

Jones, Joyce. "On Exhibit: Reading Between The Lines." *The Washington Post*, January 16, 1998.



Nancy Chunn's 1996 front pages featured (from left) smiley-faced primaries on March 6; angels hovering over the July 19 page devoted to the TWA crash; and the welfare bill starting a stampede on Aug. 1.

Reading Between the Lines

By Joyce Jones

THE NEW YORK Times might claim "All the News That's Fit to Print," but artist Nancy Chunn has news for the Times. Like a reader talking to herself as she peruses the morning paper, Chunn has taken every Times front page in 1996 and added her color commentary right on A1. The resulting 366 images are on exhibit at the Corcoran Gallery of Art through March 1.

Chunn, a 56-year-old New York artist known for her straightforward political works, has found a popular, easily accessible medium in her personalized news pages. Taking each front page, she used rubber stamps and pastels to augment the stories and

images with her slant. In the process, she developed an extensive iconography—scissors signifying budget cuts, coffins representing the dead—and in many instances color coding combines with symbolism. For example, a pink pawn appears on the story of Whitewater figure Susan McDougal's sentencing. When an image won't do, she stamps on expressions such as "Ban the Bomb" or, in the case of a tobacco-related story, "Ban the Butt." Expressions like "Leave and let die" are reminiscent of artist Jenny Holzer's aphorisms though not as original or thought-provoking. And sometimes they're so obvious that they merely elicit a "So what's new?"

Each of the 12 months is grouped together and hung in order, filling one gallery. The progression clearly shows

a transformation as Chunn moves through the year. January found her mostly coloring the photos, but pretty much staying within the lines, and stamping telegraphic responses over story copy. Consequently, the earlier months are grayer and less exciting. As summer turns to fall, images begin to take over the pages, and the months of August through December are the most vivid. Where in March she simply put smiley faces on Bob and Elizabeth Dole, in August the Clintons and Gores become the Jetsons and Bob Dole and Jack Kemp are Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble.

You'd think after a year of working seven days a week to keep up, Chunn would have been running out of ideas, but instead she seems energized as the year's end nears. Individual pages as well as the entire months of October, November and December become more surreal, whimsical and creative: a

dragon slithers, a forest springs up complete with woodland creatures, a bear balloon from the Macy's Christmas parade devours a man. Chunn's pages are strongest when she fills them with these free-association montages rather than the more simplistic slogans. "The closer I got to finishing the more I piled on the page," Chunn explained at the exhibit opening. "It's like I didn't want it to end."

In a way, it hasn't ended. Chunn has more recently given her treatment to a month of front pages from The Washington Post. The 31 fronts from October 1997 are on view at Addison/Ripley Fine Art near Dupont Circle. According to Chunn The Post's more modular, horizontal layout was a design challenge. "Graphically, the Post was more difficult to deal with because it was divided more at the fold, and the bolder heads left less room for my comments." And she even did an improv-

tu content comparison. "I counted up and there are more women on the front pages of The Post than in any of the New York Times months . . . There's lots of pink."

"Front Pages 1996" has been a boon for Chunn. Rizzoli International Publications has released the pages as a book and the Corcoran has answered Chunn's other wish. "I wanted two things out of this: a book and to show in Washington, D.C. I wanted people in D.C. to see it. I wanted them to see themselves."

NANCY CHUNN: Front Pages 1996—Through March 1 at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 500 17th St. NW (Metro: Farragut West, Farragut North). 202/639-1703. Open daily 10 to 5, and until 9 on Thursdays. Closed Tuesdays. Suggested donation: adults \$3, students and seniors \$1, family \$5.

NANCY CHUNN NEW WORK 1997—Through Feb. 28 at Addison/Ripley Fine Art, 9 Hillier Ct. NW (Metro: Dupont Circle). 202/328-2332. Open Tuesday through Saturday 11 to 5 and by appointment.