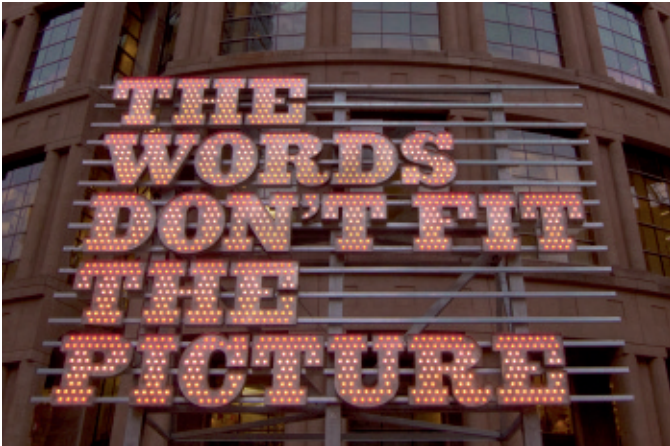


RON TERADA
The Words Don't Fit
the Picture

PUBLIC
ART
vancouver



About the Work

Cities are dense meeting places of histories, voices, publics and feelings that intertwine and clash, but which ultimately add up to the textures and possibilities of urban life. In this interplay of time and place, of visible signs and less visible histories, Vancouver has a particularly complex texture. Vancouver artist Ron Terada uses public art as a subtle yet pointed format to draw out, or bring to the surface, exactly these kinds of fecund urban sites and moments. What is compelling in Terada's public signs is the way in which he draws us into the particularities and peculiarities of public places — a street corner, a path running along a major road, a street leading to the border crossing, a public plaza — by invoking an emotion, a thought or a question that *alters* our engagement with that site.

In his illuminated marquee sign in front of the Central Branch of the Vancouver Public Library, Ron Terada uses large Las Vegas-like letters to humorously open up the relationship of the message and its site, and also to bring forward an aspect of Vancouver's history that no longer shines as brightly as it did in the 1950s and 1960s. At one point, Vancouver had 19,000 neon and illuminated signs calling for our attention.

Above *The Words Don't Fit the Picture*, 2010. Photo: Robert Keziere

From the Save-On-Meats on Hastings Street, to the glamorous Palomino Club on Burrard Street, to the gigantic BowMac sign on West Broadway, Vancouver's streets flashed temptations for us to eat, drink and buy things. Sitting outside the city's largest repository of words and the biggest (and curiously Romanesque) public space where we collectively consume words and fit them to our personal and civic pictures, Terada's sign is more subtle — despite its almost gaudy bulb-lit Ziggurat typeface — and also more public than the long-gone neon. Terada's sign is more public because of its site and because it does not promote any commercial message and because it prompts us to look at the relationship of architecture, urban space and civic histories. The perplexing statement "The Words Don't Fit the Picture" calls the relationship between the library's function and its architecture and its historical references into a humorous questioning. This sly work is about language and site, architecture and knowledge, and public and private meaning.

Terada's sign, with its bulbs projecting its simple yet askew message that echoes Willie Nelson's song of the same name, points to ways that public spaces are never as singular as they may appear. How does Nelson's country tune about the realization of love having run its course open up meaning in front of one of our busiest — and variously loved and questioned — architectural landmarks? Yet, this sign reminds us of a crucial aspect of city life that the French urbanist, Henri Lefebvre also cherished: "The urban space of the street is a place for talk, given over as much to the exchange of words and signs as it is to the exchange of things."

— Jeff Derksen

Jeff Derksen is a poet and critic who was born in New Westminster and lives in Vancouver's West End. He works at Simon Fraser University.

Opposite *The Words Don't Fit the Picture*, 2010 (detail). Image intentionally reversed at the artist's request. Photo: Robert Keziere



About the Artist

Ron Terada was born in Vancouver where he still lives and works. Terada's work is distinguished by its subtle intelligence and even more subtle humour, drawing from both popular culture at large and specific art histories. Terada's text-based practice operates across numerous media, including painting, photography, signage, video and various printed matter. His public works, of which "The Words Don't Fit the Picture" is the most recent, often invoke the hidden complexity of city spaces and our relationship to them. Recent solo exhibitions include Justina M. Barnicke Gallery (Toronto), Hayward Gallery Project Space (London), Walter Phillips Gallery (Banff) and Ikon Gallery (Birmingham, UK).

Above Fabrication of *The Words Don't Fit the Picture*. Photo: Steve Bedard

The City of Vancouver Public Art Program commissions contemporary art for public spaces. The program supports excellence in art making of many kinds — by emerging and established artists, in new and traditional media, from stand-alone commissions to artist collaborations. Projects at civic buildings, greenways, parks and other public spaces are funded through annual civic capital budgets. Private sector projects are funded by developments in the rezoning process. Learn more about this and other public artworks in the Public Art Registry at www.vancouver.ca/publicart; subscribe to the Public Art Listserv at the same site to be notified of upcoming artist opportunities.



The Words Don't Fit the Picture was commissioned by the City of Vancouver through its Olympic and Paralympic Public Art Program, Legacy Sites, Vancouver 2010.

Coverpage *The Words Don't Fit the Picture*, 2010 (detail), Vancouver Public Library, Robson Street at Homer, Vancouver, British Columbia. Photo: Robert Keziere

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