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## NADINE NORMAN

Galerie Sans Nom, Moncton

Montreal-based installation artist Nadine Norman recently exhibited a new work, *Ephéméride*, at Moncton's Galerie Sans Nom (and later at La Chambre Blanche in Quebec City). This work was a departure of sorts for the artist, a minimalist treatment of a recurring theme in western art – mortality. Norman's past work (at least as far as I am familiar with it) is anything but minimal. Her installations filled spaces with scents as well as objects, incorporating multiple elements in what seemed to stop just short of chaos. Heaps of lemons, piles of dead flowers, potatoes, ribbons, bundles of sticks and electrical wiring jostled for space with the viewer. Performance was often part of the work, demanding a degree of participation from viewers that they were not always ready to give, significantly impacting on the success or failure of the particular piece.

*Ephéméride* (a French word for a tear-away calendar) consisted of three main elements. White silk banners hung on two adjoining walls of the gallery. Rubbed into the silk hangings were dates from gravestones (1970–1992, 1770–1844, 1889–1985, etc.). Text stencilled onto the walls behind the banners spelled out the names of flowers: Crown of Thorns, Angelica, Narcissus, Mother of Thousands, Love Lies Bleeding. A black thread ran the length of the two walls just above the names. On the floor were piles of wood ash, neatly fitting the lines of the floor tiles. I found myself seeking a pattern in the seemingly random scattering of these "plots" and ended up just counting them – there were thirty-four.

The allusions to a graveyard were obvious, as was the correlation of the flower names with deaths: the notion of a cycle, seasonal or otherwise, was very important to the work. However these rather easy summations don't begin to approach the powerful effect of the installation, one that, months later, I still recall. On one level *Ephéméride* was an exercise in transferring an effect from one site to another, an encapsulation of the powerful nostalgia and pathos that can be evoked by graveyards. This effect, distilled by the artist's labour and skill, was what was so present in the gallery space. I was transported out of my awareness of the room, of its past as a classroom, of my trip to Moncton and so on, and faced with my own mortality and with the nameless mortality of others who have preceded me. By using the names of flowers rather than those of people, Norman was able to evoke a sense of continuity, complementing rather than contrasting the finality of death. It was a beautiful and essentially romantic vision grounded in something I feel to be essentially true. Perhaps with an understanding of our individual ephemerality can the day-to-day minutiae of life take on a poetic character and, in doing so, lend a certain dignity to our brief time together.

Ray Cronin



Nadine Norman, *Ephéméride* (detail, 1994).  
Installation, Photo courtesy the artist