



Concrete Language, 2006, Archival pigment print, 11.8 x 139.7cm

Ron Terada's primary material is language. Often adopting the formats, materials and distribution systems of signage, he engages the conventions of mass communication. His text-based artworks treat language as a cultural readymade that destabilizes the function of signs and animates social meanings. Since his late 90s paintings, Terada has sustained this rigorous investigation through an increasingly expansive art practice. He works deftly with mediums that problematize the consumption and circulation of art, such as outdoor signs, magazine ads, catalogues and posters, to ensure that his art operates in a complex social and political field.

Expanding on propositions of pop and conceptual art, and at times referencing key artworks from that history, Terada reinvigorates the potential of a "dematerialized" art. He negotiates distinctions between art and publicity, aesthetics and marketing, through deadpan gestures that provoke complex social meanings. This practice reveals contradictions, even within itself. For example, with *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 as an act of social commentary. By infiltrating the packaging of exhibitions, he often assumes the role of a clandestine interlocutor, questioning institutional intentions, the reification of art objects and the role of the artist.

Terada allows for the possibility that his art is often unrecognizable as such. He consciously avoids privileging the visual to harness the seemingly inert clichés of the mundane. His vernacular signboards with cryptic messages placed at roadside were designed to thwart the expectations of passersby, perhaps provoking anxieties, irrational reactions or laughter. These subtle disruptions in the urban landscape are indicative of Terada's witty strategies to disturb the imperceptible aspects of everyday life.

Open-ended and generative, his projects allow for permutations that draw out the fluidity of apparently fixed meaning. For example, the municipal highway sign – *Welcome to the City of Vancouver* – has taken the form of a sculptural installation, poster, catalogue cover, photograph and advertisement. Each context sets up new possible readings. His uncanny sensitivity to the mutability of language through the effect of location is evident in how his works change in response to the particularities of locale. Refusing to take shelter behind aesthetic devices, Terada assigns fresh functions to art. His work is based in a serious questioning of authorship and artistic labour that thrives on contingencies. ■

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FROM LONELY PLACES**

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