BANANA, build absolutely nothing anywhere near anything.

The Budding Artist Hopes Critics Give His Work Blanket Approval

By LOURDES LEE VALERIANO

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
NEW YORK—Unmade beds may be the one of a parent's life, but here they're high art.

In the past few days, courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, 24 billboards have gone up around the city showing a 230-square-foot photograph of a rumpled double bed.

The bed belongs to Felix Gonzales-Torres, a New York artist who, in the words of the museum, is interested in "exploring the permeable boundaries that separate private experience from public realities, and the collapse of conventional distinctions between these two realms."

Uh-huh. "It's trying to tell you something," says Carlos Pabon, a delivery driver for Every Supply Co., squinting at the image of mussed-up sheets and two prominently indented pillows on the side of a five-story Manhattan building. "Is it for a furniture store?"

Mr. Pabon isn't helped by the billboard, which has no text. "It's [the artist's] hope that people will see what they want in them," says Anne Umland, curatorial assistant at MOMA.

The museum will open a one-man show on Mr. Gonzales-Torres this week as part

of a series devoted to young artists. The only piece on exhibit will be the same giant poster of the bed that's on the billboards. But the museum promises to have a brochure with photos of the 24 identical billboards and their addresses so museum-goers can see the billboards "in situ." (The bed isn't part of the exhibit.)

Ms. Umland swears Mr. Gonzales-Torres really sleeps on the bed but says the picture was staged. "The pillows were dented more to show that there were two bodies there." One picture of the bed hovers above a Donut House in Brooklyn. Another forms a background for an Amoco station sign in the Bronx.

In midtown Manhattan, Mr. Gonzales-Torres's creation is getting mixed reviews. "It's nice," says Jose Castillo, standing at the corner of 50th Street and Ninth Avenue. "I can see two people making love, togetherness."

"Pretty boring," says Curtis Hannah, tugging at his black chow chow's leash. "It doesn't insinuate anything sexually."

To gauge reactions herself, Ms. Umland recently stood on 42nd Street, but her field research was inconclusive. "It's so funny in New York," she says. "People don't look up a lot."

U.S. Supports Lifting Curbs On 3 Networks

By MARY LU CARNEVALE

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
WASHINGTON—The Justice Department recommended that a federal court allow the three major broadcast networks to participate in the lucrative rerun business.

In a filing with the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles, the department said the restrictions were no longer needed because the ABC, CBS and NBC networks don't dominate their markets as they did in the past. The restrictions, spelled out in consent decrees more than a decade ago, could even be anti-competitive, the department told the court. The decrees bar the networks from taking a financial interest in any program they air from an independent producer, or from acquiring rights to syndicate those programs.

The Justice Department action, which had been expected, is likely to intensify the fight between the networks and Hollywood studios over the \$5 billion-to-\$6 billion syndication market. The battle heated up a year ago, when the Federal Communications Commission modified what are called its financial interest and syndication rules, giving the networks some ability to tap a new revenue source. But the networks still need changes in the consent decrees to take advantage of the FCC's action.

"The television industry has changed significantly since these decrees were entered" in 1976 and 1980, said James Rill, head of the antitrust division. "There is no longer any competition rationale for maintaining restrictions that impede efficient marketplace transactions."

The department is now in a 60-day period of seeking public comment on the proposed changes and reserves the right to change its position. The matter will then be up to federal Judge Robert Kelleher, who oversees the consent decrees.

The consent decrees answered complaints filed in 1974, when the networks controlled 95% of the TV audience. With growth of cable television since then, the networks' share of the prime-time audience has slipped to about 60%. The networks argue that they want to compete on an equal footing with Hollywood studios, which they contend dominate the production of TV series and syndication.

Jay

Staff Reporter
NEW YORK

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ING PLAYERS: Nearly four o Angelopoulos's minimalist pe of itinerant performers to history of modern Greece hological past. September 3 um of Modern Art, 11 West 8-9490. (Hoberman)

3: Customized cars of every ide through Harrod Blank's 7 of an American subcul- 50 subcultures (each vehicle ss sui generis). Through Sep- Forum, 209 West Houston 0. (Hoberman)

Music

Sponsored by WXTV and for Hispanic Arts, this huge ms to be cut in the mold of ated Calle Ocho festival. A / of Latin-Caribbean music, ter will be on display on four r stages. Most notably sched- r are Willie Colon, Oscar neral, Wilfrido Vargas, and mber 6 at noon, Broadway 14th streets, 1-800-339-7349.

VAGAN: This most consis- and elegant conservator of mo will be contending with a ge in his remarkable trio, so s along with the epiphanies. mber 13 (except Mondays), East 15th Street, 254-0960.

AL: When the rests are as ie notes, and the dynamics e the virtuosity, it's Jamal e as fastidious as an orches- nance always shines through. mber 6, Fat Tuesday's, 190 at 17th Street, 533-7902.

UDJO: Making her American norous Benin native is a fave beat charts thanks to her in- conscious, Paris-processed a thick jazz-fusion twist. The those who pick up tickets eptember 5 at 8, Delacorte al Park, midpark near the et entrance, 861-7277. (Gehr)

Talk about subcultural ener-

that rumors of salsa's death are greatly exaggerated. Combophiles will no doubt thrill to the supporting cast, which includes the thinking person's sonero, Gilberto Santa-rosa, the perennial superstar Celia Cruz, and those uncanny Japanese masters of son montuno, Orquesta de la Luz. September 5 at 8, Madison Square Garden, Seventh Avenue and 32nd Street, 925-4885. (Morales)

EDDIE PALMIERI: At his recent S.O.B.'s gig, I was excited to see that Palmieri had acquired the future of Puerto Rican saxophone, David Sanchez, for his swinging horn section. With his Turnaround bandmate, Charlie Sepulveda, on lead trumpet, this Palmieri configuration makes for Afro-Cuban ecstasy of Bauzian proportions. And Eddie still squeezes that slightly off Nuyorican soul out of his percussive piano. The show's free to those who pick up tickets in advance. September 4 at 8, Delacorte Theater, Central Park, midpark near the West 81st Street entrance, 861-7277. (Morales)

DANILO PEREZ QUARTET: Perez is a Boston-based piano prodigy whose jazz licks are so accomplished you'd think you were on the planet Tyner, but he and his bandmates inject a subtle Latin edge and bode well for the future of Latin jazz. Strong on playing and composition, Perez and crew prove that *muchachos* are mo' better, too. Through September 5, Bradley's, 70 University Place, at 11th Street, 228-6440. (Morales)

TITO PUENTE: Latino icons are forever. Yes, it's "the King," no, the beat has not been swallowed up by the end of summer, and this time you can dance on the water-front just like in the movies. For the purely musical: watch for Mario Rivera's sax solos. It's free, September 2 at 7:30 (rain date: September 3), World Financial Center, on the Hudson River between Vesey and Liberty streets, 945-0505. (Morales)

JOSHUA REDMAN: At press time, it was still uncertain whether the band would be the superstar unit with which Redman will make his recording debut as a leader this week; but, yes or no, this is a notable gig—a chance to hear close-up one of the most promising tenor saxophonists to come along in recent years. Through September 6, the Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Avenue South, at 11th Street, 255-4037. (Giddins)

LULU SANTOS: Listening to this Brazilian pop-rockers' gloss on the American main-

card, and since this gig promises an original members," we shall see. Also: Toaster and Let's Go Bowling. September 5, Tramps, 51 West 21st Street, 727-7788. (Gehr)

CAETANO VELOSO: Brazil's most respected singer-songer is an utterly charming velvet-voiced visionary with a surreal sense of humor. The pioneer Tropicalista's new Arto Lindsay-produced album contains typically articulate takes on the new world order, fatherhood, and a sinking Brazil he characterizes as the "asshole of the world." September 5 at 8 and September 6 at 7, Town Hall, 123 West 43rd Street, 840-2824; September 8 through 13, the Ballroom, 253 West 28th Street, 244-3005. (Gehr)

MAL WALDRON: The well-traveled pianist always puts together imposing bands, and this one is characteristic. With a double-tenor front line of Ricky Ford and Chico Freeman, and a rhythm section including Reggie Workman and Pete La Roca, there's little chance of slack, especially in the second week, when they've done all the fine-tuning. Through September 13 (except Monday), Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Avenue South, at Bleecker Street, 242-1785. (Giddins)

Photo

FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES: His photograph of a rumpled, conspicuously empty double bed is one of the year's most striking and resonant images. Displayed around the city on billboards (which originally tied into a MOMA Projects piece), the beds are effective on so many levels—as symbols of absence, passion, loss, frustration, AIDS, privacy, or the lack of it—they should be permanent fixtures of the landscape. As it is, they remain up at nearly 20 locations only until the billboards are rented again. Keep your eyes open. (Aletti)

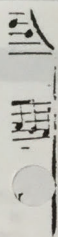
Video

TXAI MACEDO: Exceptionally clear and often moving, Marcia Machado and Tal Danai's doc depicts the unique alliance of the Ashaninka tribe and white rubber-tappers fighting for their autonomy in Brazil's disappearing rain forest. The film, which focuses on the dedicated organizer Antonio "Txai" Macedo, is part of "Cantos Latinos," WNET's annual festival of Hispanic and Latin American programs. September 3 at midnight, WNET, Channel 13. (Taubin)



DAVID McLIMANS

VOICE
SEPT. 8, 1992



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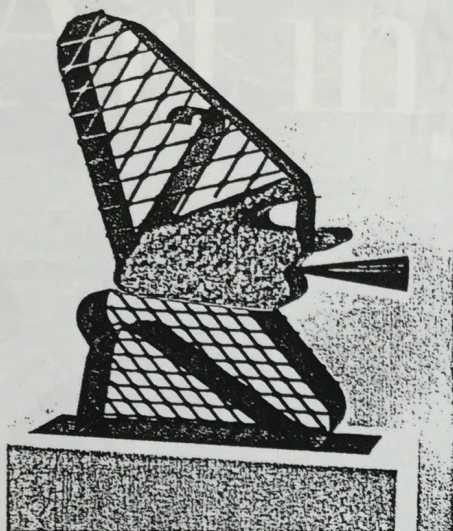
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Martin Silverman: *Clown*, 1992, mixed mediums, 22 1/4 inches high; at Michael Walls. (Review on p. 134.)

few inches above the floor. Attached to the wall at the bottom, each line, like a captured fish, possibly an enticing piece of bait, was a different small creation: a light-blue corrugated cardboard rectangle with a pink square in the lower left corner; two knifelike slivers of wood also painted blue and pink, but in harsher tones; a green circle with a cometlike tail of tissue paper attached; a drawing of what looks like a silhouette of the Buddha perched on an ice-cream cone, and so on. These objects seemed to hover somewhere between painting, drawing and sculpture, and their ephemeral materials appeared ready to undo themselves given half a chance. They were, however, accorded a surprisingly formidable presence, solidity and cadence by the space that contained them. Tuttle's project is to create an area of unexpected concentration on a blank wall, a section of greater visual density. The emptiness of the gallery is carefully suspended by his material intervention—held there tautly, like a fish on a line.

We have tended over the years to see Tuttle's art as eccentric—interesting but off the main path of development. Given time, however, the early work has taken on a greater centrality. Anti-form, Arte Povera, and the continuing vitality of the Minimalist impulse have placed it in a larger context.

Tuttle's work of the last few years, by contrast, seems very much off on its own. Having regained its irritating edge, it is more narrative than his previous efforts, more pictorial and at times decorative to the point of ditziness. In his early pieces there was barely enough to look at, but now there is always, despite the small scale, an element of excess. These days Tuttle is less reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg than of Saul Steinberg or even Paul Klee (another maker of fictional fish). Both he and Klee operate on a similar scale, with a similar material inventiveness and a similarly skewed but accurate sense of observation and humor. Tuttle's brand of finely tuned individuality has been remarkably potent over the years, and judging from the work on display this fall, it is very likely to remain so. —Richard Kalina

Felix Gonzalez-Torres at MOMA Projects Room

Death and sex are not strangers. The "little death" of orgasm has long been celebrated by poets and analyzed by psychologists. The transitory sense of merging with another person and losing one's self in sexual intercourse seems uncomfortably close to how we imagine death itself: a moment in which time stops and the unstable elements of human individuality disappear.

But for Felix Gonzalez-Torres, the nexus between sex and death is more direct. His installation in the Projects Room at the Museum of Modern Art gives us a simple yet profound image of love in the shadow of AIDS. The work consists only of a billboard-sized, grainy black-and-white photograph of a recently deserted bed, demure and quietly regretful in the softly diffused light of early afternoon. We see by the dents in the pillows and the creases in the sheets that the bed was recently occupied by two people, but both are now gone. The imprints of their bodies create a ghostly presence in the empty room. It may be evident to some, even without reading the accompanying brochure which tells of the death from AIDS last year of Gonzalez-Torres's lover, that the missing persons in this photograph refer to the thousands who have been lost to AIDS. The bed, once a place of private pleasure, has been transformed into a memorial, a site of public pain.

Gonzalez-Torres displayed this picture not only at MOMA but also on 24 billboards throughout New York City. There, the effect was more complex. Art that functions in public spaces bears both the content intended by the artist and a great complex of meanings borrowed from its surroundings: buildings, crowded streets, traffic, the indifference of passing pedestrians. Into this jumbled space of varied intentions and multiple meanings, Gonzalez-Torres inserted a quiet photograph reflecting his own life. Oddly out of place, it served as a testament to the life of the individual and to the primacy of the private experience.

Gonzalez-Torres, a former member of Group Material, is often regarded as a political artist. An earlier series of works consisted of photographs of "ordinary" people from his native Cuba and from other South American countries, their figures floating in an empty space of expansive and alienating color, divorced from their original geographic context. Those works were poignant, sometimes simplistically didactic, images of political disenfranchisement. His installations at MOMA and on New York City billboards evince the same deep sympathy for the human suffering of others, but with an added depth and subtlety.

By placing such a personal picture in public settings, Gonzalez-Torres points to the juncture between private lives and the public institutions and circumstances that often shape and regulate our lives. He subtly reminds us, for instance, that recent governmental redefinitions of privacy have made even domestic space public. And, at the same time, governmental inaction with regard to AIDS has had devastating and tragic human consequences. Gonzalez-Torres has transmuted personal tragedy into a profound and deeply disturbing political image. —Dena Shottenkirk

Sergei Bugaev at the Queens Museum

Russian artist Sergei Bugaev (a.k.a. Afrika) is one of the brightest and funniest members of a "ludic" postmodernist group that for some time now has been undermining the cultural determinism of Soviet ideology. As if



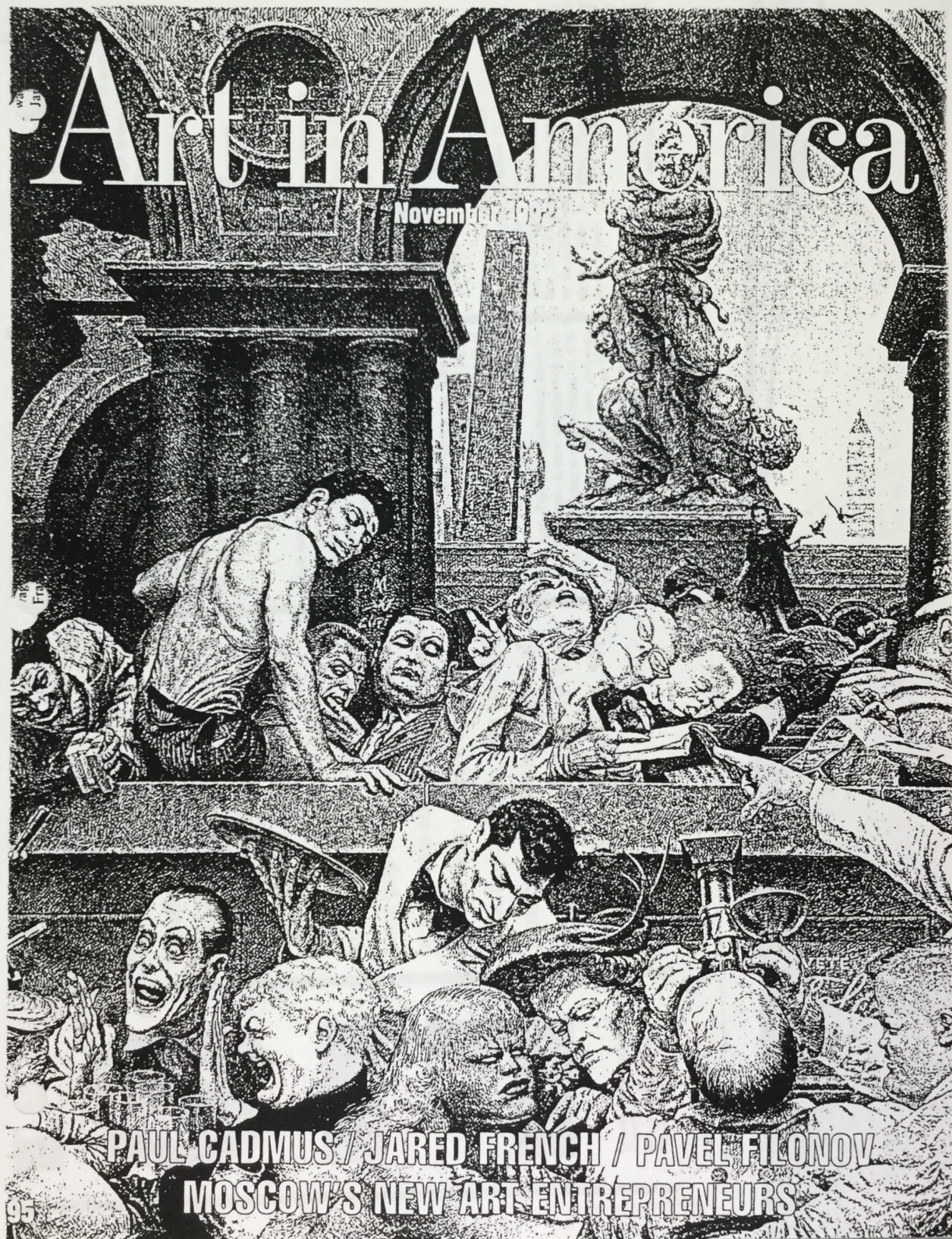
Felix Gonzalez-Torres: *Untitled*, 1991, black-and-white photograph, dimensions variable; at MOMA.

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MOMA Magazine
Spring 1992

Valentine (above) are the new age feedback-through-a-dirty-needle kings, the ugly as beautiful. Their live show is a true teasefest, with lyrical passages that go on just a little too long relieved again and again by tunelessly ecstatic riffs. Pavement are the first Sonic Youth imitators to get it right, achieving the same pop-skronk sequence and/or synthesis about five years faster than their models. In between come Superchunk, who are slack motherfuckers with a couple of great songs by me. June 19, the Ritz, 254 West 54th Street, 541-8900. (Christgau)

Choices & Briefs Editor
Vince Aletti
Cheap Thrills Editor
Ben Mapp

agucy worded attack on free speech, this Franklin Furnace benefit is mighty timely. Holly Hughes and Tim Miller (two of the NEA Four), poet Sapphire, and performer Scarlet O—whose work led to the denial of Franklin Furnace's peer-panel-approved 1992-93 grant—fly in the face of censorship and homophobia. Carole S. Vance, author of *Pleasure and Danger*, introduces this Brooklyn grand slam. Two shows, June 21 at 2:30 and 7:30, the Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway, 925-4671 or 718-638-5000 ext. 230. (Parks)

Art

FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES: A single pale silvery floor-to-ceiling photographic image of a rumpled bed (his own) is atomized by its enlargement and imprinted with overwhelming absence. Not only pasted onto the Projects room wall but plastered on 24 billboards around the city, it's without words. But no words are needed. Look for it—at Carmine and Bleecker, Delancey and Allen, Columbus and 107th Street, De Kalb and Flatbush, or Cooper Square and 5th Street, for a start. Through June 30, the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, 708-9480. (Levin)

HUNG LIU: This Beijing-schooled artist living in California is now transforming turn-of-the-century photos of prostitutes in China, taken by Chinese men, into paintings. These accessorized portraits of Asian Olympians, Mona Lisas, and odalisques—displayed as products for sale—may seem too airless, but the passive images and lacquered

MASAMI TERAOKA: Teraoka's watercolors, which simulate traditional Japanese wood-block prints, have been dragging a tranquil insular art into the problematic late 20th century ever since the '70s. Here he continues his allegorical insertions of condoms, scuba divers, foreign blonds, fast-food sushi, and amorous octopuses into would-be traditional frothy sea-foam scenes. Through June 24, Pamela Auchincloss Gallery, 558 Broadway, 966-7753. (Levin)

Film

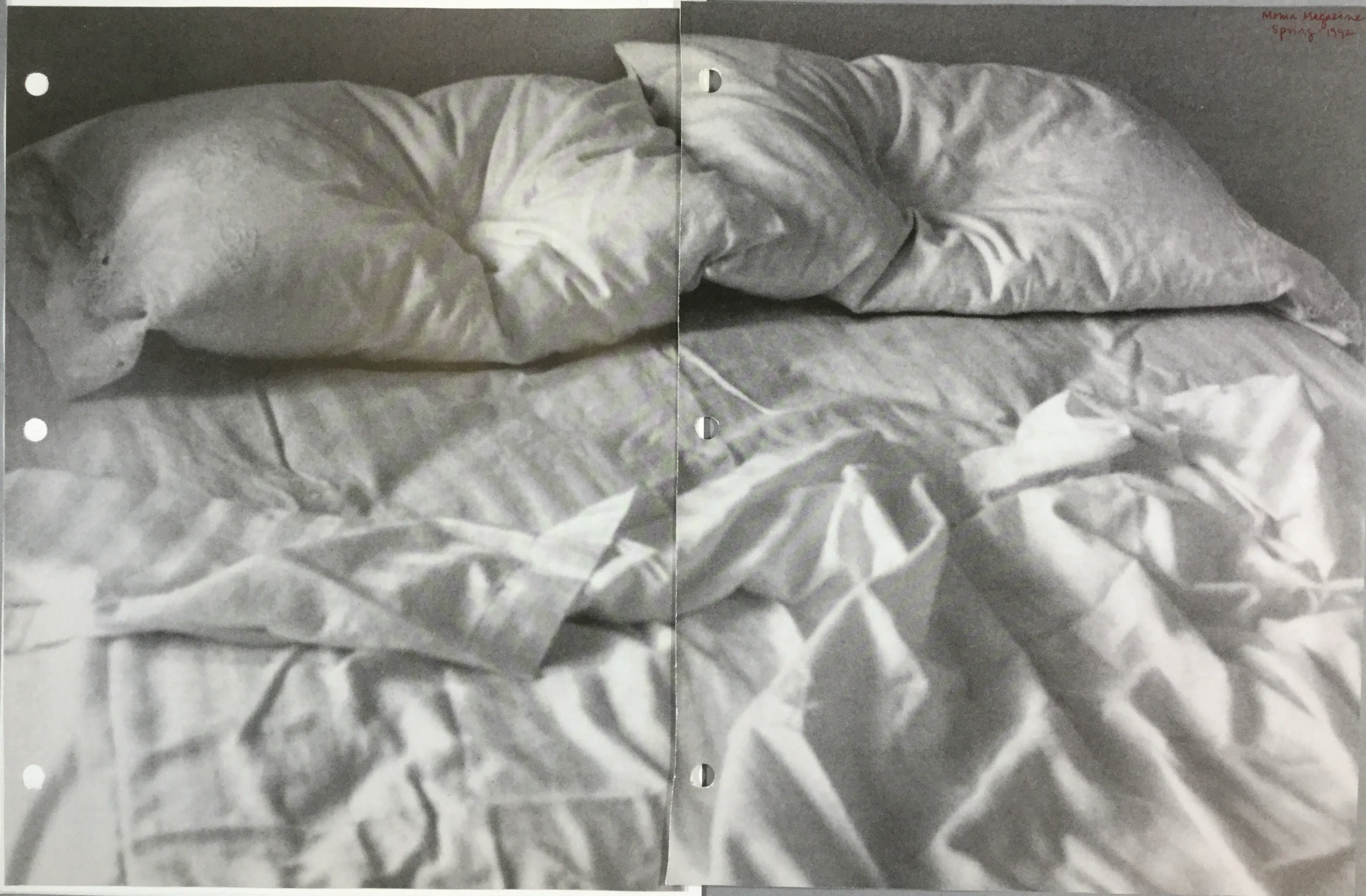
ASIAN AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL: The 15th edition mixes premieres with revivals—the first two shows are Lino Brocka's 1990 *A Dirty Affair* and the 1973 Bruce Lee vehicle *Enter the Dragon* (last films both)—as well as documentaries, experimental works, and features. Highlights include previews of Hanif Kureishi's *London Kills Me* and Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China II*. June 19 through 28, Florence Gould Hall, 55 East 59th Street, 925-8685. (Hoberman)

CHIMES AT MIDNIGHT: Made 14 years after *Othello* (and 25 before *My Own Private Idaho*), Orson Welles's *Falstaff* was his last theatrical feature. The film may be unrestorable, but it's showing in a new 35mm print on the suitably big Newman screen. June 19 through July 2, Public Theater, 425 Lafayette Street, 598-7171. (Hoberman)

IVAN THE TERRIBLE: For the first time in New York, all extant material of Eisenstein's

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PROJECTS 34: FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES

BIOGRAPHY

American, born Cuba, 1957
Lives and works in New York City

EDUCATION

New York University/International Center for Photography, New York, MA, 1987
Independent Study Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1983
Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, BFA, 1983
Independent Study Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1981

SELECTED INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS (* = accompanied by a catalogue)

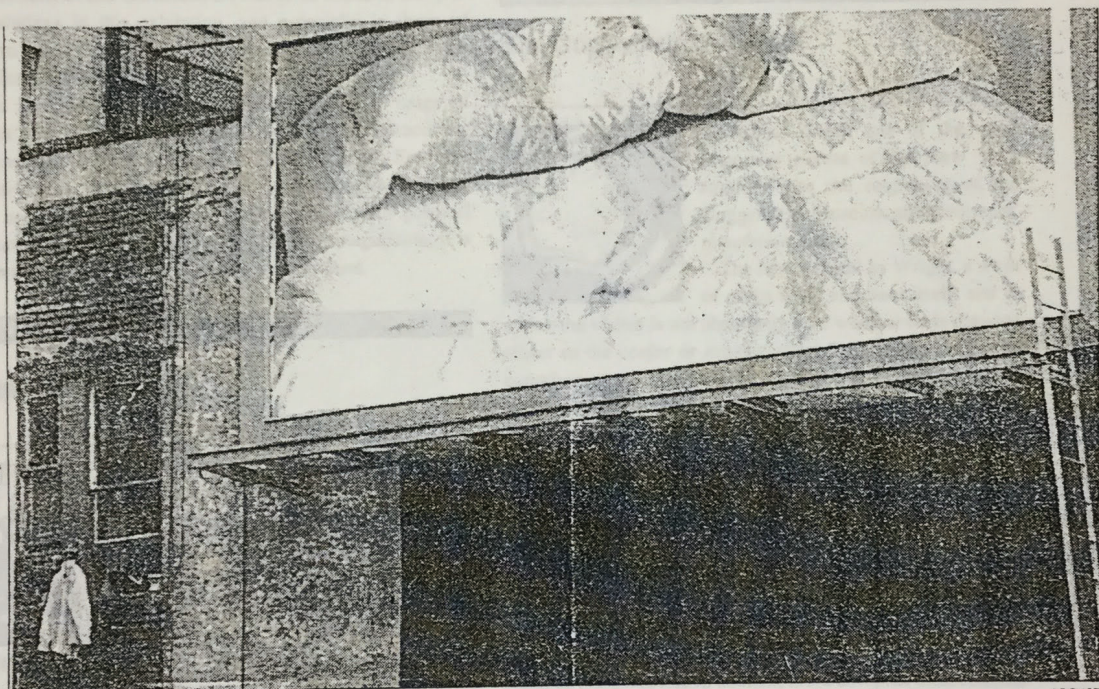
Luhning Augustine Hetzler, Los Angeles, October 19 - November 16, 1991
Massimo De Carlo, Milan, September 17 - October 19, 1991 *
Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, May 2 - June 1, 1991
Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany, February 8 - March 17, 1991
(simultaneous one-person exhibition with Cady Noland) *
Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin, December 17, 1990 - January 30, 1991 (simultaneous one-person exhibition with Cady Noland) *
Fine Arts Gallery at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, November 16 - December 22, 1990 (simultaneous one-person exhibition with Donald Moffett) *
Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, January 20 - February 24, 1990
The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, September 16 - November 20, 1988
INTAR Latin American Gallery, New York, March 1 - April 8, 1988
Rastovski Gallery, New York, May 27 - June 24, 1988

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Galerie Jennifer Flay, Paris, Not Quiet, March 21 - April 18, 1992
Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot, Paris, By Arrangement, February 22 - March 21, 1992
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Portraits, Plots and Places: The Permanent Collection Revisited, opened January 7, 1992 (ongoing)
Emerson Gallery, Hamilton College, Clinton, From Media to Metaphor: Art About AIDS, January 13 - March 15, 1992
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Biennial Exhibition, April 9 - June 23, 1991 *
The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, The Body, March 10 - April 21, 1991
Fundación Caja de Pensiones, Madrid, The Savage Garden, January 22 - March 10, 1991 *
The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, Rhetorical Image, December 9, 1990 - February 3, 1991 *
Musei di Spoleto, Artedomani, May 27 - September 16, 1990 *

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THE BOSTON GLOBE
14 May 1992



AP PHOTO

PUBLIC AIRING — A Manhattan billboard shows a blown-up photo of artist Felix Gonzales-Torres' unmade double bed in one of several such scenes set up across New York City as part of a series of exhibitions by the Museum of Modern Art to showcase rising young artists.

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NEXUS [fall 1992]

Less serious in content but also with personal symbolic overtones, *Nocturnal Reminiscence* (1987), by popular Cuban exile artist Rafael Soriano (whose works were to be the focus of Nader's second exhibit in August) is a luminous abstraction composed of a fusion of light and dark colors. Its forms glow with an eeriness that is fascinating, yet menacing. This quality of an other-worldly magical existence so often associated with Latin American and Caribbean art was to be found in many of the paintings in this exhibition, and especially in those of Roberto Matta from Chile, Elmar Rojas from Guatemala and Ivan Zeno from Puerto Rico.

This inaugural exhibition demonstrated the wide range of subject matter, styles and techniques which characterize contemporary Latin American and Caribbean artists. From the figurative and realistic to geometric and painterly abstractions, there are paintings of serious subject matter with political overtones and paintings of total whimsy and imagination. It is a selection which offers something for everyone.

MONTERREY

Cugat and Camporeale

CARLOS BLAS GALINDO



During the months of June and July, the Museum of Monterrey presented the travelling exhibition of work by Delia Cugat and Sergio Camporeale, covering the period 1989-1992 and comprising oils on canvas by Cugat and watercolors and pencil works on paper by Camporeale.

The importance of the show - which will go on to Colombia - lies in its specifically artistic virtues. Both Cugat and Camporeale have achieved a masterly control over their materials, both technical and thematic. There is an example of how tradition has been successfully used to create something which is both new and topical.

Guillermo Conte

KLAUS STEINMETZ

The Arte Actual Mexicano gallery recently presented work by Guillermo Conte, in a joint project with Jacob Karpio of Costa Rica.

Conte is not an Argentinian artist, although he was born and has lived in that country. Neither does he belong to the Catalan informalist movement, although such a reference is essential in his work. And neither is he Italian, although he has lived and worked within the New Roman School. Or rather, he is all these things.

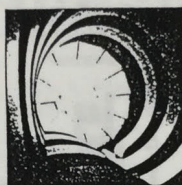
His essentially lyrical works are closer to the poetics of intimacy than to ethnographic narrative. Hence their acceptance in the most diverse environments, with their final almost

antiquarian patina, as if they were canvases which suddenly grew old at the precise moment of their separation from their authors. They are all that remains of instants of life, the artist's fantasies and unconcluded histories, always on the point of disappearing into oblivion. It is an art of absence, of all that has been left behind.

NEW YORK

The Guggenheim Museum

MONICA AMOR



Without doubt one of the most important events of the New York summer was the reopening of the Guggenheim Museum, after two years' restoration work.

The famed spiral by Wright, a work of art in itself and unto itself, and in which the visitor is not absolutely sure whether he is drawing closer to the center or moving away from it, has now been complemented by an annex, a rectangular building by the architects Gwathmey and Siegel. The result quite simply alters radically - and for the better - the profile of one of the most famous buildings in the city.

There were various reasons for this modification: Wright's design, undeniably exciting, did have certain limitations, particularly regarding the presentation of works. At the same time, Wright himself had even considered the idea of an annex.

The new structure undeniably causes a shock to the visitor - but one in which the multiple spaces interact with one another. The formal dialectic, that is the opposition of geometries, gives rise to another, more complex dialectic, that which subsists between function and form. And parallel to that, there is the dialectic between the inside and the outside. As a result, Wright's structure acquires a new spatial internal dimension, which actually modifies our perception of the art which it houses. Now more than ever, the Museum is a journey from the universe of logic to the imagination, freedom and art itself: in short, a new dialectic is established, that of the mind and soul, which Bachelard said were the opposite poles which govern what we call "inspiration".

Félix González Torres

*MARINA URBACH

An exhibition of recent work by the Cuban artist Félix González Torres was organized by Anne Umland at MOMA, as part of its continuing *Projects* series (May-June 1992).

The artist works with billboards, texts and images, employing unexpected materials and strategies for his sculptures and installations: candies and cookies, stacks of paper and offset printing and photography, often combining these strategies to create an ambiguous space. People take away pieces of his

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Adblisters

If only the people were as fed up with mass commercialism as they supposedly are with politics and the press. That sort of disgust will take generations, if it comes at all—that would be true revolution in America—but meantime, many little bulimias are in the works.

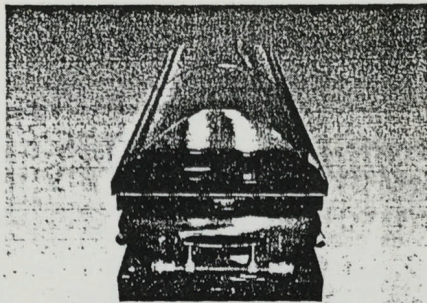
They're surfacing in the form of what one practitioner calls "subvertising": an ad is not merely attacked but elements of its own campaign are twisted and used against it. They might be guerrilla ads or political art, social-cause ads that look like art—or art that looks like ads.

For instance, *Adbusters*, a magazine linking the commercial world and ecodisaster, just came out with its second lampoon of Absolut Vodka ads, that campaign so glamo and arty it would seem forever immune from an askance look. Seeing alcoholism where Absolut sees sales, the ad pictures a coffin with the headline "Absolute Silence," and in tiny print adds, "The birthdays, the graduation, the wedding day.... We were there to toast them all. So from one great spirit to another, here's to the most enduring ritual of all."

The Vancouver-based quarterly often rips advertisers by name, and the companies usually ignore it. (An "American Excess" ad features a sloppy shopping corpulent couple over the legend "Members since birth"—and AmEx is absolutely silent.) But after the first vodka parody—"Absolut Nonsense.... Any suggestion that our advertising campaign has contributed to alcoholism, drunk driving or wife and child beating is absolute nonsense. No one pays any attention to advertising"—the upscale-image liquor got low. Absolut Vodka of Canada "threatened legal action unless we surrendered the remaining copies of the magazine, published a retraction, and agreed never again to print similar material," says *Adbusters*. Instead, the magazine sent out press releases, and Absolut backed off. "They just didn't want to take us on in a public debate," says *Adbuster* editor Kalle Lasn. The Canadian distributor for Absolut won't comment, and a spokesperson for the American distributor (different companies but often same advertising) will say only that "no action whatsoever is contemplated."

The anti-ads, which *Adbusters* also sends out to about

OP AD Leslie Savan



ABSOLUTE SILENCE

Absolut Inversion: casting a pall over the party

mercial-sucking reminders plastered all over the world? *Adbusters* has nothing against Absolut in particular, but targeted the company "because it seems to be the most conspicuous of all alcohol advertisers in the last few years," Lasn says. "They have a right to advertise, but that campaign just needs to be countered. Alcohol companies spend \$2 billion a year on advertising in North America."

Absolut's ad success—its share of the imported vodka market rose from 10 per cent to 62 per cent since the campaign began in 1980, according to Video Storyboard Tests—rests on absolution through art and hipness. The company has techno-teased actual music (via computer chip), jigsaw puzzles, and hankerchiefs into its magazine spreads. And they've co-opted dozens of artists by publishing their work as ads with their names writ large—"Absolut Mothersbaugh," "Absolut Carafe"—as long as they include the Absolut logo and bottle.

So, you might ask, vodka complaining about? Art that sells out is redeemed by its own cheerful corruption, it's, it's... ironic, or something like that, we hip people are trained to say. But even if Absolut art is sometimes wonderful enough to take you places, its prime goal is to take you back to the brand and down the buy-hole. The ads lure

This spring—and here the "irony" really grates—Absolut commissioned bottle-centered artworks from 16 African Americans and ran the ads in *Black Enterprise* magazine. Like Philip Morris's savvy funding to black arts groups, this campaign bounces grossly off the whitewashing work of the Reverend Calvin Butts in New York and the Reverend Michael Pfleger in Chicago, who've defaced alcohol and cigarette billboards in the inner city. In these areas, alcoholism and heart disease rates, as well as the number of smoke- and drink-coaxing billboards, are vastly higher than in white neighborhoods. (The liquor stores of South Central L.A. were targets of arson for this same reason.)

Art is at the crux of guerrilla advertising or, as the Artflux collective says, "Artflux everything and everything Artflux. Messing with the mass message is a minor art form and we've committed long before *Adbusters*. By their clever reassembly of public space, the graffiti artists of Pompeii—whether etching "Don't go to Lucretia the prostitute" or "Tall go home to your wife"—were running de-ads of sorts.

Continuing the tradition, artist Ron English has redone more than 100 billboards, either adding crucial touches like explicit penises and testicles for the suggested ones on the face of Camel's "Smooth Character" or putting up a whole new billboard, like the enlarged copy of *Guernica* he plastered under the words "New World Order" during the Gulf war. English sometimes works with the New Jersey-based Artflux, which snipes up posters like one of Uncle Sam saying, "I want you to die a horrible meaningless death to sustain a lifestyle that will ultimately destroy the earth."

This leads to those mysterious billboards, 24 of them, across NYC. They're blown-up black-and-white photos of a really inviting bed with satiny sheets rumpled and two pillows indented by now-absent heads. When I first saw it, I assumed it was a teaser campaign and that any day a Calvin Klein logo would be slapped across the bottom.

"It tortures me, because I sleep alone," one young man told me, interpreting it quite differently. But then he also figured it was some kind of AIDS ad—"because two people, gone, death...." Actually, though it's pretty darn obscure, that is what the billboard's supposed to "say." It's not an ad at all, but a MOMA-sponsored project by artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, whose lover died of AIDS.

But for me the main effect of the bed in the sky was, how refreshing *not* to have a jaded expectation satisfied, that a logo never did land on what looks like an ad, that an image