

RON TERADA

Ron Terada's primary material is language. In his text-based artworks, language is treated as a cultural readymade both in terms of the words themselves and their delivery. He adopts the formats, materials, and distribution systems of common forms of signage in a way that destabilizes a neutral and fixed reading. Working with mediums that have included outdoor signs, publications, exhibition titling, cassette tapes, and posters, Terada engages the conventions of mass communication to problematize the very consumption and circulation of art.

Terada reinvigorates the potential of a dematerialized art. His deadpan gestures slip between art and publicity, aesthetics and marketing, provoking contradictions, including those of his own practice. In *Catalogue* (2003), the bureaucratic transactions of a public gallery became the content of the exhibition/catalogue, exposing its economic structures and networks of power relations. Moving beyond institutional critique, Terada unravels the hierarchies of art systems—including the assumed value of his own artistic labour—as an act of social commentary. By infiltrating the packaging of exhibitions, he takes on the role of a clandestine interlocutor in order to provoke questions about institutional intentions, the reification of art objects, and the role of artists.

Refusing to take shelter behind aesthetic devices, Terada allows for the possibility that his art is often unrecognizable as such. Since his early monochrome paintings of the late 1990s that featured found text from personal ads and high school annuals, his strategy is to avoid privileging the visual. His full-size municipal highway sign, *Welcome to the City of Vancouver* (2002), was a sculptural installation that then mutated into a poster, catalogue cover, photograph, and advertisement. Each format with its attendant context generated new meanings. Similarly, each installation of Terada's standard issue federal highway sign, *You Have Left the American Sector* (2005), and the neon sign, *Stay Away from Lonely Places* (2005), absorbs its locale. Open-ended and generative, his projects allow for permutations that draw out the shifting meanings of apparently straightforward information. His deadpan, often humorous, artworks that seem to easily provoke emotional reactions operate in a complex social and political field.

Terada's interest in the mutability of language through the effect of location was developed further in the works for *Territory*. For this project, he produced a series of changing messages—truisms, aphorism, and jokes—mounted on vernacular signboards. This inexpensive and nearly obsolete type of advertising technology used by small businesses blended into North Vancouver's mixed-use urban landscape, complementing the sense of impermanence and transition. On the Presentation House Gallery grounds, Terada placed a bright yellow version of the title *Territory* that served to announce the exhibition while at the same time labelled and claimed the backdrop that framed it: a generic scene of new urban developments clashing with old buildings. Much to the artist's delight, an anonymous audience continually changed the letters to create anagrams such as "TITYERROR." The sign "LEARN VIDEO EDITING" suggested that a course was being offered inside the building and played with the expectations of passersby, many of whom made inquiries.

Along a primary North Vancouver artery placed in liminal zones along the road appeared other peripatetic signboards with cryptic messages: "THE WORDS DON'T FIT THE PICTURE" and "SEE OTHER SIDE OF SIGN." These works were designed to momentarily interrupt the daily patterns of commuter traffic. Perhaps unnoticed altogether until the fifth drive-by, they may have provoked anxieties, irrational reactions, or even laughter. Almost imperceptible, and likely not understood as artworks, these subtle disruptions in the flow of daily life were animated by the imaginations of those who noticed them.

On a landscaped median of a busy North Vancouver boulevard, Terada produced a "sign" out of plant material and decorative stone that read "TEMPORARY." Small businesses as well as municipal landscapers favour this type of vernacular signage. The sign's title called attention to the impermanence of the work itself with its imperfect, hand-designed letters whose shapes would change over the course of the summer months as the plants died. Signs such as this one temporarily claimed liminal spaces and functioned as fleeting disturbances in the urban terrain. —H. P.



Ron Terada
The Words Don't Fit the Picture, 2006
Sign board
Photo: Diane Evans

Ron Terada (b. 1969, Vancouver) lives and works in Vancouver. Terada studied at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and the University of British Columbia. Often using signage and advertising as art forms, Terada has been included in group and solo exhibitions across North America and internationally with presentations at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum Van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen; the 2006 Shanghai Biennale; the 2003 Prague Biennale; and the 1999 Melbourne International Biennial. Terada is represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver.