

English

[abonnez-vous maintenant !](#)
[faire un don](#)

Recherche

esse

*esse arts + opinions est une revue d'art actuel
qui s'intéresse aux diverses pratiques disciplinaires
et interdisciplinaires*



[Texte en anglais]

Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver, February 4—March 8, 2009

Fallow, a work by Germaine Koh, was titled incorrectly. The grounds of an entire vacant lot—soil, grass, plants and insects in tow—were transplanted into the floor of the Charles H. Scott Gallery. But it was neither, as the title suggests, dormant nor brown. On the contrary, the turf flourished wildly over the month in its new environs, its grasses and weeds turning electric green.

Koh's title, of course, was a play on what it was before its migration: an unattended lot awaiting development. In a city known for rapidly shifting infrastructure and accelerated development, especially in anticipation of the Olympics, lands left vacant for any period of time are anxious spaces. This particular lot was taken from a stretch of private land in an industrial area of East Vancouver, thus transplanting the politics of the site, along with its physical mass, into the discursive space of the work.

Yet *Fallow* was distinctly sensory. Upon entering the gallery, one was struck by the smell of damp soil and humid air. Visitors walked on the lot, forming paths through the installation that meandered between the wooden columns to the other side and back. The walls were covered with spiders and crane flies, in a proliferation at odds with the gallery's traditional austerity. More than simply site-specific, *Fallow* was an entire situation.

The counterpoint for *Fallow* would be Walter de Maria's 1977 *New York Earth Room*, a gallery in SoHo filled with 197 cubic meters of black soil. A perfect meeting of Minimalism and Earth Art, de Maria's installation is inaccessible and unchanging—the earth looks the same as it did the day it entered the space over thirty years ago. As well the source of the soil has remained unspecified, never entering the discussion of the work.

In the case of Koh's *Fallow*, the original site carries important signification for the work, as does the site that it moved to. The Charles H. Scott Gallery is situated on manufactured land, the False Creeks flats, now Granville Island. This small peninsula was created in 1915, when 760,000 cubic meters of mud were raised onto the sandbars to bring them just above sea level. The new land was opened for commercial business a

year later.

The irony of Koh's *Fallow* is in the transplanted land (the lot) on top of transplanted land (false creek), in a city where the socio-political and economic issues of land development are always rumbling just under the surface. This semiotic and physical doubling—land transplanted onto land transplanted onto land—is both irreverent and poetic, adding a poignant chapter to the politics and representation of urban landscape on the West Coast.

COMPTE RENDU

Germaine Koh, *Fallow*

NO 66 —

KATHLEEN RITTER