

---

# THESEUS TEMPEL WIEN

---



## FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES

**APRIL 25 TO  
OCTOBER 1, 2018**

---

Continuing our series of contemporary art exhibitions at the Theseus Temple, this year we present a single, major work by the Cuban-American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996). The exhibition is curated by Jasper Sharp, and generously supported by the Contemporary Patrons of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. A second, related work by Felix Gonzalez-Torres is currently on display at the Kunsthistorisches Museum as part of the exhibition *The Shape of Time* (March 6 to July 8, 2018).

**“UNTITLED”  
(LOVERS - PARIS)**

---

Two strings of light bulbs tumble from the ceiling, collecting in a pool of light on the floor. While the meaning of the work is left open, its title “Untitled” (*Lovers - Paris*) suggests a pair of lovers who bring light and joy into each other’s lives. And yet this reading is accompanied by an inescapable melancholy. Despite their warm, affirming glow, each bulb will one day burn out and extinguish before being replaced by another. With this in mind, the work points to the fleeting nature of life, the vulnerability of the human form, and beyond, to the process of regeneration. “Untitled” (*Lovers - Paris*) belongs to a group of more than twenty light string works created by

---

# THESEUS TEMPEL WIEN

---

the artist. The first of them, made in 1991, was produced following the death of his partner, Ross Laycock.

The modest and open-ended quality of the work is reinforced by the fact that it has no fixed form of its own. The artist stipulated that whoever installs the work is free to choose its configuration. Hanging in the darkness of the Theseus Temple, the strings of lights occupy the same position that Canova's sculpture itself once did. But in place of the heroic monumentality of the latter work, we now find stillness and sensitivity.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

### **FELIX GONZALEZ- TORRES**

---

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was born in 1957 in Guáimaro, Cuba. In 1979, he moved to New York to study at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. His first solo exhibition, held at the Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York in 1990, was followed by some notable early successes outside the United States. He is best known for installations comprising everyday objects like sweets, light bulbs, or clocks, some of which invite visitors to interact with them. His often Minimalist compositions focus on subjects such as love, loss and sexuality, and are informed by his experience of HIV/AIDS, from which he died in 1996.

His work is as simple in its appearance as it is deeply layered in meaning. Everyday objects – mirrors, jigsaw puzzles, public billboards, piles of candy, or in this case, lights – are transformed into deeply personal meditations on the essential truths of human existence. His first-hand experience of the devastation wrought by AIDS lent his work a profound sense of mourning and loss. Despite his tragically short life, and an artistic career that lasted barely more than a decade, Gonzalez-Torres created an artistic legacy that continues to influence generations of artists today.

---

# THESEUS TEMPEL WIEN

---

## CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE THESEUS TEMPLE

---

Beginning in 2012, the Kunsthistorisches Museum initiated a new series of exhibitions within the Temple, a neo-classical structure built by court architect Peter von Nobile in 1823 to be the home for a single work of then-contemporary art: Antonio Canova's white marble masterpiece *Theseus Slaying the Centaur*. For almost seventy years, this artwork stood alone inside the building, until in 1891 it was moved to the newly-completed Kunsthistorisches Museum where it still stands today. More than a century later, these exhibitions have returned the Temple to its original purpose: to house remarkable artworks by contemporary artists, one at a time.

Artists who have previously exhibited at the Theseus Temple include Ugo Rondinone (2012), Kris Martin (2012), Richard Wright (2013), Edmund de Waal (2014), Susan Philipsz (2015), Ron Mueck (2016) and Kathleen Ryan (2017).

## HISTORY OF THE THESEUS TEMPLE

---

Pietro Nobile (1774–1854, Vienna's foremost Neo-Classical architect) designed the Theseus Temple in 1819–1823 for Emperor Francis I as part of the new layout of the Volksgarten. These major building works were necessary because the French army had razed the city's fortifications in front of the imperial palace when they withdrew from Vienna in 1809. Initially devised as a private park for members of the imperial family, it was later opened to the public, becoming the first imperial public park. Since 1825 it is known as "Volksgarten" (people's park).

The Theseus Temple, a neo-classical copy of the Theseion in Athens, was conceived to house a single contemporary artwork: Antonio Canova's celebrated *Theseus Slaying the Centaur*, a seminal neo-classical group. Antonio Canova (1757–1822, a leading representative of Italian neo-classical sculpture) is also credited with devising this unusual building. In 1890, Theseus was moved to the main staircase of the newly built Kunsthistorisches Museum, where it remains today.

The crypt beneath the Theseus Temple was accessed from a no longer extant sarcophagus-shaped side entrance; it initially housed part of the

---

# THESEUS TEMPEL WIEN

---

imperial Collection of Antiquities. From 1901, finds from Ephesus were shown in the temple's cella (i.e., the inner sanctum); today they are displayed in the Ephesus Museum in the Neue Burg. Later the cella served as a venue for art exhibitions staged by the Academy of Fine Arts and, from 1992, by the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Totally refurbished in 2008–2011 in collaboration with the Bundesdenkmalamt, the facades of the Theseus Temple are once again painted with a dazzling polished lead-white. The newly installed electric lighting has turned the Theseus Temple into an elegant highlight of the nighttime skyline comprising the impressive Hofburg complex and grand buildings along the Ringstrasse. In the winter of 2014/15, the coffered ceiling of the Theseus Temple was extensively restored and thus returned to its original state.

The bronze statue *Young Athlete* (1921) in front of the Theseus Temple is by Josef Müller.

---

# THESEUS TEMPEL WIEN

---

## PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

---

Press photographs are available in the press section of our website at <http://press.khm.at> free of charge, for your topical reporting:



**Felix Gonzalez-Torres**

»Untitled« (*Lovers – Paris*), 1993

Light bulbs, porcelain light sockets and extension cords

Two parts: Overall dimensions vary with installation

Collection Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland

© The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation

Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

© Photo: KHM-Museumsverband



**Felix Gonzalez-Torres**

»Untitled« (*Lovers – Paris*), 1993

Light bulbs, porcelain light sockets and extension cords

Two parts: Overall dimensions vary with installation

Collection Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland

© The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation

Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

© Photo: KHM-Museumsverband



**Theseus Temple**

© KHM-Museumsverband

---

# THESEUS TEMPEL WIEN

---



**Theseus Temple**  
© KHM-Museumsverband



**Theseus Temple**  
Illuminated by night  
© KHM-Museumsverband



**Restored ceiling of the Theseus Temple**  
2015  
© KHM-Museumsverband



**Theseus Temple, cross section**  
Drawing by Karl Schmidt (1825)  
after the design by Pietro Nobile (1820)  
Vienna, Albertina, Architektursammlung  
© Vienna, Albertina

---

# THESEUS TEMPEL WIEN

---



Antonia Canova

**Theseus Slaying the Centaur (1804–1819)**

The statue at its original location in the Theseus Temple  
Vienna, ÖNB, Picture Archive

© Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

## OPENING HOURS

---

April to October  
Daily 11am - 6pm

Opening Hours Volksgarten  
April 1 - October 31, 6am - 10pm

## PRESS CONTACT

---

Nina Auinger-Sutterlüty, MAS  
Head of Communication & Public Relations  
Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien  
Burgring 5, 1010 Vienna  
T +43 1 525 24 – 4021  
M +43 664 605 14 – 4021  
info.pr@khm.at  
www.khm.at