Core Tenets for Gonzalez-Torres's portrait works
Draft – 1 April 2023

A note on the Core Tenets: In addition to the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation's main priority of fostering and facilitating individuals' direct experiences with the work, which follows Gonzalez-Torres's primary intention, a significant Foundation activity is providing language around the nature and structure of the works, in accordance with the type and forms of language that Gonzalez-Torres developed and has been provided to owners and exhibitors on an ongoing basis. The Foundation has developed a format to provide access to such language, referred to as 'Core Tenets,' for those works/bodies of works that have specific, yet sometimes open-ended parameters.

CORE TENETS FOR FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES'S PORTRAIT WORKS

While each body of work follows its own set of rules, Gonzalez-Torres's practice includes purposeful contradictions, within a body of work and between bodies of work, in order to foster engagement and questioning. See a complete list of all portrait works as well as information on the variations following the Core Tenets.

A specific note on portraits: Portraits are the only works in Felix Gonzalez-Torres's oeuvre that were made with the involvement of the initial owner.[1] In the process of making each portrait, Gonzalez-Torres asked the subject to provide a list of events/dates which they considered formative. Gonzalez-Torres deliberated extensively on the provided content before proceeding to select, edit (e.g., rewording and/or renumbering), remove provided events/dates, contribute additional events/dates, and arrange a sequence of the events/dates, thereby determining the initial version of the portrait.[2]

- Each portrait work is a unique artwork.

- Each portrait work can exist in more than one place at a time.

- The portraits, as with all manifestable works, exist regardless of whether they are physically manifest.

- It is integral that the portrait works have the capacity to change over time.[3]

- The owner has the right to make a new version at any time, including each time they manifest the work.

- The owner has the right to choose to manifest the work at any time within the specific, yet open-ended parameters of the work.

- When lending a portrait work, whereas certain rights are automatically extended through the lending process, the owner can choose whether or not to extend the right to make a version of the portrait within the open-ended parameters of the work.[4]

- The portraits are installed directly on the wall(s)[5] at what would be considered "frieze" height, in a modest but readable scale, in a horizontal line(s).[6] [7]

- The font of the text for all portrait works is Trump Medieval Bold Italic.

- The color of the text, and in some cases the optional band of background color, is specified for each portrait work.[8]

- Gonzalez-Torres considered a recording of every version of each portrait to be conceptually important. New versions of a portrait work do not eliminate any other version of that work.[9]

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T E L E P H O N E :   2 1 2 - 4 1 4 - 4 2 4 2   E - M A I L :   I N F O @ F E L I X G O N Z A L E Z – T O R R E S F O U N D A T I O N . O R G

- Each authorized manifestation of a portrait is the work and should be referred to only as the work.

- While the rights of ownership transfer from one owner to the next owner, the title of a portrait always remains the same as specified in the original caption.

- Regardless of how the work may vary with each manifestation and throughout the course of each manifestation, each element of the work's caption remains consistent, including: the precise wording and punctuation of the title (including placement of quotation marks and parentheses), the date of the work, the specified medium and description of dimensions.

- The uniqueness of Gonzalez-Torres's manifestable works is linked to ownership. [10]

- Portrait works are accompanied by Certificates of Authenticity and Ownership. [11] [12]

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[1] There was one additional artwork in another body of work that was made in dialogue with the initial owner. [FGTF# GF1992-009]

[2] The portrait subjects provided events/dates to Gonzalez-Torres in a range of formats, and he engaged with the material provided in various ways. There are throughlines that can be discerned in the formats of the initial versions of each portrait work (e.g. in the initial version of each portrait, the events/dates took the form of one or a few words followed by a numerical year [in almost all cases]). That said, in his process of creating the initial versions of portrait works, in addition to adding completely new events/dates and ultimately sequencing all of the events/dates, Gonzalez-Torres's treatment of what was provided included: shortening provided events/dates into one or two words; lengthening provided events/dates; keeping provided events/dates verbatim; eliminating provided events/dates; and choosing completely different language and/or dates to represent what was provided. The varied strategies Gonzalez-Torres employed across the initial versions of portrait works suggests that he sought to impart both a complex questioning of how a subject might be represented, and to evoke how one might continue to create future versions of portrait works. (See also footnote 3.)

[3] A 1994 letter from Gonzalez-Torres to the subject of one particular portrait work illuminates aspects of the conceptual importance of the portrait works' ongoing capacity for change: "We are *not* what we think we are, but rather a compilation of texts. A compilation of histories, past, present, and future, always, always, shifting, adding, subtracting, gaining. These portraits are an attempt at dealing with the theoretical and limited aspects of portraiture. We are as much a product of the invention of TV as we are the product of our parents, and domestic environments, historical events and accidents, and the social forces that have shaped the so-called 'public' life. [...] Public life is private life. In our culture we live in a network of interrelations. As Lenin said: everything is related to everything. And why so many dates of a time in which you were not even born yet? When you were born you already came into a world that was pretty much decided and organized for you: your language, the language you first learned, and the other languages you later learned. The names of things, of cities, the history of our humanity and our atrocities, the inventions, the viruses, the ways of loving, religion, etc. In other words: when we look at a photo of how we look like it's only that — how we look, and not *what* we are, that is a history too complex to 'represent.' That is one of the reasons why these pieces can, and should, be altered to reflect in the future the fluctuations of a 'personal' and/or 'public' developments." [Felix Gonzalez-Torres, letter to Robert Vifian, December 3, 1994. Reproduced in: *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, edited by Julie Ault. Gottingen, Germany: Steidldangin, 2006: 170-171].

[4] The owner is requested to use discretion in accepting or rejecting the loan of the work for exhibitions, prioritizing exhibitions that add to the discourse around Gonzalez-Torres's work, and borrowers who understand that by borrowing the work, they are taking on rights and responsibilities to engage with the work and understand the work's ability to shift over time.

[5] The medium is specified as 'paint on wall;' alternative methods of applying a portrait work directly to the wall have been used.

[6] Decisions regarding the installation of a portrait in situ may be influenced and/or directed by the architecture and conditions of a given space. While typically "frieze height" may be described as just below the point where the wall meets the ceiling, the interpretation of "frieze height" may vary in response to the scale of the architecture. Accordingly, the size of the text may shift relative to what is considered "modest but readable" at a given height. The form/concept of a "frieze" is also a guideline for other aspects of installation. Depending on the length of a version of a portrait, a priority may be that the portrait span the entire width of a wall or encircle a space (the spacing between characters, the spacing between the events/dates, and the size of the text may be finessed accordingly).

[7] Decisions made when installing a portrait in situ constitute a significant contribution to the content of a particular manifestation of a portrait.

[8] In some cases, the color of the text and the optional band of background color is specified as "to the owner's choosing."

[9] As the content of any given manifestation of a portrait work encompasses not only the version installed, but also decisions made in response to the architecture and conditions of the spaces of each installation, the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation requests in-depth archival information about each installation, including: the version of the portrait installed, the ways in which the space impacted or shaped decisions about installation, photographic documentation of each physical manifestation, the location and duration of the installation, etc. (*Please note: the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation may be contacted for current information on the scope and details of its archival requests.*)

[10] While there may be works by Gonzalez-Torres which have owners that consist of more than one entity, together they constitute the current owner. The entities are perceived, referred to as, and operate as a single owner.

[11] Gonzalez-Torres intended for the Certificates of Authenticity and Ownership for works to be issued anew in the name of the current owner for as long as possible. When the process of certificate issuance has been discontinued, a record linking the new owner to the chain of previous owners is intended to be in place. (See also footnote 10.)

[12] The language in the Certificates of Authenticity and Ownership has the potential to change over time to reflect nuanced understanding of the work and how language evolves in its capacity to articulate ideas.

COMPLETE LIST OF GONZALEZ-TORRES'S PORTRAIT WORKS:

"Untitled", 1989 [FGTF# GF1989-020]
"Untitled" (Portrait of the Wongs), 1991 [FGTF# GF1991-003]
"Untitled" (Portrait of Michael Jenkins), 1991 [FGTF# GF1991-014]
"Untitled" (Portrait of Julie Ault), 1991 [FGTF# GF1991-033]
"Untitled" (Portrait of the Stillpasses), 1991 [FGTF# GF1991-059]
"Untitled" (Portrait of Jennifer Flay), 1992 [FGTF# GF1992-010]
"Untitled" (Portrait of Andrea Rosen), 1992 [FGTF#GF1992-017]
"Untitled" (Portrait of Elaine Dannheisser), 1993 [FGTF# GF1993-011]
"Untitled" (Portrait of Ingvild Goetz), 1993 [FGTF# GF1993-012]
"Untitled" (Portrait of the Magoons), 1993 [FGTF# GF1993-013]
"Untitled" (Portrait of Robert Vifian), 1993 [FGTF# GF1993-021]
"Untitled" (Portrait of Austrian Airlines), 1993 [FGTF# GF1993-022]
"Untitled" (Portrait of the Rosenbergs), 1994 [FGTF# GF1994-002]
"Untitled" (Portrait of MOCA), 1994 [FGTF# GF1994-006]
"Untitled" (Portrait of Cincinnati Art Museum), 1994 [FGTF# GF1994-009]
"Untitled" (Portrait of the Fabric Workshop, a gift to Kippy), 1994 [FGTF# GF1994-020]

PURPOSEFUL VARIATIONS WITHIN THE BODY OF BILLBOARD WORKS:

"Untitled" (Portrait of Austrian Airlines), 1993 [FGTF# GF1993-022]

(*Description of this work's variation currently unavailable*)

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