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CARLOS AND ROSA DE LA CRUZ INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Rosa Rionda de la Cruz

Félix González-Torres did not court the limelight. His work is quiet and generous, further accentuated by the seeming incongruity of his selection of location. Always preferring the side to the center stage. He once said that in an exhibition in Europe, he chose to install his work in an office rather than in the actual exhibition space. Thus, I was not surprised that his light piece, “*Untitled*” (*America #3*), was installed in the cafeteria of the Guggenheim Museum in New York for his retrospective in March of 1995.

Félix was candid when speaking of his work. When Carlos and I acquired his double stack piece, “*Untitled*” (*Nowhere better than this place / Somewhere better than this place*), print on paper endless copies, ideal height 26 inches, Félix commented, “I always wanted that piece to go to a couple. It is like two persons having an endless discussion of nowhere better / somewhere better. . .”

González-Torres began exploring the paper stacks while reading Walter Benjamin’s, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Benjamin wrote this essay to describe a theory that would “be useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art.” Benjamin is referring to the consequences of the “Modern Age”: “The object consumes man at the same time man consumes it.” Mass consumption, in this case, reveals the loss of the aura. For Benjamin, a distance from the aura is a good thing. The loss of the aura has the potential to open up the politicization of art. However, it allows for us to raise political questions in regards to the reproducible image, which can be used in one way or another.

This quiet revolution was evident in González-Torres’ approach to the private vs. the public. Félix was very personal about his work. His private moments were very public and his public moments were very private. For Félix, there was no ground to “draw a line.” There was a mysticism revealed in the physical space through his “takeaways.” His attempt to engage audience and space created a temporal world that was there for us to participate.

In the summer of 1995, González-Torres sent Carlos and me a photograph of the sky. In the envelope was a sheet of light-blue paper where he had written a poem with his wishes for that summer.

“A possible horizon.”
 Light blue balmy skies
 Blue warm light waters
Carlos M. de la Cruz, Sr.

I'd like to change gears a bit, and give my perspective as a businessman. Félix González-Torres' work emerged at a pivotal time in the business of art. I remember when museums had an acquisition fund. Currently, an enormous amount of museum funding is being allocated to building expansion projects, at times reaching the billions. Acquisitions were once the primary obligation of the museums. Interestingly enough, this change came about concurrently with a major shift in our global economy.

The economy is again in a transition period due to a combination of factors. Prices are generally going down. We are experiencing a deflationary period in which you are seeing negative interest rates in Europe. If you look back to 1922, the price of sugar went from 22 cents a pound to 2 cents a pound. Hyperinflation, the mirror image of deflation, devastated certain markets as we felt the repercussions of a global economic collapse in the throes of a post-WWI era.

Our economy in the 1920's transitioned from an agricultural society to an industrial society, fundamentally impacting our workforce. We are currently living in a post-industrial era in which developments in modern technology and means of globalized communication have shifted an industrial economy of manufacturing to one rooted in the invention of information technology.

What has the greatest value? You have the multinational conglomerate company Alphabet, which is “Google,” and the technology company Apple both providing services in the accessibility of information. These stocks combined exceed a market value of 1 trillion dollars, making them the two most valuable stocks in the world. The banks were worth nothing in 2008, and the car companies are worth less than their replacement value.

So what does this mean for art? González-Torres was living in a period of mechanical reproduction. His most prolific projects required viewer participation, dissemination of information and the transformation of the “object form” caused by the depletion, reproduction and regeneration of his work. His work questions what we as a society consider valuable, favoring ‘cultural currency’ above the material.