Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ has created nineteen candy pieces which were featured in many museums around the world. The works target the topic of a serious nature, one that is still unfortunately often taboo in mainstream society. It takes the topic from the shadows, where individuals still cringe and avert their eyes, and lays it on the table for discussion and contemplation. The approximate 175 pounds of candy that make up the work resembles the 175-pound body of Ross Laycock, the artists’ boyfriend who died of AIDS in 1991. As each person takes a piece of candy, they in turn act as the AIDS virus depleting Ross’ body, piece by piece taking it away until there is nothing left. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who dedicated his artwork to the one he love and lost, died in 1996 of AIDS. Mooney, James (2006) Without destination: the gift of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. In: Art Becomes You!: Parody, Pastiche & the Politics of Art – Materiality in a Post Material Paradigm. Rogers, HHenry and Williamson, Aaron, eds. Article Press, UCE, Birmingham, pp. 28-41. ISBN 9781873352984

The essay gained approval from the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation in New York. The book was developed from a conference organised by Henry Rogers and David Burrows at UCE (2005). Other speakers included: Amelia Jones, Sarat Maharaj, Aaron Williamson and Judith Halberstam. Earlier versions of this paper were presented as lectures at the Intimacy Lecture Series, RCA, 2002, and as part of the Guest Lecture Series in the Dept. of Visual Culture, Goldsmith's College, 2005.

ABSTRACT

Mooney’s essay explored the notion of ‘the gift’ and the attendant ethical implications and elaboration in relation to the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. The essay’s significance may be assessed in the challenge it offered to the usual readings of the gift in relation to the artist’s work, cautiously moving toward the proposition that the gift his work delivers is the very nullification of conventional concepts. The appropriateness of Marcel Mauss’s writing in The Gift on its operation and circulation in potlatch economies to the work of Gonzalez-Torres was contrasted with Derrida’s thoughts on the ethics of the gift. In particular, the Derridean metaphor of ‘dehiscence’ – to burst/scatter – was explored as a vector of ethical concern with particular reference to certain key works by Gonzalez-Torres. The text focused on the candy installations and the paper ‘stacks’, where members of the viewing audience were permitted, indeed encouraged, to take ‘gifts’ in the form of sweets from the installations or prints from the stacks, thus enacting a form of cultural dehiscence, scattering, and dissemination.

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