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VISUAL ARTS & ARCHITECTURE

## Meditations on life expectancy take precise, textural, monochromatic form

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Christopher McNulty puts a personal spin on mortality in his latest show at Saltworks Gallery. Entitled "Days," this exhibition stems from the artist's interpretation of a statistical premise — according to actuarial probabilities, how many days does anyone have left to live? Given that, how do we make our mark?



Christopher McNulty  
(ENLARGE)

Christopher McNulty's circular forms, like '20,193,' suggest basketry as well as the rings of a tree trunk. They conjure nature's measurement of time passed, and the mathematical probability of allotted lifespan.



### REVIEW

**"Days"** (Christopher McNulty)  
Through Oct. 20. 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturdays and by appointment. Prices: \$1,500-\$10,000. Saltworks Gallery, 635 Angier Ave. N.E., Atlanta. 404-876-8000, [www.saltworksgallery.com](http://www.saltworksgallery.com).

**Bottom line:** Elegant work hits its mark.

The Alabama-based sculptor uses his own theoretical lifespan (to an age of 90-some years), translating his conceptual exploration into a series of sophisticated monochromatic works on paper. Each one documents life expectancy through jots, dots, pinpricks and other means, while reflecting the passage of time through the act of repetitive mark-making.

"20,589" is one of the earliest in the series, begun — statistically speaking — when McNulty had that many days left to live. It consists of 20,589 short lines arranged into a slightly irregular square.

A closer look reveals an interior filled with clustered hatch marks, presenting a textural, clothlike effect. "20,534" creates a similar impression, a pleasurable weave of undulating vertical slashes.

Most often, McNulty's works take spherical shape, like "20,193," which relies on small round burn marks made with a stylus. Other circular forms use splotches of watercolor, acrylic and ink to count the days.

With an emphasis on process as well as result, each of these images resonates with physicality — human limitations (exactitude, endurance), and the inherent properties of varying materials and their interactions (the precision of a sharpened pencil point, the absorbency of paint into paper). But these are more than cerebral exercises; the work is coolly beautiful, exploiting nuances in value and texture, fine line, and sharing kinship with Agnes Martin's soft-spoken geometries.

"20,249" is especially striking. McNulty fired darts at a large sheet of paper exactly 20,249 times, a feat that required persistence and stamina, and took months to complete.

The result is both pristine and explosive — a rich, metaphorical composition of absence and presence. Its center is literally ripped apart, leaving a jagged, irregular opening and a spill of lacy, pierced edges, dangling shreds and a spray of holes in the background. Tiny bits of paper rest along the inner rim of the frame; detritus from the process is preserved as part of the artwork.

Contemplative and intelligent, McNulty's "Days" form a cohesive series of sculptures on paper, satisfying the viewer aesthetically, philosophically and intellectually.