

Joel Ross, THE EVER

off the wall 2016

Joel Ross (American, born 1966, lives Urbana, IL) has long engaged dual audiences – both chance onlookers and art gallery visitors – with strategically and surreptitiously installed text-based sculptures and resulting photographs. His work activates our imagination and invites us to stop and consider some of the spaces we travel through or pass by every day: roadways, parking lots, alleys, abandoned buildings, and the dead space behind strip malls. His messages become voices in our heads tempting us to plug the gaps in these short stories, to puzzle out their meaning, and to speculate about their authors.

Ross holds an MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art and a BFA from Tufts University. Born in Port Arthur, Texas, he is the son of a police sergeant and the grandson of a Baptist preacher. He received a discharge from the United States Marine Corps in 1984. Currently he is an Associate Professor in the School of Art and Design at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Exhibitions include *INTERTWINED: Words and Art*, University of Chicago Medicine (2014), *It's Not My First Time*, Beta Pictoris Maus Contemporary Art, Birmingham, AL; *(No) Vacancy*, Carrie Secrist Gallery, Chicago IL; and *Write Now!* curated by Nathan Mason, Cultural Center, Chicago. Solo exhibitions alongside collaborator Jason Creps include *Not How It Happened* at Tiny Park, Austin, TX, and *Alleys and Parking Lots* at moniquemeloche in 2013 and 2012, respectively. Ross' work has been published in *Engaging the 'Race Question': Accountability and Equity in U.S. Higher Education* (2015); Artnet, Chicago Magazine, NewCity, The Austin Chronicle, ArtSlant, Conde Nast Traveler, amongst others.





With *The Ever*, a series of site-specific works proposed for public bus benches throughout Chicago's Wicker Park Bucktown neighborhood, Ross offers viewers provocative prompts with phrases like **THE HEAVIEST THING YOU EVER TRIED TO MOVE** and **THE MOST YOU EVER CARED**. These voices might be sprouting from cracks in the landscape or directly from the minds of pedestrians or passengers. The signs are, in effect, asking the ubiquitous 'you' to fill in the blank. Do you remember holding your breath for an especially long time, trying to move something heavy, or hearing something funny? Our responses help us claim ownership of their subject; these public signs will then become private reflections. Passing by the same sign on subsequent days, viewers might see their contemplations and memories floating above the bus stop. *THE EVER* suggests the infinite number of answers to the "questions" posed by the text, but also the open-ended, always happening nature of life.

THE FUNNIEST THING
YOU EVER HEARD

THE HEAVIEST THING
YOU EVER TRIED TO MOVE

THE LONGEST
YOU EVER HELD YOUR BREATH

THE ONE THING
OUT OF EVERYTHING
YOU EVER BELIEVED IN

THE MOST OFFENSIVE
IMAGE YOU EVER SAW

THE ONE PLACE
NO ONE WOULD EVER LOOK

THE SILLIEST THING
YOU EVER CARED ABOUT

THE MOST
YOU EVER CRIED

THE BIGGEST THING
YOU EVER TRIED TO HIDE

THE MOST
YOU EVER CARED