

Ron Terada's TL; DR

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The following is excerpted from a text that originally accompanied Ron Terada's TL; DR exhibition (at the Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver, BC, from September to October 2017).

You may have read that the TL; DR painting series is Ron Terada's most recent work and that the texts themselves are found. They are short headlines taken verbatim from a single website, The Verge, and their font is Cheltenham, the typeface used variously by The New York Times for their print edition headlines, in the outdoor outfitter L.L.Bean's logo, and for any bill in the United States Congress. The Verge does not use this font; their font is terrible.

According to The Verge itself, it "is an ambitious multimedia effort founded in 2011 to examine how technology will change life in the future for a massive mainstream audience... Now, we live in a dazzling world of screens that has ushered in revolutions in media, transportation, and science. The future is arriving faster than ever."

You may or may not know that Ron has been producing series of found text paintings since 1993. Their sources include commercial gallery ads, high school yearbook quotes, Jeopardy clues, the subject index from a book about art world finance, and the full text of an artist's memoir. The paintings in front of you might seem familiar—their texts are not precisely clickbait, not quite BuzzFeed, Upworthy, or Breitbart—but their headlines dabble in that logic, trafficking in the capital of clicks. This form of communication is dense with potential, producing texts that are simultaneously earnest, self-satirical, frightening, meaningless, and absurd.

The painting's titles are also the texts of the works, followed by the date, hour, and minute that they were originally posted online. The fleeting nature of their relevance, logic, or lack thereof, is fixed in front of you as paint on canvas. The temporal nature of contemporary art production and its currency, with cruel tides of attention and success, may or may not enter your thoughts.

Familiar corporations and business leaders feature in the majority of these paintings' texts, and some measure of absurdity results from the recurrent obsession with the detailed nuance of socio-technological progress, in concert with the socio-cultural sublimation of "corporate personhood." (If you search this term on the internet you will probably find that this is the legal notion that a corporation has rights. Further reading likely would reveal that most scholars agree that this concept and law is a problem for the majority of the world's population.) You may find that a company's status-update-as-news-as-advertising is much more engaging and relevant to your life than many other things.

Let me Google that for you:

TL; DR, short for "too long; didn't read" is Internet slang to say that a text being replied to has been ignored because of its length. It is also used as a signifier for a summary of an online post or news article.