Koko + Johnson EMAIL LINK PRINT

Ron Terada: Who I Think I Am

I've been a big fan of Ron Terada since I studied his Artist's Book Project (1996) in class last year. So when I heard that Ron Terada: Who I Think I Am, was going to show at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, I was excited to see his work first hand.

posted by Johnson - January 24th, 2011.

The opening was busy on Wed. January 19th; I had just finished a meeting and I think I had thirty minutes to look at everything before the gallery would close (but everyone knows those times are lax...). There was a really great turnout of over two dozen people, considering the weather and the many arts exhibition openings and events occurring that evening.

Walking through the east gallery, I just glazed over everything, trying to get through the groups of people to see the art. At this point, many people were locked in conversation as the night unfolded. Soundtrack for an Exhibition (2010), a video installation, was located in a room crowded with people, so I decided to continue on and come back if I had time.

In the west gallery, sixteen canvases occupied the entire space, wrapping around three walls -- Jack (2010). Uniform white text on black background stood out from each canvas. The paintings retold the story of American painter and conceptual artist Jack Goldstein -- a chapter from his memoirs appropriated by Terada.

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 generation to die out.

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 top die out (if not literally, then at least their reputations), 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 upsurge of galleries, and those of us who had come from CalArts, with our ideas about pictures and appropriation, 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 made so much work but didn't know what would happen to it. Now it is being kept alive again. Some people are keeping alive 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 peripherally with the artworld came in to see my April 2001 show 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. Image courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver

The people and noise around me filtered out; I was left alone with the text. Empathy and emptiness welled up inside of me. I think I spent thirty minutes re-reading each word, savouring some phrases to store them in my mind. Jack's words spoke as if they were Terada's own. The feelings and struggles as an artist described by Goldstein incited all of my deepest insecurities and anxieties as an emerging artist.

I had to step away from the piece and leave the space to collect myself. I took a few deep breaths and hoped no one would notice me in the hallway. But then I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was Rebecca Gimmi, the Programme Coordinator and friend, who came to greet me. I turned around and all I could say was, "I'm crying."

For more information.

Ron Terada: Who I Think I Am runs from January 19th to March 20th, 2011 at the <u>Justina M. Barnicke Gallery</u>, located at University of Toronto.

This exhibition is curated by Helen Legg, Barbara Fischer, and Kitty Scott, and organized in collaboration with Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK; the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre, and the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Hart House, University of Toronto, Canada.

http://www.jmbgallery.ca/exhibitions.html

Jack (2010) was recently purchased by the National Gallery of Canada.

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