Akimblog EMAIL LINK PRINT

## TERENCE DICK in Toronto 02/01/11

Ron Terada at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery | Yuula Benivolski at Roadside Attractions | Come Up to My Room & Hard Twist at the Gladstone Hotel posted by Terence Dick - January 31st, 2011.

There was <u>an article</u> in the New York Times last week on the possibility of the philosophical novel. The opening line, "Can a novelist write philosophically?" and subsequent less-than-positive response – oftentimes from novel-writing philosophers themselves – came to mind as I perused **Ron Terada**'s quasi-retrospective show, *Who I Think I Am*, at the **Justina M. Barnicke Gallery** this week. Can an artist create philosophical art? Yes, of course, is my immediate response. My drift into art criticism from a long schooling in Philosophy happened through Conceptualism. Most of what I've written over the years relies on the underlying assumption that art is a discourse of ideas. Most of the contemporary art that I know and love lives and breathes in that discourse. But then I look at Terada's nth degree effort to push conceptualism to its limits and suddenly I'm on the other side, dismissing it as arid gestures without any... what?

In the end, I want my legacy; that's the most important thing for me. As it is, I went much farther, I did much better than I expected. I keep remembering Matt Mullican, who had some real wisdom; he was always telling me that the thing we had to do was to wait for the previous gen-Matt said that it's like the base of a triangle: It gets narrower as it reaches the top. As those who are at the op die out (if not literally, then at least their reputa there will be room for people like us to push in, and that's what happened. With the opening of Metro Pictures in 1980, a new decade began; all of a sudden there was an irge of galleries, and those of us who had come from got a lot of attention. After I returned to Southern California, I lived for ten years as a failure. What had I done wrong? I had m so much work but didn't know what would happen to it. Now it is being kept alive again. Some people are keeping live what I did, but for so long I worried it had been lost and forgotten. Myths about my drug use have been following me for over thirty years; someone who was involved periph erally with the artworld came in to see my April 2001 how at Brian Butler's, someone I hadn't seen for years Even she knew about my alleged drug use. If you can't

Ron Terada, Jack, 2010, acrylic on canvas (courtesy the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery)

Well, the first thing he gets rid of is himself. That's an old trick taken from the granddaddies of the scene, Cage and Duchamp, but he adds a post-Marxist twist by holding on to the market value of his name (on the poster, on the catalogue, on the work). The work is about names, which is not surprising for such a text-heavy show. It's about the marketing of those names and the identity of the artist as he moves through the various machines of culture. Visually, it's not about much, and that's another inheritance from his Conceptual ancestors. There is no skill here, only ideas (which is to be expected). To paraphrase the title, who Terada is is only revealed through his choices: the music he compiles on exhibition soundtracks and the artists mentioned in his paintings of gallery ads. These appropriations erase any barriers between art and life (yet another conceptualist gesture); he simply recreates what's already there in the world as a means of curating along certain themes (the replica of the rock group Big Star's neon logo is the most telling work here as long as you know the short history of that far from "big" band). The closest Terada gets to a portrait is his multi-panel text painting of mages from Jack Goldstein's memoirs. The creative anxieties and artistic bravado of the late artist play out against his economic failures and drug-fueled downward spiral in a way that makes you want to track down the rest of the book, but also read into it some identification with Terada. The rigor of his practice must bring him to similar dark places. Though, in the end, you're left with the question: is that all there is? Be it aesthetic, epistemological, or metaphysical, it certainly is philosophical, but is it art? Sure, why the hell not? But is it any good? Is it worth it? I'd say no, because Terada doesn't give you anything. He just takes it away. You're better off making your own mix tape and reading the original memoirs, which sounds like a Fluxus-type call to find the artist within everyone - and it's not what Terada is getting at - but it's what I exit the gallery thinking, if only to resist the cynicism that pervades the work I leave behind.

1 of 3 08/04/2011 3:05 PM