

**ARTIST PROJECT:  
ALPHABETIZED NEWSPAPER  
RUTHERFORD CHANG**

Newspapers take the events of everyday life, both minor and momentous, and mold them into compelling narratives designed to inform and instruct. Who, what, when, where, why – the five indispensable pillars of the news story may suggest the traditional deadpan parameters of reportage, yet as any reader knows, papers also employ a battery of less straightforward tools to engage their audience's attention. Stylish journalism – from seductive ledes to poignant kickers to clever headlines and captions – is much more art than science. In fact, it's a highly subjective and very strategic form of literary performance, one that furthermore must operate at a level of subtlety that manages to be effective without contradicting the implicit assertion of expository objectivity essential to the self-image of the overwhelming majority of major American newspapers.

Rutherford Chang's painstaking hand-made alphabetization of the front page of the 12 May 2004 *New York Times* presented here challenges the formal and conceptual architecture of the newspaper with often surprising results. While it's true that Chang's process is a leveling one – a kind of averaging machine that takes the carefully wrought informational matrix of the *Times* and dismantles the syntactical hierarchies used to create its original meaning – the gesture is not simply deconstructive. For virtually every witty turn of phrase or vivid description that gets detoured by the strokes of the artist's X-acto blade, some other little bit of poetry emerges, the Grey Lady's familiar "just the facts ma'am" tone reorchestrated into a wondrously glossolalic account of All Fit News Print That's The To.