

11th Biennale of Sydney

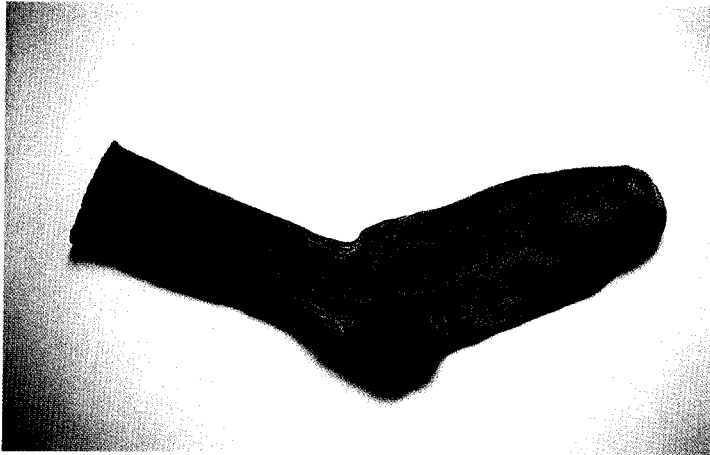
every day

Artistic Director
Jonathan Watkins

18 September – 8 November 1998

The Art Gallery of New South Wales
Museum of Contemporary Art
Pier 2/3
Goat Island
Ivan Dougherty Gallery
Artspace
Australian Centre for Photography
Government House
Sydney Opera House
Royal Botanic Gardens

Germaine Koh



Germaine Koh deploys a strategy of revelatory displacement grounded in the materials and processes of daily life. With roots in the practices of artists like On Kawara, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Sophie Calle and Stan Douglas, Koh's work ranges from small, almost gestural, forms and activities to monumental projects, all entailing conceptually driven interrogation of ordinary experience.

Knitwork (since 1992), like many of Koh's projects, is ongoing. The artist unravels used sweaters, socks and scarves, then knits the yarn into a vast extended blanket now over sixty metres in length. The absence of an anticipated point of completion affirms the grace of the continuous present: the accumulation of stitches in *Knitwork* is a metaphor for the incidental actions that accrue into the larger patterns of our lives. Likewise, *Self Portrait* (since 1994) is a project in which Koh paints successive self portraits on a single board. Exhibited with photo-documentation of previous states, the piece speaks of the obliterated but ever present personal past.

Found photographs, many of them damaged, out-of-focus or end-of-roll shots, are re-circulated as commercially produced postcards in *Sightings* (since 1992). The poor quality of the images guarantees their authenticity as

uncontrived personal records and makes room for strangely affecting identification with the anonymous subjects. This identification and the pleasure taken in their substitution for urban monuments and picturesque views are tinged with anxiety over their unknowing distribution.

The blank-faced publicity buttons of *Teams*, 1998, expose the pervasive twinned impulses of identity formation and differentiation. Viewers are invited to select and take one colour from the gallery. Koh writes, "As one walks away wearing or carrying a button, one becomes a node in a tenuous network of chance and association whose points are linked only by the innocent circumstance of having made the same choice in the same place. Those who wear the buttons become mobile markers, beacons of a shifting set of relations spread across and expanding territory . . . [*Teams*] is an ambivalent experiment, referring both to a poetics of dispersal and to the combativeness of defining a community." Koh's brand of Minimalist conceptualism harbours a latent Deleuzian reflection on the way meaning is constructed through oscillations of difference and repetition.

Jan Allen

- ▲ ► *Knitwork*, ongoing since 21 February 1992
Installation: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1997
Unravelling used garments with photographic and text documentation
Approximately 200cm x increasing length
Courtesy of the artist
Photography David Clearwater