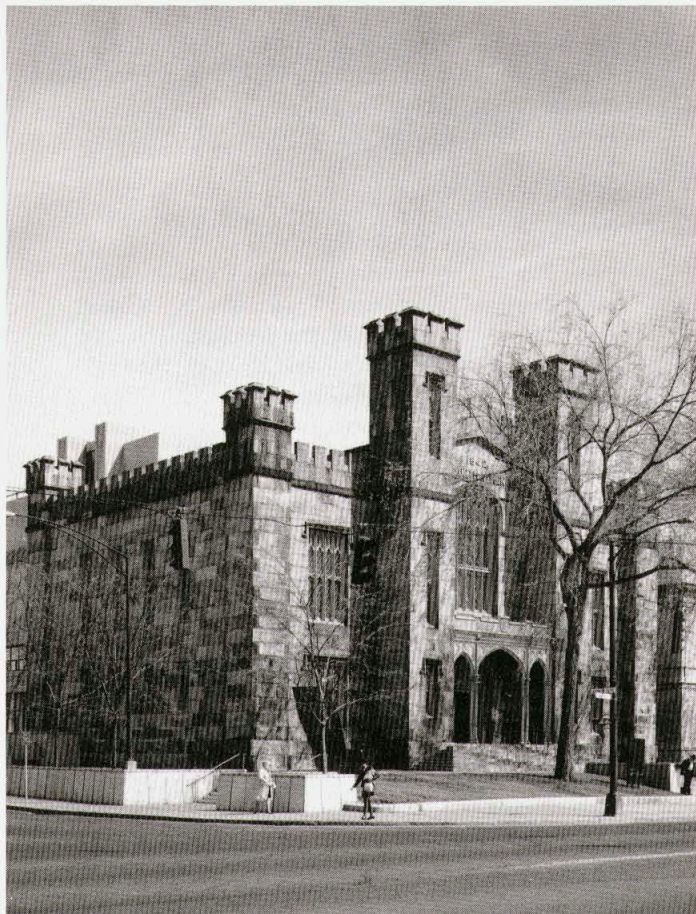


Wadsworth Atheneum
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

Andrea Fraser/MATRIX 114
Welcome to the Wadsworth: A Museum Tour
Every Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m.
during April, 1991



Front view, Wadsworth Atheneum, 1970
Photo: Irving Blomstrann, courtesy Wadsworth Atheneum

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Andrea Fraser/MATRIX 114
Welcome to the Wadsworth: A Museum Tour

Andrea Fraser presents **Welcome to the Wadsworth: A Museum Tour** at 1 p.m. each Saturday and Sunday during the month of April. In preparation for this performance-tour, Fraser has studied the history of Hartford, its environs and the Atheneum's collections, exhibitions, and public programs. Fraser will guide museum visitors to selected points in the Atheneum, remarking on the history, the buildings, and the contents of the museum, as well as the function of the museum as an institution in Greater Hartford's interconnected urban-suburban environment. She hopes to gain an understanding of what visitors, both herself as an arts professional and the "general public," want and expect from a visit to the Atheneum. Although Fraser's talk may seem casual, even aimless at times, it is based on a carefully crafted script.

Fraser, who has a strong background in the visual arts, is interested in what she calls "an analysis of cultural practices."¹ Since the late 1960s, there has emerged an interest on the part of some artists in looking analytically at the activities and conventions that comprise the making, presenting, describing, interpreting, and selling of art in our society. While their motivations, strategies, and ideas about such matters have varied, all have shared a high degree of dissatisfaction with these activities and conventions as they currently exist. For many of these artists, the art world offers a microcosm of the structure, dominant values, and disposition of society at large. Inevitably, as artists, they are participants in the very art world practices they repudiate. Their response to this dilemma has been to incorporate into their artistic practices or even to predicate their work on a critique of these conditions.

Historical precedents for this kind of critical approach can be found in a number of early twentieth-century antecedents, including both the primarily iconoclastic gestures of the dadaists, surrealists and Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), and the more idealistic efforts of the Russian avant garde and the German Bauhaus whose leaders believed fervently in the transformative power of artistic expression.

Over the past several decades, artists have continued to explore these issues in significantly different ways. In 1968, Marcel Broodthaers assumed curatorship of his own *Musée d'art moderne. Département des Aigles, Section*

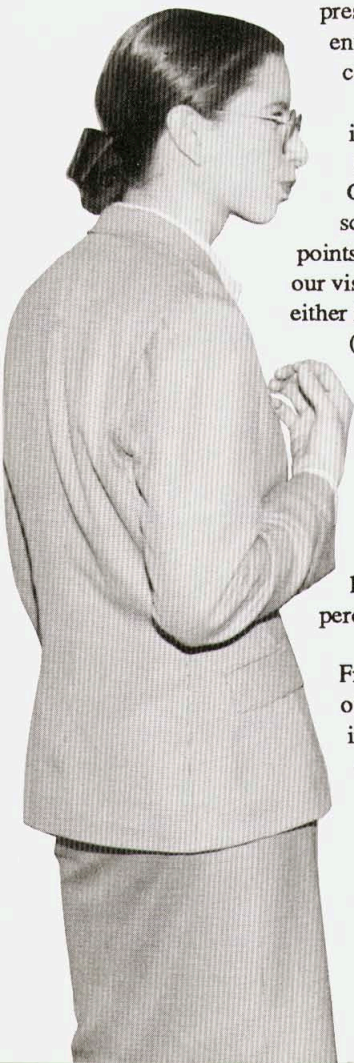
XIXeme (Musuem of Modern Art. Department of Eagles, Nineteenth Century Section), located originally in his Brussels apartment. He entertained the organizing principles of museums in his influential work in order to disorganize the methodologies of hierarchy and expertise that dominate the museum profession. For more than two decades, Daniel Buren's museum-wide (and sometimes city-wide) installations, always using his "signature" stripes, have explored how institutions "frame" works of art. Says Buren, "Any object placed on exhibition in a museum space is framed not only physically by the museum architecture but also (and certainly not the less) by the cultural context which a museum signifies." ² Often by quoting directly from public documents (as does Andrea Fraser), Hans Haacke has

presented evidence of how the art world is entwined with the demands and desires of corporate and private wealth.

Over the years, MATRIX has presented installations by Buren, Haacke, Adrian Piper, Louise Lawler, Chris Burden, Sherrie Levine, Group Material and other artists who have scrutinized these kinds of issues from different points of view. These exhibitions have engaged our visitors in a dialogue about art world practices either implicitly or explicitly related to the Atheneum (and MATRIX). Not only does MATRIX try to inform our visitors about contemporary art, but, influenced by such artists, it also hopes to encourage viewers to ask questions: about works in MATRIX, about contemporary art, about the nature of museums and about issues related to the world at large. We think this dialogue is healthy for the museum and for our visitors' perceptions and understanding of contemporary art.

More recently, younger artists such as Andrea Fraser have chosen to focus less on the idea of the museum as a site of monolithic institutional power than on the possibility of illuminating the complex network of social relations that infuse the life and character of the museum. Furthermore, for

From *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*,
Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989.
Photo: Kelly & Massa Photography



Fraser, "implicit in many of these practices was not just a critique of museums but also a critique of the traditional function of art making." She asks, "How might the almost exclusive prerogative to produce and critique culture accorded artists by museums disenfranchise the non-artist population from the production and critique of the culture of their everyday lives?"³

Fraser's strategy to locate herself inside the customary activities of the museum follows from a desire to think about art making less as a specialized activity than as a social practice that produces and transforms meaning in everyday relations. Education is one of the fields in which such discourse routinely occurs. That is why, for Fraser, the gallery talk is a particularly useful place to site her work.

Fraser has received an enthusiastic response to tours she has led at The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City in 1986 and at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1989. To explore the relationship between the stated mission of museums and public interests in these earlier pieces, she "took up the position and function"⁴ of a docent, by tradition one of the official voices of the museum and the voice that directly addresses the general public. Says Fraser, "My models for such an intervention are less art practices than the pedagogy of Paolo Freire and the seminars of Jacques Lacan (with a little Marx Brothers thrown in)."⁵

In these presentations, most visitors discerned that Fraser was not a usual docent as she drew attention to many aspects of the museum's history and physical plant which are not usually presented in a museum tour. Furthermore, although her monologues typically began with a strong sense of propriety and decorum, enhanced by her appearance in a classically well-tailored suit, this model behavior soon began to unravel as she free-ranged from such topics as the logo of a security system to the museum gift shop to her own attire.

In **Welcome to the Wadsworth**, Fraser is dropping the persona of docent Jane Castleton (a.k.a. Mrs. John P. Castleton), the alter ego she used in her previous museum tours. Here she appears under her own name. This will enable Fraser to deal more honestly with her function as a guest artist working inside the institution and to engage more directly the triad of relationships which exist between herself, the museum, and the museum's public.

While Fraser's antic musings are often wry and humorous, they also reflect her incisive critical thinking. Using a psychoanalytic model (in which everything uttered is

significant), Fraser asks the question, what does the museum want *of and for its public*? She looks to how the Atheneum has chosen to represent itself (in annual reports, members' calendars, and other published documents) for answers to these questions. Her talk includes many direct quotes from museum publications, from its early documents to its latest membership brochure. Other sources for Fraser include articles from the *The New York Times*, *The Hartford Courant*, *The Wall Street Journal*, local histories, and a variety of promotional texts, including the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce's "relocation packet." A copy of her script, **Welcome to the Wadsworth: A Museum Tour**, is available upon request at the Information Desk.

Andrea Fraser was born in Billings, Montana in 1965. She grew up in Berkeley, California, attended the School of Visual Arts and the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program in New York City. She continues to live and work in New York City, where she is also a member of The V-Girls, a feminist performance group of artists and writers whose work features critical and amusing panel presentations in academic settings.

Andrea Miller-Keller
Curator of Contemporary Art

¹ Fraser, Andrea. In conversation with Andrea Miller-Keller, November, 1990.

² *Daniel Buren/MATRIX 33, Dominoes: A Museum Exhibition*, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, (p. 6, unpaginated).

³ Note from the artist after reading this text, March 23, 1991.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Fraser, Andrea. Letter to Andrea Miller-Keller, October 20, 1990.



From *May I Help You?*, in cooperation with Allan McCollum, American Fine Arts, Co., New York City, 1991. ("Staff" performed by Ledlie Borgerhoff, Kevin Duffy and Randolph Miles, pictured talking to gallery visitors)
Photo: American Fine Arts, Co.

Selected One-Person Exhibition:

Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne, Germany '90.

Selected Group Exhibitions:

Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY *Opposing Force* '84; Fourwalls, Hoboken, NJ '84; Philip Nelson Gallery, Lyon, France *Transitional Objects* '85; Hallwalls, NY *Picture This: Films Chosen by Artists* '86; 303 Gallery, NYC '87; Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA *Re:Placement* '88; 10 on 8, NYC *Selling Us Ourselves* '88; Milford Gallery, NYC *After the Gold Rush* '89; Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown at Federal Reserve Plaza, NYC *The Desire of the Museum* '89; Galleri Nordanstad-Skarstedt, Stockholm, Sweden *Videoworks* '89; Gracie Mansion Gallery, NYC *notes on the margin: a framework in focus* '90; Galerie Ralph Wernicke, Stuttgart, Germany *Art Supplies and Utopia* '90.

Selected Presentations by Andrea Fraser:

Damaged Goods Gallery Talk Starts Here, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, NYC '86; *The Fairy Tale: A Gallery Talk*, Artists Space, NYC '86; *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA '89; *May I Help You?*, in cooperation with Allan McCollum, American Fine Arts, Co., NYC '91.

Selected Performances by the V-Girls:

A Talk About a Talk, Barnard College, NYC '87; *Sex and Your Holiday Season*, Fourwalls, Hoboken, NJ '87; *Academia in the Alps: In Search of the Swiss Mis(s)*, "The Politics of Comparison," conference, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA '87; (also at New York University, NYC '88; Columbia University, NYC '88; Franklin Furnace at Judson Memorial Church, NYC '90; Modern Language Association, Chicago, IL '90); *The Question of Manet's Olympia: Posed and Skirted*, The Institute of Contemporary Art, London, England '89, '90 (also at the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA '89; University Art Museum, Berkeley, CA '89; The New Museum of Contemporary Art, NYC '90; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA '90; Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY '90; Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, Scotland '90).

Selected Bibliography about Andrea Fraser:

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Linker, Kate. "Damaged Goods: Desire and the Economy of the Object," *Artforum* vol. 25 no. 3 (November '86), p.133+.

Owens, Craig. "The Yen for Art," in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture* (Hal Foster, ed.), Dia Art Foundation (Seattle: Bay Press), 1987, p. 16+.

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Smith, Roberta. "The Whitney Interprets Musuem's Dreams," *The New York Times* Sunday, July 23, 1989, sec. 2, p. H31.

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Decter, Joshua. "Andrea Fraser," *Flash Art* vol. 23 no. 155 (November-December '90), p.138.

Decter, Joshua. "De-Coding the Museum," *Flash Art* vol. 23 no. 155 (November-December '90), p. 140+.

Graw, Isabelle. "Field Work," *Flash Art* vol. 23 no. 155 (November-December '90), p. 136+.

Schneider, M. Christiane. "Art in America," *Prinz* (Hamburg, Germany) December '90.

Selected Bibliography by Andrea Fraser:

Woman 1/Madonna and Child 1506-1967 (artist book) (New York City), 1984.

"In and Out of Place," *Art in America* vol. 73 no. 6 (June '85), p.122+.

"Allan McCollum," *Investigations 18* Institute of Contemporary Art (Philadelphia, PA), 1986.

"On the Post-Partum Document," *Afterimage* vol. 13 no. 8 (March '86), p. 6+.

"Damaged Goods Gallery Talk Starts Here," *Artpaper* vol. 7 no. 7 (March '88), p. 12+.

Allan McCollum: Individual Works (catalogue) John Weber Gallery (New York City), 1988.

"A Conversation with *OCTOBER*," (with the V-Girls) *October* vol. 51 (Winter '89), p. 115+.

"Allen McCollum" *Portikus* (Frankfurt, West Germany), 1989, p. 13+.

"Notes on the Museum's Publicity," *Lusitania* vol. 1 no. 3 (Fall '90), p. 49+.

Interview with Joshua Dechter. "Andrea Fraser," *Flash Art* vol. 23 no. 155 (November-December '90), p. 138.