

**STAY AWAY
FROM LONELY PLACES**

FLOODGATE ST.

RON TERADA

CLIFF LAUSON



You Have Left the American Sector, 2005. Courtesy: the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver. Opposite: *Stay Away from Lonely Places*, 2005. Courtesy: Ikon Gallery, Birmingham

ON 28 September, 2005 municipal city workers from Windsor, Ontario removed Ron Terada's *You Have Left the American Sector* (2005) from public view after only six days of display. Mimicking official highway signage, the work recalled the infamous border crossing at the Berlin wall, Checkpoint Charlie, and implied an overblown hostility between Canada and the United States near one of the busiest border crossings between Windsor and Detroit. Neither the artist nor the commissioning body, the Art Gallery of Windsor, were consulted regarding the removal or the apparent complaints received from business owners who feared that a negative American response would impact the local economy. Ironically, the city council had approved the commission based on submitted plans, fabricated the sign and installed it themselves. Terada had relinquished authorship of the project to the city's governing structure and responsibility for the work's reception fell squarely on the approval body. Though it was not his intention to create scandal, Terada's work revealed the government's confidence in its ability to judge the aesthetic merit of artworks and to subsequently censor those not befitting certain criteria.

Ron Terada's general interest in language and printed matter echoes the work of Lawrence Weiner and Ed Ruscha, and his concern with authorship and institutional critique the practices of Seth Siegelaub and Hans Haacke. Yet, if there

is a conceptual legacy that identifies Terada's work, it is less a 1960s practice than the more contemporary blending of a number of the above under the category of intervention. Though his first public commission, *You Have Left the American Sector* was Terada's second highway sign demarcating both geographical and ideological boundaries. His first, *Entering the City of Vancouver* (2002), acknowledges both the city limits of his hometown and the geographical clustering frequently imposed by curators and critics to classify artists by locality. This work has undergone multiple permutations, appearing as a poster image, advertisement for an exhibition, photograph of the advertisement, fabricated sign, catalogue cover, and photograph of that catalogue cover, all of which underline Terada's critical and slightly suspicious take on art production in Vancouver and perceptions of it from abroad.

This historical and inter-textual play on the artistic history of Vancouver was also present in Terada's contributions to the exhibition 'Intertidal: Vancouver Art and Artists' held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp in 2005. His digital snapshots *Learn Video Editing* and *Learn Photoshop* (both 2004), two de-skilled and modestly presented prints, became embedded critiques by appearing amongst work by a group of artists recognised for their use of



Entering City of Vancouver, 2002. Courtesy: the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver

lens-based media. A recent manifestation of these works as actual signboards on the grounds of Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver, has resulted in numerous public enquiries for tutorials.

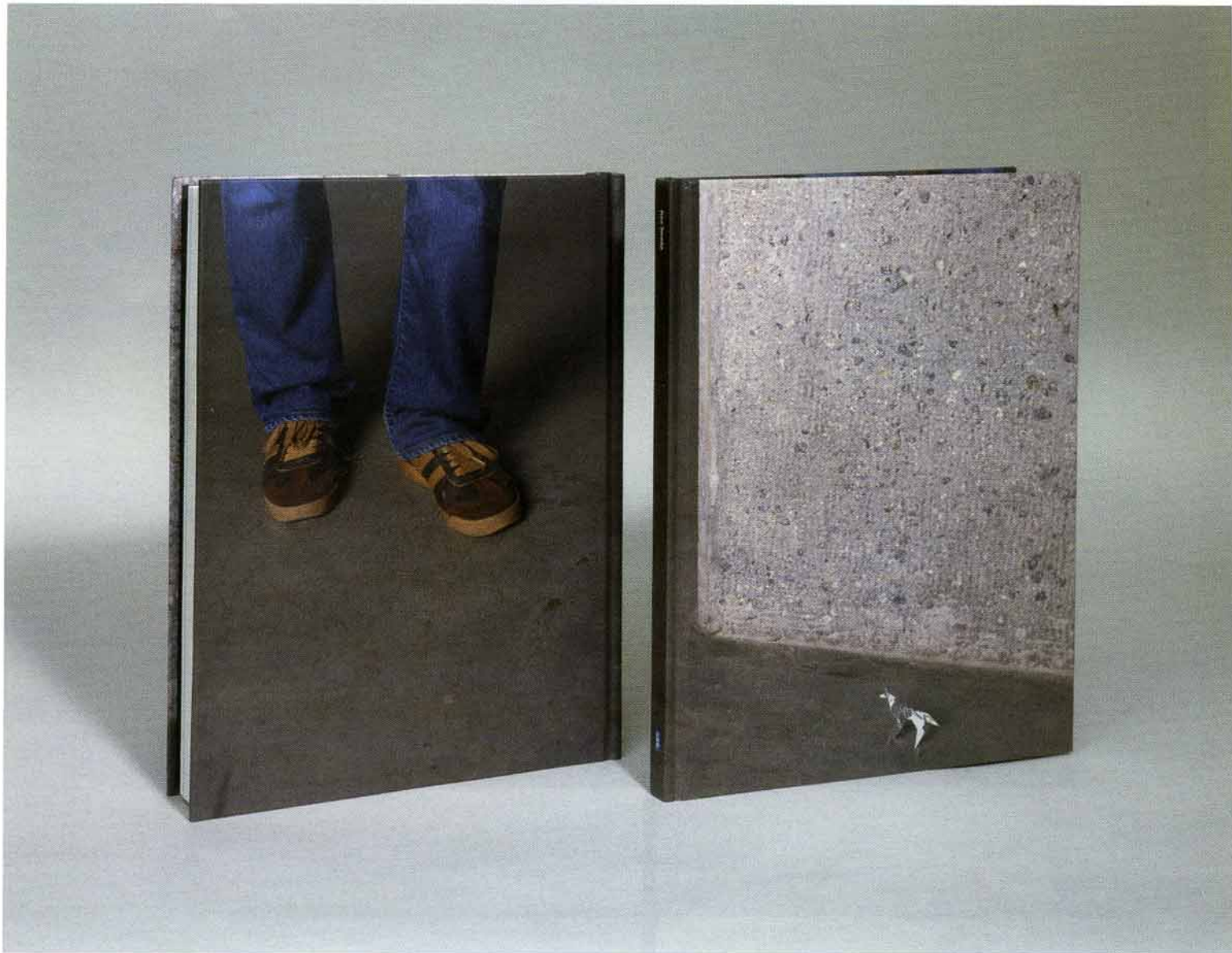
Continually engaging with the themes of signage in public space and with the (supposed) ineffectiveness of text-based artworks amidst the spectacle of capital, Terada's practice also includes the production of exhibition posters, pamphlets and signs. *Stay Away from Lonely Places* (2005) is an illuminated sign installed on the exteriors of galleries. It is thus legible both as an anonymous piece of advice and as a dubious warning about the isolation of the art world. Recently, Terada has designed a new logo sign for the entryway of the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, in which each illuminated letter of the word IKON is composed of screw-type light bulbs. The artist likes both the literal and the kitschy connotations of his unsigned intervention – a mix of early Dan Flavin and Las Vegas burlesque.

Terada's signs also exemplify his deliberate complicity with the structures of the art institution, not only revealing or calling attention to, but transforming its mechanisms into the work itself. Neon signs such as *These Days* and *Promises* (both 2001) re-circulate the curatorial process – a curator selects Terada to participate in an exhibition and, in turn, Terada chooses the exhibition (title) as his contribution. 'Catalogue' (2003), his solo exhibition at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, involved a large amount of fundraising from gallery patrons, businesses and corporations, who were recognised for their support in a typical manner through display of their names and company logos in vinyl on the gallery walls. However, since the exhibition space was left otherwise empty and the

vinyl texts were all enlarged, their sponsorship literally constituted the exhibition. The funds generated were used to publish a particularly lavish catalogue, the record and legacy of the exhibition. Rather than receive recognition for being affiliated with a high-brow art show, the sponsors and philanthropists found themselves the subject of the exhibition and had, in effect, funded their own longevity in the form of the catalogue.

The magazine project, *Defile* (2003), similarly took the art publishing industry as its focus and involved advertisement space swaps with international art magazines, journals and galleries. While these collaborators agreed to advertise *Defile* within their pages, Terada's publication consisted only of exchanged advertisements without the illusion of content; or rather, its content was a historical time-slice of the art world told through its advertisements. The spaces the magazines gave over to *Defile* reflected the circuitousness and self-affirming tendencies of publishing culture – tendencies usually used to bolster an artist's value. Still, Terada continues to pursue his interest in the conceptual use of advertising strategies: after the removal of the *You Have Left the American Sector* road sign, he published a full-page exhibition announcement in the Canadian art magazine, *Border Crossings*, complete with an image of the work's de-installation and the dates of its truncated exhibition run.

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Above: *Catalogue*, 2003. Below from left: *Learn Video Editing*, 2004. *Learn Photoshop*, 2004. All images courtesy: the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver

