

Vancouver artist Ron Terada is sitting in a Main Street coffee shop, talking about *Blade Runner*. He's discussing the director's cut of that 1982 sci-fi classic and its suggestion that Harrison Ford's Replicant-hunting character is himself a Replicant. He's explaining, too, why a copy of the origami unicorn, which occurs as a symbol of identity in the movie, is making an appearance on the cover of his new exhibition catalogue. Titled *Ron Terada*, it's something of a replicant, too, a simulacrum, a fake. It's not the publication associated with his upcoming show at the Contemporary Art Gallery, it's the show itself.

Yes, there will be some work on view inside the gallery and on the CAG's Nelson Street windows, wall text naming the sponsors of the project, but what's really on offer is the 96-page, full-colour, hardcover catalogue with its four essays and 40 reproductions. The catalogue that appears to document a 10-year survey exhibition of the artist's work—but doesn't. The catalogue that proclaims this "emerging" young artist has now arrived—although perhaps he hasn't. The catalogue to which a certain professional prestige will inevitably attach itself—even though that prestige is part of what Terada calls "a false economy". Catalogues, as his project highlights, are a significant form of currency in the art world.

"This project could be seen as first—and nothing but—self-promotion," Terada says. "But I'm hoping that you scratch the surface a bit and it's more complicated than that. I think in some sense it's about exposing all the other mechanisms or networks that are implicated in the promotion of a particular artist." Those networks include curators, gallery directors, art dealers, art collectors, and sponsors, all of whom have complex reasons to promote a given artist at a given time, to boost him into another economy.

Promotion is a theme that has recurred throughout Terada's conceptual-art career. During the 1990s, he established his reputation with monochrome paintings that used text rather than visual forms of representation to address their subject. The text was appropriated from a range of sources, including personal ads in newspapers, exhibition announcements in high-end art magazines, and grad quotes from Terada's high-school yearbook. The found voices shared an impulse to project themselves into the world, assert an identity. "A lot of those texts that I culled for those paintings were about this idea of self-advertisement," he says. "It's this idea of self-becoming, in a sense, or self-determination."

The paintings that have drawn the most critical and commercial interest, however, employ those weirdly answer-formatted questions plucked from the TV game show, *Jeopardy!* Made in 1998 and '99, they allude to high modernism, history painting, national identity, and the disjunction and trivialization of knowledge by the entertainment industry. Perversely, given their wide appeal, they also mark Terada's voluntary exit from painting.

"I still have a great appreciation for painting," Terada says, "but I felt I was being pigeonholed into this serial production." Although he himself was interested in the "workman-like" process by which the works were made, he felt their appearance, especially their extremely meticulous finish, attracted too much critical attention. "The paintings could never be discussed within a conceptual-art discourse. The



The artwork that graces the "catalogue" *Ron Terada*, featuring origami at Terada's feet, is as close to self-portraiture as he gets.

post-studio form of art-making. "As I've given up painting—painting is strictly a studio practice—I've become more interested in where work is shown, the context," Terada says. In the last few years, his projects have included posters for nonexistent exhibitions, giveaway compilation CDs, exhibition titles in neon, an art magazine composed entirely of ads for art magazines, temporary text installations, road signs, and the daily posting of pop songs on an MP3 site. "I've started to occupy these areas where it's more about dissemination...visual contemplation of an artwork," Terada observes.

Terada's forthcoming work also addresses an aspect of dissemination, since catalogues far outlive the exhibitions they document and can be used by artists to promote themselves in the art world. His publication mimics all the conventions of catalogue production, including the securing of private and corporate sponsorships to fund it. But the sponsorships in this case are actual, too. Each of the donors to the project (solicited by CAG director Christina Ritchie and Terada's dealer, Catriona Jeffries) has agreed to be a participant in it.

Donor names will be conspicuously announced in both the gallery and the publication—and will also allude to that complicated apparatus of altruism and self-advancement Terada earlier alluded to. "What does it mean for someone

Terada wonders. Are they, he asks, "trying to create their own sense of abstract value in their holdings on me as an artist, as a cultural producer?" Then he adds, "I'm interested in using the gallery's apparatus, not necessarily against itself but complicit with it."

There's a big irony in Terada's exploration of self-promotion and professional advancement in the art world, and the potentially false economies of exhibitions and catalogues, since he has refused to have his photo taken for this article. "I'm just not interested in the artist as some sort of celebrity—or being perceived as such," he explains. In lieu of a headshot, he's offered an artwork, his catalogue-cover photo.

The delicate piece of origami in the photo is a subtle allusion to the Vancouver-born artist's Asian background, the first time he's made such a reference in his body of work. "I'm given this situation where I'm getting to oversee the creation of my own image as an artist," Terada says. "It's a kind of joke at that, too." Set at his feet, on the concrete floor of the Contemporary Art Gallery, the little paper unicorn may be the closest thing to self-portraiture we see from a self-parodying artist who takes on the vexed field of self-promotion. Self-promotion, but not celebrity. ■