

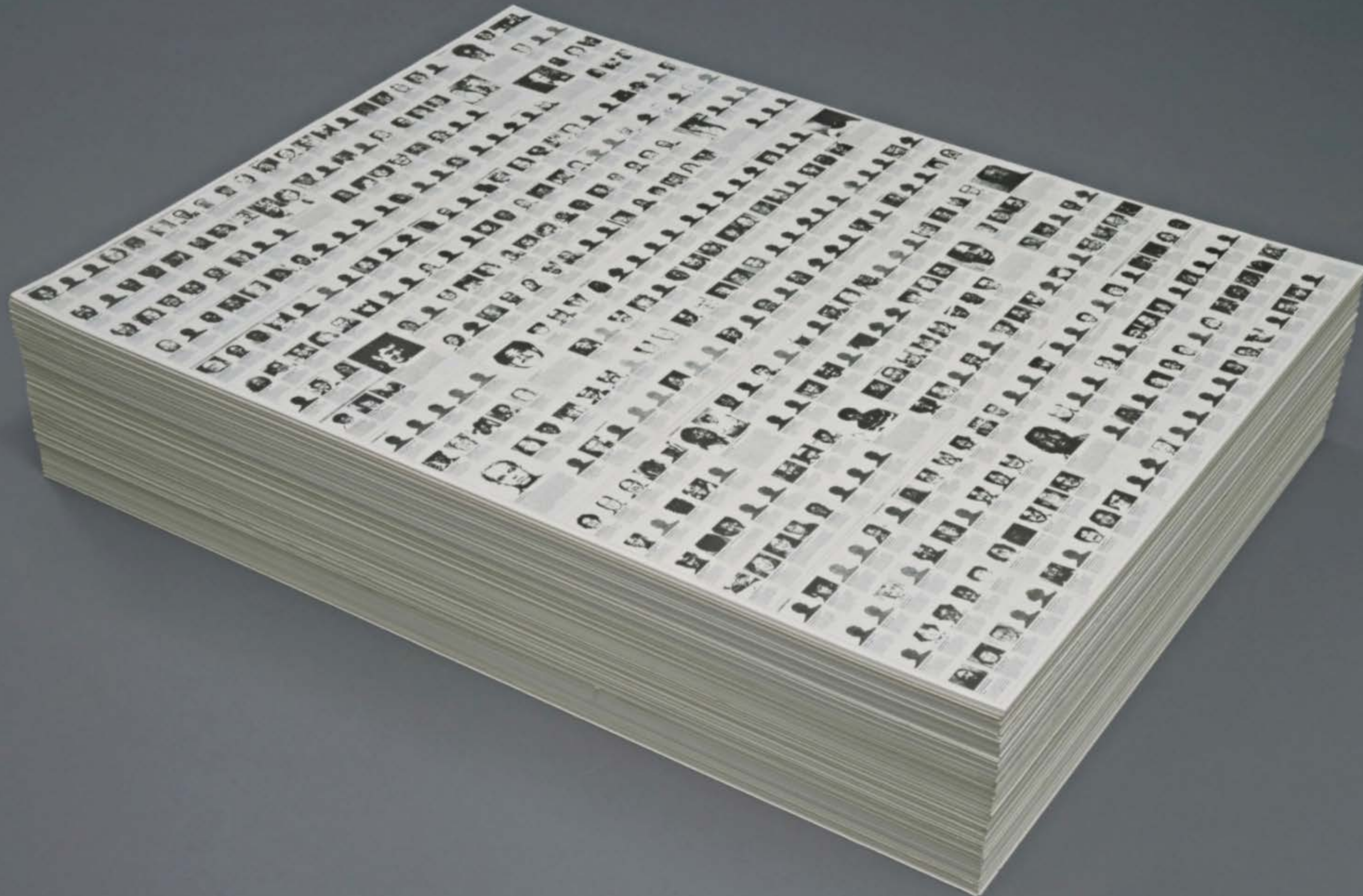


“Untitled”

(Death by gun)

1990, Felix Gonzales-Torres





Gonzalez-Torres addressed love, mourning, and loss in his art, and “Untitled” (Death by Gun) is an unusually direct approach to these themes. The viewer’s first reaction to the work is often one of uncertainty. Is this stack of papers on the floor meant to be walked around and viewed from different angles, like sculpture? Or did the artist intend for them to be picked up and examined? Listed on each sheet are the names of 460 individuals killed by gun in the United States during the week of May 1–7, 1989, cited by name, age, city, and state, with a brief description of the circumstances of their deaths and, in most cases, a photograph of the deceased. These images and words, appropriated from Time magazine, where they first appeared, are reprinted without commentary.

Conceptually, the work is ongoing. Viewer participation is an important element, and the public is encouraged to read the sheets and take them away to keep, display, or give to others. Gonzalez-Torres determined that the ideal stack of pages is nine inches high, and he arranged for the sheets to be continually reprinted and replaced, thus ensuring that “Untitled” (Death by Gun) can be distributed indefinitely. In the three decades since the work was made, its message has only become more urgent, as gun deaths and mass shootings continue to be common American tragedies.

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