



GLENN LOWSON/NATIONAL POST

Conceptual artist Germaine Koh, of Toronto, used classified ads which she ran in *The Journal* and other newspapers as part of her art.



## ... as art among the classified ads

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**WANTED** — *Moffat tickets.*

*A live-in nanny.*

*A 3-bdrm bungalow in the west end.*

*A hopeless romantic, who can make me laugh.*

You see a lot of wants in the classified ads of a newspaper.

Germaine Koh sees the hope.

"The classifieds space is filled with all kinds of unspoken desires and rife with hope," the conceptual artist says. Hope of finding a long lost relative; hope of finding a potential partner; hope of finding something as mundane as a buyer for something you're trying to sell.

"There's a place in the classified ads for each important moment

in a person's life—the birth notices, graduations, engagements, weddings, deaths and everything in between," Koh says. "I think a lot about these kinds of objects and rituals that we surround ourselves with every day, but don't normally think about how they shape the way we live."

There's comfort in a repetitive action or something that's always there, like the classifieds, she says.

Koh takes these repetitive gestures and the classifieds and melds them into her work. As part of her exhibitions, which run in galleries across the country, Koh provides a daily journal or diary entry of her life that is printed in the personals section of the newspaper in the city where her work is on display. She has presented versions of this project in

six different newspapers in six major cities since 1995. Her most recent project wrapped up in Edmonton and featured journal entries like this:

*26 SEPTEMBER, Montreal. Worked late last night. Geo is coming "if I want." He's always testing me, still.*

*11 OCTOBER, Toronto. Geo's birthday. He's upset because I'm not there. G and T are separating. She seems certain. Makes me sad.*

*13 OCTOBER, Friday. Read "A Suitable Boy" all day. Sleeping a lot, finally. Another open day today. I should fix my tire.*

These journal-like entries recently ran for about five weeks in the Notices section of the *Edmonton Journal* classifieds as part of an exhibition sponsored by Latitude 53 Gallery. (The journal will continue to run to the end

of the month in the Messages section of *Le Devoir* classifieds in Montreal.)

"The entries are a real daily record of her life, says the Toronto-based Koh, who spent part of her childhood in Lac La Biche.

"Most of what happens is pretty boring," though a friend's father died, her sister and her partner broke up and Koh, herself, continued to deal with the aftermath of the recent end of her own long-term relationship during her stint in Edmonton.

"It all gets described much as I would describe having to go to work for a long day. So these things start to have an equivalence, that every day work becomes as notable as this break up," she says.

"I think it's a suggestion to be attentive to the stuff that's going on

around us—now."

Koh said doing the journal was difficult. "I thought about it a long time before I got the guts to start because it really is exposing myself and my thoughts."

At the same time, because she refers to the people in her life only by their initials, Koh hopes the anonymity of her journal entries allows readers to share in her experiences by recognizing similarities with their own lives.

"I like the idea that it could be about anybody's life." And, that in a section of the paper surrounded by wants and needs, her journal entries don't ask anything of anybody.

"It's important to me that it be gentle like that, not advertising anything. That it just be a reminder of the things that go around all of us."

Koh has no way of knowing how people receive her work, "but I imagine there may be a regular audience that will wonder where (the entries) have gone.

"I guess it's a little bit sad that all of a sudden these things disappear.

"To me, it's much like the sadness I see in the classifieds, a lot."

Her next presentation will start running February in the classifieds of a Detroit newspaper.