

## Nancy Chunn

### RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS

A *Book of Days* with an axe to grind. Nancy Chunn has arrayed the 366 front pages *The New York Times* saw fit to print in 1996, together with her own textural emendations in the form of drawings, overpaintings and printed marginal commentaries. The pages are displayed in separate rectangles around the gallery in month by month blocks, like narrative tapestries.

The glib commentaries and the satirical nature of the artist's responses to the stories she follows give the project a decidedly analytical tone. Chunn has consecrated herself to the task of following the news of the year from a skeptical remove. The "news" for Chunn is a subjective construct, not an objective reality. It is *The Times'* editorial decisions about what is and is not the news that compels the artist, more so seemingly on occasion than the stories themselves. It is a delicate balance to maintain, for the "corrections" she makes are most effective when the immediacy of a story overwhelms forgetfulness and resistance, hitting right in the heart.

The installation, as an immediate, all-enveloping environment, would seem to impose itself on the viewer in a vastly different way than it did upon the artist, who experienced the work as a series of incremental intimate daily events. As a series of political commentaries, the work is an effective platform for Chunn's considerable skills as a satirist and drafts woman, but the accumulated record is not so much an indictment of *The Times* as it is a record of an articulate individual protest. Rush Limbaugh, who has just as many reservations about the objectivity of *The New York Times* as does Chunn, might also produce an interesting document along the same lines, if he could draw. All the more so in fact, since Chunn is preaching to the converted, speaking from the privileged position of the traditionally liberal downtown art scene. But then again, Rush Limbaugh is a big fat idiot who could never be this clever.

The installation has an earnest pedagogical ring which is at odds with the real power of Chunn's idea. Time and news pass over us like waves. A second chance to look back into the past and watch the year unfold reveals not just the insidious side of the information-producing industry, but the powerfully locating experience provided the truly (rare) universal event as well.

The small streams and cross currents which run mundanely through the months may suddenly erupt into a compelling climax, as when growing intimations of the Yankee's championship year bloomed into a starry night of celebration. But it is the galvanizing spectacle of a awesome and unforeseen event marks the greatest shared experiences. The crash of TWA 800 left a tidal wave on Chunn's pages for days, pulling the artist, along with the rest of the country, deep into the sad news, so deeply that her skeptical voice was lost, drowned out by the inescapable tragedy. Chunn used angels to mark the story, and the angels continue through the rest of the year, tracking the resulting story of the inquest. Soon, however, the angels lose their power to recall the moment the story broke into everyone's life. The banal business of assessing blame for the disaster becomes a slightly tedious bureaucratic exercise and there is little anyone can do reassert the initial sense of loss. Here, at least, you need only look back to the day after the crash.

These rare events changed everything, at least for a moment, broke through the exercise, and swept the artist away. That's a remarkable thing to see. That's what real news is — the stuff that gives texture and cadence to life. The record of a year distills into the moments when the outside world blew past our suspicious selves and pulled us into a larger understanding of our shared humanity. The rest is civics class.