



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *"Untitled" (Toronto)*, 1992. Light bulbs, porcelain light sockets, and electrical cord. Overall dimensions vary with installation. © Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Courtesy of the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation.

# Educator Resource

Recommended Age: Grade 9 and up

Felix Gonzalez-Torres,  
*Summer*

March 10, 2022—July 31, 2022

Museum  
Of  
**Contemporary  
Art**  
Toronto Canada



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled* (Golden), 1995. Strands of beads and hanging device. Dimensions vary with installation.  
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## Overview

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was an artist, educator, writer, and activist. Gonzalez-Torres' practice evolved during the transition from the 1980s to the '90s, a period remembered for the emergence of the HIV/AIDS health crisis, as well as drastically changing attitudes towards government (in)action, medicine, wealth and race inequalities, war, climate, sexuality, and freedom of expression.

Many of his artworks take the form of mass-produced items—light strings, piles of candy, beaded curtains, stacks of paper, and signage—that can be locally sourced and adapted to any setting. However, even in his lifetime, Gonzalez-Torres chose to impart the full responsibility of making choices about his artwork to owners, authorised exhibitors, and members of the public, ensuring that each artwork's significance varies with time, orientation, geography, and experience.

Titled *Summer*, this arrangement of his works generates new reflections on our relationship to the landscape, what the artist once alluded to as being not only the natural environment but also our "cultural concerns, political realities, and civic issues." It embraces the spirit of seasonal transformations, the dilemma of being in one set of physical and social circumstances, but longing for others.

## Ontario Curriculum Connections

### **English, Grade 9 – 12**

Oral Communications, Reading and Literature, Writing

### **World History since 1900, Grade 11**

A2. Developing Transferable Skill

D. The Cold War Years, 1945–1991

E. A Globalizing World: Issues and Interactions since 1991

### **World History since the Fifteenth Century, Grade 12**

A2. Developing Transferable Skill

E. The World since 1900

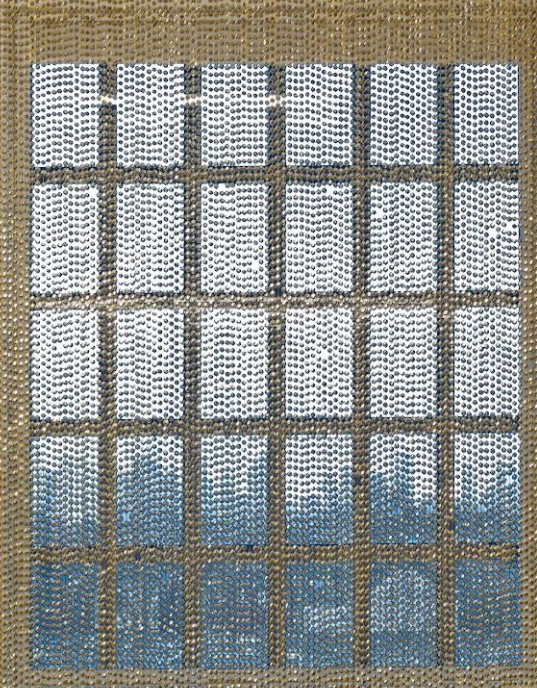
### **Visual Arts, Grade 9 – 12**

A. Creating and Presenting

B. Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing

C. Foundations





Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (Golden), 1995, installation MOCA Toronto. Photographer: Toni Hafkenscheid.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

Gonzalez-Torres' works are made from a variety of everyday, mass-produced materials: for instance "Untitled" (North) is made of lightbulbs strung together. Find an artwork or material that is familiar to you. **How does it make you feel? Does it conjure up any memories, places or personal connections for you?** Think of a single word, idea or name you could use to describe this personal connection or feeling and **write it down.**

"Untitled" is a series of names and dates that wrap around the top of the museum wall and were part of a series of works Gonzalez-Torres referred to as portraits. **Are there any dates you would add to this work? How would these dates change the meaning of the work? Who is this work a portrait of?**

Typically we think of artworks as objects to look at like paintings or sculptures. "Untitled" (Public Opinion), however, is made up of 700 lbs of liquorice that you are invited to take from. **What is the artwork here? Is it each candy? Does the artwork still exist if there are no more candies left? What might (Public Opinion) refer to?**

## Key Ideas

Place, Everyday, Audience, Minimalism, Pandemics, Ekphrasis

## Glossary

**Audience:** the viewers of an artwork who may engage with the work directly or indirectly

**Minimalism:** a form of abstract art that is stripped down to emphasize the essential elements of the work and often made from mass-produced materials

**Ekphrasis:** an ekphrastic poem is a vivid or dramatic description of an artwork that often includes what the writer is thinking or feeling when they experience the work of art





Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (Shield), 1990. C-print jigsaw puzzle in plastic bag. 7 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches. Edition of 3, 1 AP.  
©Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Courtesy of the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Photographer: Lance Brewer.

## Activity | Grade 9 – 12

Early minimalist sculptures made use of mass-produced materials—like steel, wood, felt or lights—but the personal meaning attached to them was secondary or irrelevant to the work. Gonzalez-Torres took the strategies of using mass-produced materials and minimal forms as a way to allow those viewing his work to bring their own personal connections. He often found minimal yet poignant ways to depict loss, relationships and social issues while also providing space for those exhibiting and viewing his work to bring their own personal connections and understandings.

Materials: pencils and paper

Think of an experience, feeling, person or event that is significant to you. **Keeping Gonzalez-Torres' strategy in mind, think up and propose a minimal way by which to express it.** It can be an image, a set of objects, a piece of text, or anything else that comes to mind. Take some time to draw or write it and include instructions on how to present it.

## Writing Activity | Grade 9 – 12

Following the guiding questions, compile a group list of personal connections for the artworks by polling your students for their chosen words. **How do the chosen words shift how we understand the artworks?** The following exercise will further reflect on how we connect to artworks through a poetic writing exercise.

Materials: pencils and paper

Pick one of the artworks in the exhibition that you came up with words for. Working from this artwork and the word you chose, write an ekphrastic poem (see Glossary) in response to it. Allow your poem to go beyond what you see—you can make it dream like, a related anecdote, a conversation or dialogue but try to keep your chosen word in mind.

Extension: When everyone has finished writing, get together in small groups and share your writing.

**How do these poems change how you experience the artworks? How do they open up new perspectives on how you understand the artwork?**