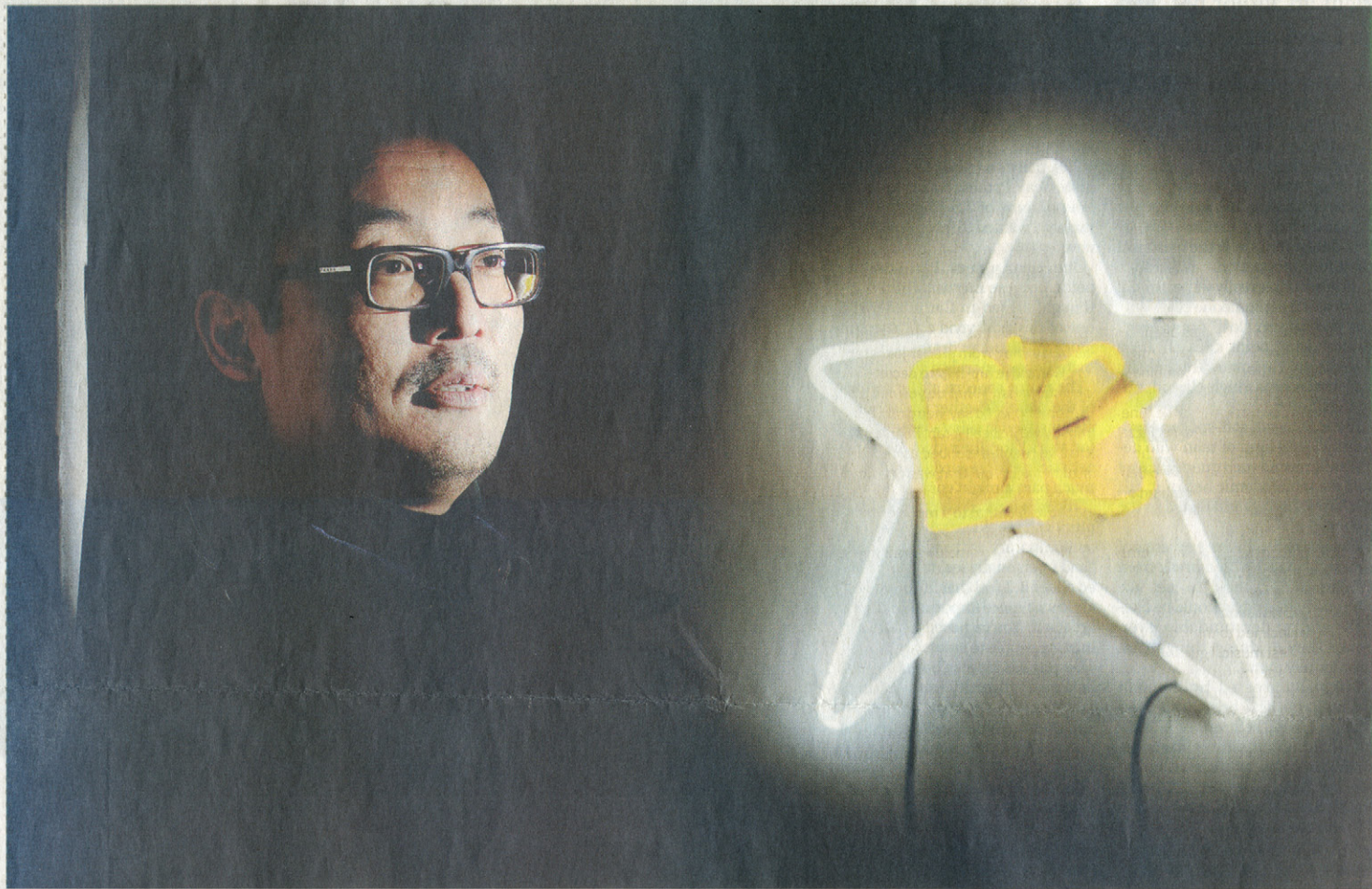


GALLERIES

Soundtrack for an artist



AARON HARRIS FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Vancouver-based artist Ron Terada at Barnicke Gallery, in front of his neon artwork that recreates the logo of the influential but commercially unloved rock band Big Star.

Ron Terada's art career comes full circle in retrospective show

LEAH SANDALS
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

For someone with an exhibition titled "Who I Think I Am," Vancouver artist Ron Terada is surprisingly reluctant, at first, to be photographed. Granted, the *Star's* photo session is a last-minute surprise and Terada ultimately warms up to the idea.

Still, one wonders: Amid all this self-referentiality, where is Terada's, erm, self?

Sitting in *Soundtrack for an Exhibition*, a pseudo rec-room artwork with a playlist ranging from Urge Overkill to Vampire Weekend, Terada explains that he sees identity as more composite (and indeed mixtape-like) than a single-shot deal.

"A lot of what I'm interested in is content that exists outside of myself," he says. "But by selecting or acknowledging content, or elevating it, it says something about you. So does the stuff that you reject.

The choices you make determine who you are."

Accordingly, "Who I Think I Am," a solo exhibition at Barnicke Gallery, highlights some of the key choices that have defined Terada over the past 20 years. There's the large-scale canvases of gallery ads that launched his career in the early 1990s, just a couple of years out of Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. There's the forays into industrial signage, like 2002's highway-side *Entering City of Vancouver* and the 2003 neon logo *Big Star*. And then there's *Jack*, a series of minimal 2010 paintings that reproduce the notoriously frank memoirs of late, troubled L.A. artist Jack Goldstein.

Interestingly, though he's been at the art-making game for two decades, this show, his first major solo outing in Toronto, sees Terada coming full circle in many ways. Even the artist says he was surprised by the consistencies that showed up when the Barnicke Gallery, the Banff Centre and Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, U.K., invited him to do this three-venue "light survey."

"The early content, about the

means by which the art world operates," Terada says, "gets more articulated as I move on to other works." Names from the ad paintings, like Matt Mullican and 303 Gallery, show up in the Goldstein memoir. Then there's that overall return to painting, the art-school love from that Terada took a decade-long break.

He's also stayed true to his roots in less obvious ways. He originally studied graphic design, a client-pleasing profession that he "couldn't stand."

"The funny thing is, I do graphic design in my work a lot," Terada says, pointing to his signs, books and posters. "I wouldn't have expected that."

Soundtrack for an Exhibition also closes a loop between home, studio and gallery as it compiles music that Terada listened to while meticulously completing the *Jack* works.

Unfortunately, as engaging as Terada is in person, this exhibition may prove too much of a sealed loop for some. Art about art does, after all, tend to turn off wider audiences. And that's too bad, because the inspiration for a lot of these works is broadly relatable.

"I started *Jack* when I turned 40," Terada admits. "I was realizing this mid-life crisis sort of moment, like, 'Where is it going to go now?' Because you have a different level of energy when you're starting out; you've got zero to lose. But when you hit mid-career it becomes about something else. It's not about trying to make it anymore. It's about trying to sustain something that you've built, which is a whole different kind of stamina."

Though Terada has never gone to Goldstein's extremes (which included living in a plumbing-free East L.A. trailer, a drug addiction and multiple suicide attempts), he sees his own experience somewhat mirrored in the late artist's memoirs. Where Goldstein obsesses about CalArts friends, Terada reflects that art-school peers can remain important post-graduation supports, with his own Emily Carr-trained gang including Canada's 2011 Venice Biennale rep Steven Shearer, 2010 Gershon Iskowitz Prize winner Brian Jungen, and West Coast wunderkinds Geoffrey Farmer and Damian Moppett.

Where Goldstein lashes out at faculty heads and curators, Terada ad-

mits the art world can be "petty" and that his hometown of Vancouver can be a "torches and pitchforks kind of town." And where Goldstein worries about gallery shows and teaching jobs, Terada sees universal issues of success and failure.

"It's kind of like the *Big Star* thing," he says, pointing back at the neon artwork that welcomes visitors to the gallery. "That band had zero commercial success in their lifetime, but a lot of bands of my generation look back and say they were quite influential. Even Goldstein alludes to that kind of thing, wondering, 'Okay, What is my legacy as an artist?'"

Though Terada's legacy remains to be known, one thing's for certain: It will be impossible to capture in any single image.

JUST THE FACTS

WHAT: Ron Terada: Who I Think I Am

WHEN: Until March 20

WHERE: Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Hart House, University of Toronto