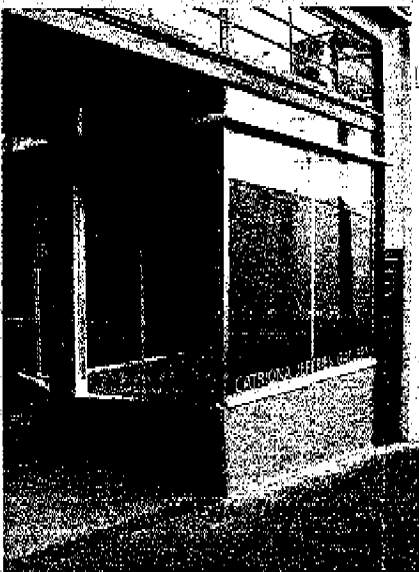


Mallett, Kyla. "Germaine Koh at
Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver."
C Magazine, Issue 86, Summer 2005,
p. 48.



GERMAINE KOH

CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY, VANCOUVER

KYLA MALLET

Germaine Koh, arguably one of Canada's most interesting artists of her generation, has practiced as artist, curator and writer (among other things) for more than 15 years. Her practice is held together by her consistently mindful, stealthy approach, through which she invites her viewers to reconsider the everyday. Currently an artist-in-residence at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, Koh returned to Canada in January to install *Shell* at the Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver.

The location of the gallery is undoubtedly the inspiration for this body of work, which is no surprise given the history of site-specificity in Koh's practice. The high-end commercial neighbourhood, which faces one of Vancouver's busiest streets, South Granville, represents the epitome of retail excess. In response to its location, and by extension the socio-economic implications of such an area, Koh constructs *Shell*, which literally opens a section of the gallery for 24-hour street access, just steps away from a bus stop. The result is an implied collision between the high-end commercial art world and the economic instability of the street; this can be a contentious topic in the South Granville neighbourhood, with its history of self-interested retailers petitioning against panhandlers and "street people." In effect, this work is both a generous and a critical gesture, a collaboration between Koh and the

gallery to react against this tendency and provide a space for transience, in turn agitating the retail establishments and their attempts to further gentrify the neighbourhood.

The idea of collision is made further apparent in Koh's *Wave* (2005), a malleable piece (which, Koh explains, she will continue to transform in response to different sites) made of a pile of broken windshield glass. This mesmerizing, jewel-like piece takes the form of a shoreline at the far end of the gallery, fading out from the wall like the edge of a wave on a beach over the sandy-brown wood floor. The poetic—a sensibility that Koh is known for in her work—is strongly evoked as she alludes to the cycles of life, figuratively returning the shards of glass back to the sand from whence they came. It takes a mere moment before you realize that you are actually staring at a pile of broken glass—a jarring reminder of your location in front of a busy street where accidents can happen. The broken glass, the car accident and the waves evoke histories and events from Warhol's *Disasters* series to Smithsonian's *Island of Broken Glass* to the recent tsunami disaster of 2004. This collision of ideas and references allows a space for contemplation, of life, of death and destruction, or of anything in between.

Germaine Koh
Shell, 2005
aluminium, plywood, plexiglass and existing
architecture
90" x 108" x 72" (h x w x d)
photo Arabella Campbell
Courtesy Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver