Bernadette Mayer

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Bernadette Mayer, *Memory* (detail), 1971–72, 1,100 snapshot prints mounted on museum board, 6-hour audio recording, 4 x 36'.

In July 1971, the prolific poet and occasional Conceptual artist Bernadette Mayer set out to shoot a thirty-six-frame roll of film each day of that month and to document her undertakings in an exhaustive written account. The resulting work, *Memory*, 1971–72, is composed of 1,100 photographic prints, arranged in a grid, and an amplified narration voiced by Mayer that she adapted from her writings—a six-hour, breath-stretching Steinian chronicle, later published as an unillustrated 1975 book of the same name. (Mayer remains best known in the art world as the coeditor, with Vito Acconci, of the late-1960s experimental magazine *0 to 9*.)

If you're lucky, perhaps you've had a New York summer idyll like the one Mayer depicts: driving up the Saw Mill or the Taconic to greener points north, making films with friends, drinking Jack Daniel's till late on the deck. Her snapshots furnish a feeling of recognition: You have likely taken casual pictures of similar forms of evanescence, or realized, too late, that you should have—of the man you loved in a convertible or shirtless in bed, of cigarette soft-packs half crushed on the dash, of garden tomatoes, a spider web, or the hurried blaze of a downtown taxi. The installation of images, if followed sequentially, forces you to crisscross the gallery multiple times, the transit from the end of one row to the beginning of the next becoming a languid carriage return of the body. (Mayer herself writes on a Smith-Corona typewriter to this day.) One moment of '70s period-piece bohemianism in Mayer's writing—"This is the part of the sky that cleared first blue / got two tabs of sunshine then"—inadvertently conjures the present material condition of these fading color prints, now tinted by palls of cyan or carmine. As the wavelengths of light-emitting bodies shift blue or red as they approach or recede in outer space, so Mayer's age-tinged snapshots both advance into the present and draw back into history, like all the ficklest, best memories do.