

GERMAINE KOH
AOIFE MAC NAMARA
ELLEN TRECIOKAS
MINDY YAN

Monuments
in the
present
tense

The Ottawa Art Gallery
La Galerie d'art d'Ottawa

"IF HISTORY RENDERS FACTS, then the spaces between what cannot be documented or what has been obliterated renders feelings for what cannot be recalled as fact. The silences that are resonant signs of history demand phrasing and representation. What is at stake is precisely what kinds of idioms can be presented in the name of bearing witness."¹

Commenting on strategies deployed by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to invoke "a feeling for the fullness of the lives that were lost,"² writer Andrea Liss articulates a new requirement at the heart of culture: a call for gestures of commemoration which give heed to that which, from the past, remains unknowable, unrecountable, elusive. Shifts in perceptions of history, brought on by an awareness of attempts at erasure and eradication, compel concrete acts of remembrance where realistic representations of the past have become inadequate. The systematic collection by museums of found objects and icons of high art as visual "evidence," historical "artifact," maintains the illusion of a complete narrative of the past, the seductive utopia of full disclosure. Reduced to an abstract sign of history, the object loses its full resonance. It is now also a matter of revealing the residual power of things—a gap in meaning—when "the shadows of an irretrievable past life"³ arise from their surface.

The four installation works presented in this exhibition offer empathic gestures of commemoration. Raw, discarded materials from the everyday, as well as replicas of preserved iconic objects from Art History—systemic opposites—here take on a common ambiguous condition, oscillating between derelict object and relic, insignificant fragment and meaningful totality. The question of value—what to relinquish and what to preserve—is open-ended in these artists' works, is rooted in the interplay between object and process. The slow gathering of lumber and human hair in the work of Germaine Koh and Mindy Yan, the progressive threshing of historical

"artifact" in the work of Ellen Treციokas and Aoife Mac Namara, are labour-intensive, reflexive acts of re-collection—processes to enact remembrance in the absence of evidence. Bearing witness to the past's silences is a symbolic gesture in the present tense: let us now work, in the words of Irving Howe, in "tentative and modest solidarity with those who fell."⁴

GERMAINE KOH graduated in 1993 from the City University of New York with an M.F.A. Her work has been recently exhibited at Galerie B-312 Émergence, Montréal (1993), at Gallery 101, Ottawa (1991) and at the Ottawa Art Gallery as part of *March 1991 Mars*, curated by Philip Fry. Upcoming exhibitions include the presentation of *Lumber* at La Centrale, Montréal and of *Knitwork* at saw Gallery, Ottawa. Germaine Koh is co-founder and director of Ad Hoc Gallery, Ottawa.

AOIFE MAC NAMARA graduated in 1991 from the University of Leeds, U.K. with an M.A. in the Social and Critical Histories of Art and in 1990 from the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design with an M.F.A. in Sculpture and Inter-Media. Recent exhibitions include *La cour de nuit* at Observatoire 4, Montréal, as part of *Le mois de la photo* (1993), *Made in Yorkshire* at the Cotton Gallery, Birmingham, U.K. (1991), and *Cryptic Triptych* at the Leeds University Gallery (1991). Aoife Mac Namara is currently Artistic Director of Gallery 101, Ottawa.

ELLEN TRECIOKAS graduated in 1987 from Shendun College, Oakville, with a post-graduate diploma in Computer Graphics and in 1985 from Queen's University, Kingston, with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. She is currently Graphic Designer at the National Gallery of Canada.

MINDY YAN graduated in 1990 with an M.F.A. from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax and in 1982 with a B.F.A. from the same institution. Her work is currently on view at the Museum for Textiles, Toronto, as part of the exhibition *Textiles, that is to say*. Recent exhibitions include *Mindé (every word their name)* at YYZ Artist's Outlet, Toronto (1993), *Pied-à-terre* at Articulic, Montréal (1993) and *The Embodied Viewer* at the Glenbow Museum, Calgary (1991). Mindy Yan lives in Montréal and is active in the artist collective Articulic.

¹ Andrea Liss, "Contours of Naming," *Public*, 5, 1993, p. 113.

² Judith Butler in Andrea Liss, *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³ Andrea Liss, *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴ Irving Howe in Andrea Liss, *Ibid.*, p. 115.