



## SUMMER SPECIAL

Corinne Carlson, Robin Collyer, Barr Gilmore,  
Jen Hutton, Sarah Lazarovic, Ron Terada

When my mother was a child growing up in the country, her trips to the big city – that is, Toronto – were special occasions: Christmas window displays, fancy roast beef dinners, the theatre and, of course, shopping. She would often accompany her grandmother to Honest Ed’s, the downtown bargain emporium. Surrounded by women on a treasure hunt for the best price, she could barely see over the tables piled high with discounted goods.

“Attention! Ladies and Gentleman,” the loudspeaker blared. “A sale is starting in Housewares!” Suddenly, a stampede of excited shoppers was on the move. Fearing she’d be trampled by the crowd, my eight-year-old mother held tight to her grandmother’s hand as they set off.

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Honest Ed’s is constructed not merely of bricks and mortar, but of memories, histories and witty one-liners. Filled with over-the-top relics – look only to the “demented deer” wall clock and the hundreds of movie posters and signed headshots of theatre and film stars – this Toronto icon has a rich heritage. Visitors from all walks of life come looking for the best price, a place to spend time or a unique Toronto experience.

An off-site intervention from the Koffler Gallery’s nomadic exhibition series, *Summer Special* offers a different kind of treasure hunt – not for the best deal but for hidden works of art. The project reimagines sixty-four years of hand-painted signs and show bills from Honest Ed’s through the lens of contemporary art. These signs, like the stories told by Ed’s patrons, keep the history of – and the love for – Honest Ed’s alive.

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Walking around the exterior of Honest Ed’s is a unique visual experience, enriched by the artwork of Barr Gilmore, Robin Collyer and Ron Terada. With bright lights and hand-painted signs, Honest Ed’s presents more visual

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stimulation than viewers will find in many art galleries. The ostentatious design and decor enhance the store’s image as a shopping mecca. Although commonplace today, the idea of a museum visit or shopping excursion as entertainment experience was first introduced by institutions such as this one, leading the way for mega malls, museums, art galleries and cinematic theatres.’

A veritable street-side museum, the outside of Honest Ed’s presents articles from the 1960s to the present day and display windows that are design creations in their own right. Artfully inserted into the surrounding vitrines, Collyer’s *Money Talks* (2012) offers standard-looking placards bearing exorbitant prices, challenging art lovers and shoppers alike to question the value of art and the everyday. Prompted by the graceful hand-painted numbers that adorn every inch of the store, Collyer’s price tags – not attached to any visible object – become abstract forms valued for their individual aesthetic appeal.

Compiled using thousands of photographs, Collyer’s second installation, *Closed* (2012), offers a peek into the store’s still and silent morning hours. In a limited-run screening in Blu-ray DVD format, the artwork offers an insight into the artist’s process and a rare glimpse of a sleeping commercial giant. Collyer’s photographic research took place over several months, during which he recorded a huge number of images. As an archive assembled into an eerie stop-motion film, the images leave the viewer waiting for action that never occurs. Collyer connects the shopping centre to the cinema with his vision for the film’s final iteration: a larger-than-life projection in a movie theatre.

Displayed high on the wall along Ed’s Alley, Ron Terada’s stretched vinyl banners – *A Lazy Lout*, *Won’t Squeal*, *No Midwife*, *A Freak* (2012) – proudly proclaim quirky nonsensical phrases. These idioms were pulled from the store’s own slogan signs, hidden beneath Terada’s geometric Frank Stella-esque images. An American abstract art legend, Stella’s works have found a home in Toronto since the sixties, including commissioned murals and ceiling paintings at the Princess of Wales Theatre, run by Ed’s son, David Mirvish. There is a clear link between Honest Ed’s visual language and Stella’s iconic style, which reinforces how over sixty years Ed Mirvish

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developed a highly conceptual aesthetic now as distinct in Toronto as that of any well-known artist.

Down the alleyway running south from Bloor Street, Barr Gilmore’s *The Son* (2012) illuminates the night sky, beckoning the viewer from the highest elevation of the building. In this artwork, Gilmore cleverly rearranges the letters of Honest into The Son, creating a new emblem for the store. Although Gilmore calls it a self-portrait, his work reads equally as a portrait of the everyman and is a fitting tribute to the store. The sign guides shoppers and art lovers alike towards Honest Ed’s, which functions as an important social space both for the Jewish community and for the city as a whole. Ed Mirvish believed in a place for everyone. He welcomed all. Working his way to fame and fortune, the son of Jewish immigrants from Russia and Austria built more than a store. He created an institution.

Discovering *Summer Special*’s interventions at Honest Ed’s requires time and a sense of adventure, with works spread across three floors, two buildings and a full city block. The treasure seeker is not disappointed. Easy to overlook on the first round, *#TOMotto* (2012), Sarah Lazarovic’s series of slogans for the city, blends into the store’s decor. Painted by one of the store’s current sign painters, Wayne Reuben, these signs refocus the store’s sensibility on the city it calls home. And the epigrams hit the spot with self-deprecating humour. Toronto, in all its urban glory, is truly a place “where people from around the world gather to ignore one another.”

Balancing Lazarovic’s darkly entertaining mottos (culled from the Twitter-sphere) is Jen Hutton’s *Welcome to Yesterday* (2012), which borrows a saying once found on the archway above Memory Lane Books, a past resident of nearby Markham Street. This cheerful sign provides a sense of hope and a gentle heart tug of nostalgia for a bygone era when art patrons preserved high-value properties such as those on Markham Street for low-rent artist studios, galleries, bookshops and cafés.

Carrying on through the store’s maze-like interior, adventurers are rewarded for their hard work. Corinne Carlson’s *Postcards* (2012), tucked in with the store’s regular merchandise, provides a souvenir at a steal of a deal: four postcards for 99 cents! Humorous yet ambiguous, *Postcards*

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recounts snippets of Carlson's own daily conversations. Each card retells a story using only the punch line. Like the traditional postcards housed next to Carlson's work, these text-based souvenirs capture a fleeting moment. Yet in contrast to the idealized Canada of mountains and oceans, black bears and Mounties, Carlson's phrases – like Honest Ed's – idealize nothing. They celebrate instead the mundane, commonplace occurrences of everyday life.

Art, design, kitsch and commerce – it all comes together under the patronage of Honest Ed's. The visual vocabulary created by the store's hand-painted signage is as poignant today as it was when my mother visited in the 1960s. Applying tools of commercial design, contemporary works by Carlson, Collyer, Gilmore, Hutton, Lazarovic and Terada reinforce how the words and images of advertising and sales infiltrate all aspects of daily life. Appropriating these devices for their artistic vision rather than sales, the artists remind the viewer that, in the words of Honest Ed Mirvish, "Economics makes the mare go. But history and esthetics make the world liveable."<sup>2</sup>

**Katherine Dennis**  
October 2012

#### NOTES

1. For ideas on museums as entertainment experience, see Julia Noordegraaf, "The Museum as Experience: The Hybridization of the Script," in *Strategies of Display: Museum Experience in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers and Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 2004), 206–10.

2. Ed Mirvish, *Toronto Sun*, March 21, 1972.

**Katherine Dennis** is an independent curator and writer living in Toronto. She completed her MFA in Criticism and Curatorial Practices at OCAD University. Recently, Dennis curated *NOW: A Collaborative Project with Sean Martindale and Pascal Paquette*, the 11th installment of the Toronto Now series at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

**Corinne Carlson** is a multidisciplinary artist based in Toronto. She attended Emily Carr College of Art, was a resident in Visual Arts at The Banff Centre, and earned an MFA from York University. Carlson's outdoor artwork *Used Cars* was exhibited in Guelph and Toronto, Canada and in Glasgow, Scotland. After premiering at Blackwood Gallery, Mississauga, and being exhibited in Stratford, ON and Buffalo, NY, *Billboard* is on permanent display on the exterior of Monforte Dairy, Stratford. Recent exhibitions include 20plus3, Manchester, articule, Montreal, Mercer Union, Toronto, and Buffalo Arts Studio, Buffalo.

**Robin Collyer** is a Toronto artist exhibiting sculpture and photography since 1969, both media playing equal roles in his practice. Public works include the Canadian Embassy, Berlin, the TTC and the Uptown Residences, Toronto. Collyer represented Canada at Documenta 8, and the 1993 Venice Biennale. His work is in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Collection of France, and Siemens AG, Germany. He exhibits with Gilles Peyroulet, Paris.

**Barr Gilmore** is a Toronto-based designer and artist. He earned a BFA in sculpture and printmaking from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver and completed his Master of Design at OCAD University in 2011, winning the prestigious Governor General's Academic Gold Medal. Gilmore was the Studio Assistant to General Idea (1991-1995) and a Senior Design Associate at Bruce Mau Design (1996-2005). His book and exhibition designs have won numerous awards and he was inducted into the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts for graphic design in 2009.

**Jen Hutton** is a Toronto artist currently residing outside Los Angeles where she is working towards her MFA at the California Institute of the Arts. Hutton completed her BA in Studio Art at the University of Guelph and has exhibited her work at MKG127, Toronto, Parker Branch, London, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto, Access Gallery, Vancouver, Blackwood Gallery, Mississauga, and Truck, Calgary. Her reviews and critical writing have appeared in *C Magazine*, *Border Crossings*, *Canadian Art*, and on *Artforum.com*.

**Sarah Lazarovic** is an artist and filmmaker based in Toronto. She mines the digital ether for ideas to be made tangible. Her work aims to reconcile digital and handmade technologies. She has exhibited at Luminato, Harbourfront Centre and most recently, Mississauga Parking Days. Her drawings appear weekly in a handful of national and international newspapers and websites.

**Ron Terada** is a Vancouver-based artist whose recent solo exhibitions include the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver, and Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Toronto. Group exhibitions include the 4th Guangzhou Biennial, Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco, Meessen De Clercq, Brussels, and VOX Centre de l'Image Contemporaine, Montreal. Terada is represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver.

#### IMAGE CREDITS

Cover:  
Ron Terada, 2012, *No Midwife, A Lazy Lout, Won't Squeal*, stretched vinyl banners, 8 x 10 feet, 6 x 10 feet, 7 x 8 feet. Photo: Nick Kozak.

Inside cover (from top to bottom):  
Barr Gilmore, 2012, *The Son*, painted aluminum, 495 light bulbs & sockets, electronic light sequencer, 96 x 96 x 8 inches. Photo: Nick Kozak.

Robin Collyer, 2012, *Money Talks*, tempera on poster board, variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist.



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Page 3 (from top to bottom):  
Ron Terada, 2012, *A Freak*, stretched vinyl banner, 6 x 8 feet. Courtesy of the artist.

Sarah Lazarovic, 2012, *#TOMotto* (detail), tempera on poster board, 14 x 30 inches, 32 panels. Photo: Nick Kozak.

Page 5 (from top to bottom):  
Jen Hutton, 2012, *Welcome to Yesterday*, vinyl lettering, variable dimensions. Photo: Nick Kozak.

Corinne Carlson, 2012, *Postcards* (installation detail), risograph on Hollinger Map Folder stock, 3 1/2 x 5 1/2 inches, edition of 13 two-sided cards, 200 of each. Photo Nick Kozak.

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