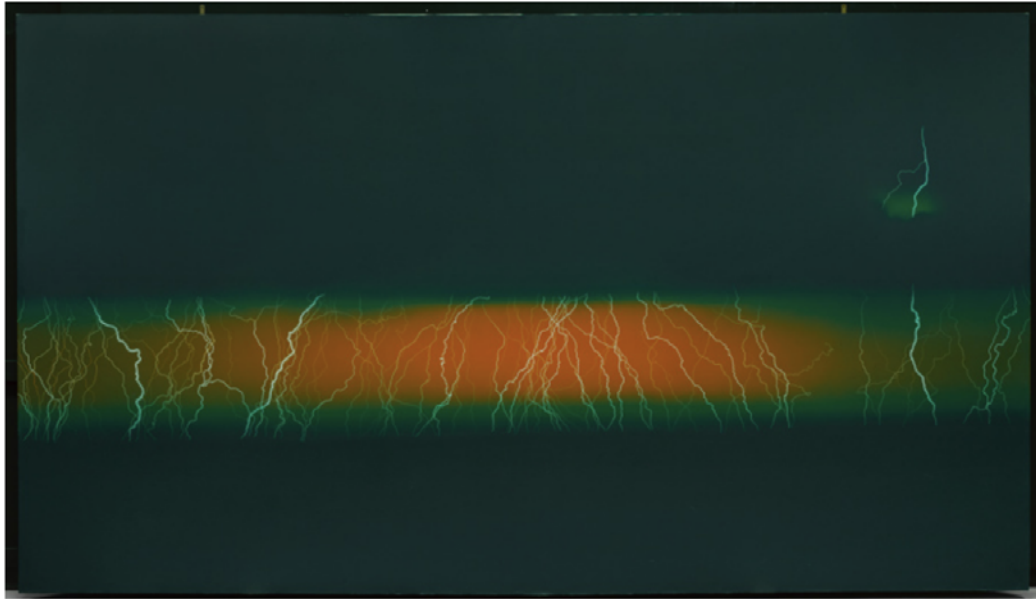


REVIEWS / SEPTEMBER 10, 2018

Jack Goldstein and Ron Terada

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by David Balzer

It seems odd to speak of the horrors of the art world when there are so many more urgent horrors to speak of. “We’re not saving lives here,” one of my former colleagues used to announce to the office on particularly stressful days, her tone sarcastic but also encouraging, as if the thought of us not saving lives would inherently calm us down. When lives have been at stake, and lost, in the art world—Dash Snow, Annie Pootoogook, Jack Goldstein—there is a predictable, revolting shrug. What indeed should the art world have to do with caring for and saving lives, when the romantic myth of art abnegates bodies; relegates suffering only to its relationship with art-making; and, vulture-like, stalks the death (whether premature or mature) of those for whom decline, by, say, old age or mental-health issues, has made living unmarketable?

Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia was a book published by Minneola Press in 2003. Only months before, in March of that year, Goldstein had died of suicide, with enough time for his death to be acknowledged in the book’s introduction by its writer-compiler Richard Hertz. Not enough can be said to recommend Hertz’s haunting, revelatory book, which interpolates transcribed conversations with Goldstein, a Jew from Montreal and an art-world misfit, with transcribed conversations with those who knew him, including John Baldessari, James Welling and Robert Longo. Hertz’s work contains so much truth-telling that it can feel positively seditious, an effect compounded by its subjects speaking through transcription, rather than through the jargon-laden and morally detached “texts” we are used to expect from contemporary-art insiders.

a lot of money. Compared with them, I never made much money, so I could never buy lofts and real estate.

It has always been important to me to have the guts to make monumental work, to make a big, grand statement. The art you make has to be yours; you stand behind it and it's real sturdy. It leans against the wall and it belongs to you.

When it did turn around, when I had success, I didn't end up trusting it because I had spent too many years sitting at the Spring Street Bar with Troy Brauntuch, then going home alone on a Friday night.

I was successful and the phone was ringing constantly. Everyone wanted to come over to my studio. At that time the only two good places to hang out in Soho were on Greene Street and on Spring Street; they were always crowded. Suddenly, the owner of the Spring Street Bar was in my studio and wanted to drink coffee. There were beautiful women constantly trying to seduce me. They would ask me to come over, but how could I trust any of that after so many years having been in the opposite situation? Once you've seen the other side of the coin, you end up trusting nobody. New York is a really cold town in that way—everybody wants to know who you are and what you're doing and who you're with. If they don't know that, then they don't want to know you.

Ron Terada, *Jack*, 2016–17. Acrylic on canvas, 14 panels, 2.03 x 1.63 m each. Courtesy Art Gallery of Ontario. Purchased with the assistance of Eleanor and Francis Shen, 2017.

Since 2011, Ron Terada's *Jack* paintings have been excerpting various passages from this book, all Goldstein's words, on uniformly sized canvases, with white type on black backgrounds. In "Jack and the Jack Paintings" at the Art Gallery of Ontario, curator Kitty Scott brings a suite of Terada's works, readable across canvases (more or less forming a chapter from Hertz's book), in contact with a large-format 1983 lightning painting of Goldstein's from the AGO's collection, made at the height of Goldstein's New York fame. As you circle around Terada's paintings, you pass Goldstein's monumental work, and eventually read about Josh Baer of White Columns and his scapegoating of Goldstein to an angry client, who wanted one of Goldstein's lightning paintings but was deprived of it because of Baer's wish to appease wealthier clients. At this point in the installation, the AGO's own lightning painting hangs behind you; it seems to emit a crackle of doom.

"It's a microcosm of Hollywood. The artworld is all about money and deals," says Goldstein to Hertz, readable on one of Terada's canvases. "People don't mean anything along the way." If the *Jack* paintings make an aspect of Goldstein visible—make into material the very thing (i.e., not playing nice) the art

world thought devalued Goldstein's own material output—they are equally about invisibility. Goldstein disappeared at the end of his life; when he began to withdraw years earlier, due to introversion, burnout, blow-ups, break-ups, insecurity, drug use and depression, the art world, according to Hertz, saw this as an affront rather than a concern. For his thesis project at CalArts, Goldstein buried himself alive. Predictably, Goldstein was shown at the Whitney Biennial only a year after his death; Terada's clever and perversely appropriative paintings are, among other things, the more appropriate exhumation.

David Balzer

David Balzer is the author of two books, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else*, winner of ICA London's 2015 Book of the Year, and the short-fiction collection *Contrivances*. He has written about art and culture for *The Guardian*, *Artforum*, *The Believer* and others, and is currently editor-in-chief and co-publisher of *Canadian Art*.

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