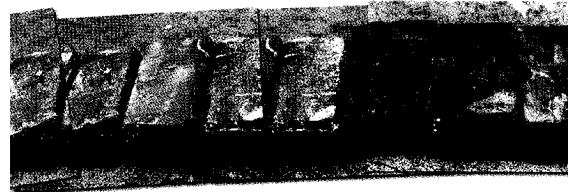


# Fresh EYES

Canada's young visual artists are making a global impression

by >> marc mayer

Oh, to be a young Canadian artist!" an American painter friend once exclaimed. "Just out of school, and their résumés are always twice as long as ours!" True enough: by U.S., European and Asian standards, talented young Canadian artists aren't short of exhibition opportunities. The larger artistic challenge, though, beyond basic subsistence in what remains one of the absolutely toughest ways to make a living, is how to age successfully. And here globalization, which began reshaping the art world in the '80s, has been good for Canadian artists of many ages. They speak to a broader audience and in more polyglot forms than at any time before. The information revolution, globalization's primary tool, has hit the art world as well. As a result, an artist from Calgary may have more in common with someone from Cologne or Boston, following an affinity of interest reinforced by the Internet. Thanks to the World Wide Web, artists can see one another's work and exchange e-mail addresses, perhaps after meeting at a constellation of big international shows—and in the past two decades, the Canadian presence at those shows has grown exponentially. Indeed, Canada today can arguably boast of many more internationally celebrated artists than can France. At first glance, much of the work of younger Canadian artists, like those shown here, looks like kid stuff, literally. But when it comes to art, you should always look again, and then again. In fact, a sophisticated sense of playful humor is the one thing that most of the bright, young Canadians you'll see in these pages have in common—along with a growing international respect for their work.



GEOFFREY  
FARMER

>> Vancouver

Here is some of what you get in Geoffrey Farmer's *Hunchback Kit*, an installation piece that spins variations on *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. There's a monk's robe, a Spanish-language edition of Victor Hugo's novel, an instructional video on theater makeup, a pair of cardboard shoes for someone with a clubfoot,

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION FOR TIME BY RICH FRISHMAN

# GERMAINE KOH

## >> Toronto

If you had visited Vancouver's Contemporary Art Gallery in May 2001, you would have seen what looked like an empty room. But closer inspection would have revealed movement everywhere: thousands of tiny silver ball bearings falling from tubes suspended overhead, accompanied by a faint metallic purr, like rain tapping off a roof. The gentle downpour was the work of Germaine Koh, who has won international acclaim for her subtle interventions into the fabric of daily life, bringing the humdrum and the

invisible into a quietly expressive new light.

Koh's ball-bearing rain juxtaposes the artist's memories of the busy clatter of Japanese pachinko balls with a view of the West Coast's weather. Another Koh piece, a machine that translates computer keystrokes into smoke puffs of Morse code, gives an eccentric visibility to the invisible labor of an anonymous clerical worker: nature and culture change places, like partners in a dance. In a constantly accelerating world, Koh's subtle, engaging constructions create quiet internal and external spaces for reflection.

Born in Malaysia in 1967, Koh

emigrated to Canada at age 2. Since 1990, her art has been shown in most major Canadian cities as well as in London and Mexico City. There is no such thing as a typical Koh work. Since her first major show at Ottawa's Gallery 101 in 1991, she has published short excerpts from her diary as classified-ad messages; installed a tall steel pole in the middle of a busy footpath to divide walkers into two groups whose membership can never be predicted—those who turn left and those who turn right—and constructed a pedestrian turnstile that revolves in response to the winds sweeping over an art-gallery roof. Uniting these creations is Koh's fierce desire to displace ordinary things from the contexts in which we usually absorb them.

**By Christopher Brayshaw**



PETER SIBBALD FOR TIME; KINWORK COURTESY ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO/MCMASTER MUSEUM OF ART