

# Extra! Extra! News As Artwork

## Corcoran Gallery Features Artist's Reaction to Front Page News of 1996

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Staff Writer

Contemporary artist Nancy Chunn has done what many of us dream but few have managed.

She's taken her love for art and interest in current events and combined them to create her latest exhibit, "Front Pages 1996 (One Year of the New York Times)," now at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington.

### Galleries

"I'm a news freak. I'm always reading the papers. I'm always looking at the news," Chunn, 55, said during a press preview of her work earlier this month. "I've never worked liked this in my life. I'm just fried."

Every day in 1996, from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, Chunn took the front page of the New York Times and inserted her take on each story with more than 500 images and phrases.

Exactly 366 papers (1996 was a leap year), grouped by month and arranged chronologically, are the result of her efforts. The concept of the exhibit is simple, and Chunn is the first to admit it.

On closer inspection, the visitor can see the thought and foresight that took each page from concept to reality.

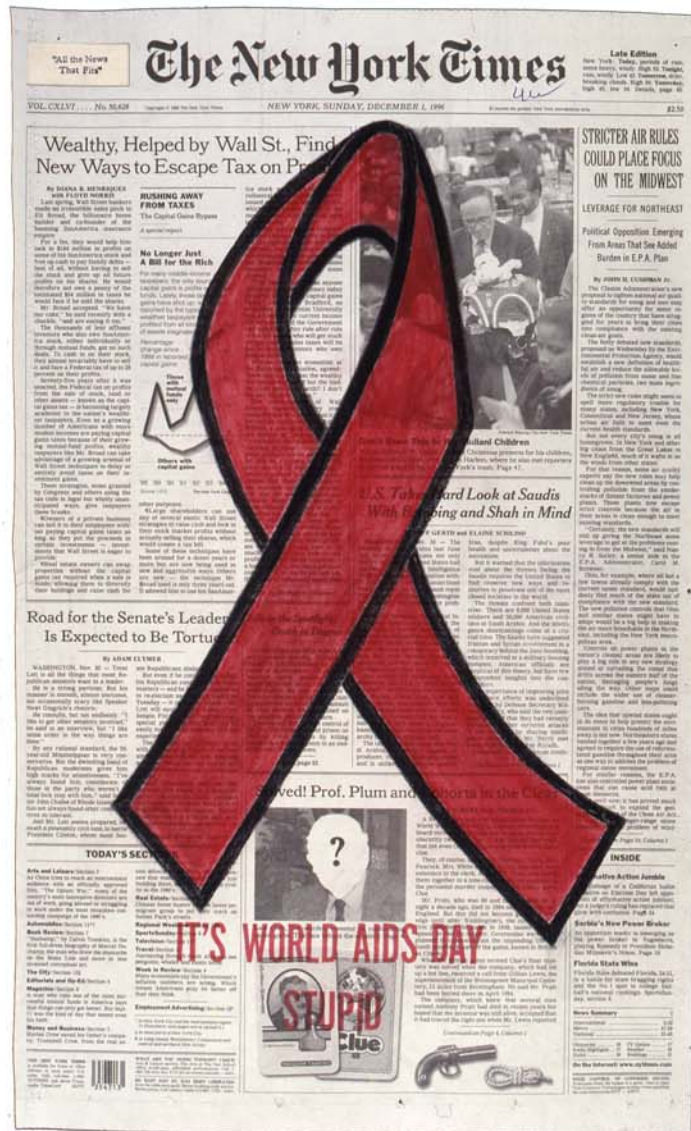
Chunn encourages others to follow her lead and question what goes onto the front page of a highly respected newspaper and why.

For Chunn, the year of 1996 taught her much about the media, her perspective on life, and the unrelenting passage of time.

"This project made me keep thinking about death," she said. "I felt like I was a gerbil spinning in a wheel. I was so conscious of time passing by."

Terrie Sultan, curator of contemporary art at the Corcoran, said she has been an avid follower of Chunn's work for many years. She visited Chunn's "Front Page" exhibit in New York, and invited her to Washington.

"Her work really attracted me, not only because it's an overview of what 1996 brought to us, but how the information was presented to us," Sultan said.



Nancy Chunn's take on World AIDS Day, with the assistance of the New York Times.

Obviously, stories on the front page of the New York Times are different, but in 1996 they contained many of the same elements that are inherent in life, such as death, money and politics.

Chunn repeatedly used the same images to symbolize each, and her work is dotted with chalk outlines and moneybags.

Politicians are often depicted as generic, smiling faces and captioned with phrases that, in Chunn's view, say what candidates won't.

For example, on top of a picture and story about former Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole, Chunn has stamped her own take on the story, which reads, "How did I

get into this mess?"

She said her own "liberal to radical" political leanings influence her art to some degree, but that she is careful not to allow any outside forces to do the same. She was recently invited by the New York Times to observe a front-page meeting, a courtesy extended to only a few outsiders, but she turned them down.

"I don't know if I want to know why some stories make it in over others. It might influence my art, but it was a great honor to be asked," Chunn said.

Some stories of 1996 transcended all politics, such as the downing of Flight 800. Many of the July and August front-page stories detailed the search for bodies. Chunn defined the event her way by coloring the copy and pictures with an ocean-blue pastel, and sketched underwater angels. This theme was carried on sporadically almost to the end of the year, as new news relegated the fatal crash to the inside pages.

Despite her constant working schedule, Chunn insists she is not tired of reading and reinterpreting the day's news for an audience. In fact, she is now busily working to exhibit her most recent work, a collection of Washington Post front pages from October 1997.

"This paper was challenging because the basic design is different," she said. "Also, it concentrates much more on local news than the Times."

In her opinion, the most interesting story of that month was the first successful cloning of a sheep. The clone was named Dolly.

"I personally think that's the biggest thing that happened this year," she said. "A hundred years from now, that story will still have the biggest resonance."

In addition, Chunn has just released a collection of her work in book form, which she dedicated to "all that read out loud."

"Nancy Chunn: Front Pages 1996" will be on display at the Corcoran Gallery of Art until March 1. The gallery is at 500 17th St. NW in Washington.

CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART