

Installation view of Ron Terada's "Catalogue"



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Ron Terada

◀◀ CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY, VANCOUVER

Ron Terada's exhibition at Vancouver's Contemporary Art Gallery featured an ordinary-looking collection of corporate logos faithfully reproduced in vinyl and arranged alphabetically by company name on one gallery wall, and an equally ordinary alphabetical list of individuals' names in plain black type on the other. The CAG's exterior vitrine windows were filled in a similar manner. All of it looked like the donor/sponsor walls found in most public art gallery lobbies, only writ large as *art*.

The sponsors (logos) and the donors (names) represented the means behind the production of the true product of the exhibition, a smartly produced catalogue publication. The gallery exhibition (names and logos) was simply a service to promote the apparent largesse of the corporate and individual catalogue financiers. In a reversal of fortunes, a lone copy of the exhibition/catalogue sat on a bench in the gallery lobby.

Terada's catalogue/exhibition was set up to interrogate how the economics of the public art world turn within a network of public and private patronage. Today, sponsors no longer merely wish to *support* the production of cultural things but wish to themselves *be* culture. In this, the artist runs the risk of becoming corporate competitor or mealy interlocutor in some "public/private partnership." Or perhaps the role of the artist is that of an entrepreneur who endeavours to eke out a market position that maximizes an accumulation of intellectual *and* financial capital.

The means used to recruit financial support were not laid very bare in the five catalogue texts, however. Perhaps the relationships at stake were too important for the artist and the institution. According to the critic and curator Mari Carmen Ramirez, maybe it really is a fallacy "[t]o pretend that any type of alternative field of action exists outside of the web of market or institutionally dominated interests..." Or maybe the mechanics of art-world fundraising and financing are, in the end, a tedious subject.

"Catalogue" underscores a developing but subtle movement in institutional practices towards the embodiment of *Culture Incorporated* (to borrow from the title of Mark W. Rectanus's book on the subject) through the transformative fusions between art and marketing. Terada has staked out a complicit, complicated and risky position as a critical insider in this process and revealed a rich field of inquiry that will, like the publication of the catalogue, last well beyond the exhibition. He turns the critic Hal Foster's observation that "artists [have been] forced to exchange critical practice for economic survival" on its head to posit a role for the artist in making critical practice the *means* for economic survival. GREGORY ELGSTRAND