

Artist:
Andrea Fraser

Curators:
Mélanie Boucher
Marie-Hélène Leblanc

November 5
→ December 13, 2025

*andrea
fraser:*

*museum
tours*

Since its foundation, Galerie UQO has presented numerous works and exhibitions that examine, question, or reuse artistic, cultural, and museum institutions. To highlight its 10th anniversary—and confirm its current and future ideology—it was only fitting to invite American artist Andrea Fraser. A leading figure of institutional critique, Fraser is well-known for her museum-based video performances: *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989), *Welcome to the Wadsworth: A Museum Tour* (1991), *Little Frank and His Carp* (2001), and *A Visit to the Sistine Chapel* (2005). This exhibition brings these four works together for the first time in Canada. Each video presents a different tour of a Western museum where Fraser delivers critical analyses through the figure of an artist, a guide, a lecturer, or a visitor equipped with an audio-guide, and ironically subverts the function and experience of the institution's cultural mediation. This selection of artworks seeks to highlight the importance and relevance of this conceptual artist's work, in which the political conditions of art and its institutions, and artistic engagement in the face of hierarchy and social expectations are integrated into a methodology of research and creation that draws on historical, sociological, and feminist approaches.

This exhibition represents Mélanie Boucher and Marie-Hélène Leblanc's third joint curatorial project. By taking a dialogical approach to narrative, they offer a differentiated reading of the works they curate, exploring the diversity of relationships between contemporary art and the museum. Through the prism of specific locations and periods, they locate Fraser's work as an embodied critique of the museum—an artist who performs the institution while revealing its mechanisms.

The total running time of the video program is 75 minutes.

This exhibition was produced in collaboration with the Research and Inquiry Group CIÉCO and the Art and museum Team. It was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Université du Québec en Outaouais, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, the Ville de Gatineau, the Fonds de recherche du Québec—Société et culture, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

*Museum Highlights:
A Gallery Talk*
(1989)

29 min.

*Welcome to the Wadsworth:
A Museum Tour*
(1991)

25 min.

*Little Frank
and His Carp*
(2001)

6 min.

*A Visit to the
Sistine Chapel*
(2005)

12 min.

Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk

(1989)

Marie-Hélène Leblanc

The institution in question here is the Philadelphia Museum of Art, one of the largest museums of its kind with a collection of over 240,000 objects. Originally performed as a live performance at the museum, Fraser embodies the role of a museum guide and wanders through several of the museum's rooms while the museum is closed to the public, addressing her speech to the camera. The script is extensively researched and composed almost entirely of quotations from museum publications, reports by the City of Philadelphia, and other sources. Now a seminal work of institutional critique and a reference in contemporary art history, *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* points to the fundamental themes that constitute the museum institution and explores the relationship between cultural and social class. Openly critical of institutional frameworks, Fraser presents facts on the museum's history, its role, donors, collection, and architecture (including dimensions). At times, she repeats certain elements as if to emphasize her point. Walking through the galleries, she discusses select works and period rooms, but also draws our attention to other elements such as a drinking fountain and the cafeteria, all while questioning the actual value of art. By stating that "I like to live as an art object," Fraser criticizes all forms of museumization and the institutionalization of art and artists.

Mélanie Boucher

Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk is an emblematic work of institutional critique. It was filmed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, whose exterior front steps were made famous in the film *Rocky* when the film's protagonist, a boxer, runs up to the top to symbolize the value of personal effort. In *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*, the museum's equally impressive interior staircase, which leads to the galleries, is climbed by Andrea Fraser as she delivers a satirical monologue on the value ascribed to the museum and its services, aimed at the very people for whom they are intended. Are visitors rewarded for their efforts to pay attention and absorb what the institution has to offer? The building's three floors contain a vast collection of Modern Art, notably the largest collection of works by Marcel Duchamp, who gained notoriety for transforming a urinal into a work of art. Duchamp himself was directly involved in installing his works at the museum in the 1950s, for an exhibition that has remained largely unchanged ever since. As for the museum's cafeteria, which Fraser includes in her *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* tour, it is indistinguishable from so many others like it.

Welcome to the Wadsworth: A Museum Tour

(1991)

Marie-Hélène Leblanc

The institution in this video is the Wadsworth Antheneum, the oldest continually operating public art museum in the United States. The title of the work references both the idea of hospitality and the name of the museum. In this piece, Fraser offers an outdoor tour to an unseen audience as an enactment of whom one becomes when internalizes the discourse of museums literally, and she offers a take on issues that pertain specifically to the museum, but also to the city of Hartford, Connecticut. The tour addresses the museum's role and its collection, but also the story of its founders, donors, and board members. Fraser also discusses the history of the city's monuments and the toponymy of its streets and parks commemorating important men, while injecting her own personal history in the city. By not entering the museum but walking around its perimeter, she draws attention to the institution's boundary and the network of financing, politics, power games, and white male and settler-colonial history dominance that have shaped the museum. Her choice to remain outside of the building acts as a form of critique against elite cultural institutions that are selective about the communities they reach, and underlines the social inequalities that this engenders. Fraser guides her audience through the inner workings of institutional history, as well as its physical and social peripheries and limits.

Mélanie Boucher

Of the four works in the exhibition, *Welcome to the Wadsworth: A Museum Tour* is the only one that features a museum that isn't a major tourist attraction or essential art historical landmark. In fact, Andrea Fraser doesn't even enter the museum, but rather outlines, from outside of its walls, the network of influential forces that have shaped the institution over the centuries. Those who are familiar with institutional and feminist critique may note the connection between Fraser's piece and a 1973 performance by Mierle Laderman Ukeles. In that work, Ukeles spent hours cleaning the front steps of the Wadsworth, remaining, like Fraser, on the margins of power as symbolized by the building itself. Produced nearly twenty years apart, both works shed light on social hierarchy, power, and inequality, but from opposite positions. While one artist washes the stone steps on her hands and knees, the other scrolls through, in a dignified manner, the names and events that contributed to the colonial and patriarchal foundation of the Wadsworth Museum.

Little Frank and His Carp

(2001)

Marie-Hélène Leblanc

This institution is the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain, designed by the famous architect Frank Gehry. The work's title references how Frank Gehry's design was inspired by the shape of a fish, and how, as a child, he once played in the bathtub with a live carp brought back from the market. Here, Fraser visits the building's atrium while the narrative plays out through the museum's official audio guide. As she listens to a man's voice lavishly describe Gehry's design, she responds with vivid facial expressions. We hear the voice strongly emphasizing the sensuousness of the building's materials and the curving lines of the space, and Fraser begins to indulge in direct physical contact with its walls. Although one of the basic rules of conduct in any museum is "do not touch," here Fraser embarks on a tactile experience that verges on masturbation as she embraces the material luxuriance of the building's forms, curves, and immense scale with her body. Prompted by the museum's own audio guide, she "performs" the architectural sensuality it praises.

Mélanie Boucher

Converging points lead us to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, the radiant, voluminous museum designed by the Canadian architect Frank Ghery. The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and the National Gallery of Canada, across the river from Galerie UQO, both feature outside an unmistakable marker in the form of an immense spider—a sculpture by the artist Louise Bourgeois. Another edition of this piece can be found inside the Tate Modern in London. When the National Gallery opened on Sussex Drive in 1988, its design, by Moshe Safdie, was considered ground breaking. Since the magnetic Guggenheim Bilbao opened its doors in 1997, it has attracted huge crowds drawn by the beauty of its reflective facade. By the time Andrea Fraser visited the Guggenheim for her museum tour video from 2001, this time using the museum's official audio guide as her narrative, several institutions had embarked on similarly excessive construction projects.

A Visit to the Sistine Chapel

(2005)

Marie-Hélène Leblanc

This institution consists of a series of rooms within the Vatican Palace, which is part of the Vatican Museum. The title of the work is a direct reference to the activity and location visited. Here, Fraser is constrained by the dense crowds of tourists she must navigate in order to see the artworks while listening to the Palace's audio guide. The audio features a man and a woman's voice, with background music, describing the historical aspects of each work, to which Fraser emotionally reacts. Straining to catch a glimpse of the works as she weaves her way through the crowds, her visit highlights the impossible challenge of appreciating art when a museum is overrun with tourists, yet it also reveals how, even in sub-optimal conditions, some artworks still have the power to move viewers. Despite the throngs of people, Fraser seems to be one of the few who is genuinely interested in what she sees. This work was conceived as a companion work to *Little Frank and His Carp* and in both works Fraser is responding to the context as instructed by the audio guide, but where the Guggenheim inspires libidinal freedom, the Vatican inspires piety, challenging as that is in the context of mass tourism and commercialism.

Mélanie Boucher

The current audio guide for the Vatican Museum last summer may be identical to the one used by Andrea Fraser twenty years ago for her piece *A Visit to the Sistine Chapel*. Confirming this might be challenging, however, given the vast number of audio tracks it contains—more than two-hundred, each approximately thirty seconds long, for a total of roughly two hours, not including the time it takes to walk from room to room and to contemplate what is on view. In 1763, Diderot praised the public exhibition for providing “useful impetus” and “pleasurable recreation.” Fifteen years later, Pidansant de Marobert described the museum's grand staircase and its exhibitions as a “trap where, despite its considerable width, you suffocate. When you manage to escape from this torturous back alley, you find yourself breathless from the heat and dust. The air is so malodorous and filled with the gobs of so many sickly spitting people that you are either struck by lightning or fall victim to an epidemic.”

Mélanie Boucher is a Professor at the École des arts et cultures at UQO, specializing in museum studies, as well as modern and contemporary art. Over the years she has developed advanced expertise in the field of exhibitions, new collecting practices, and performance. A cofounder of the Research and Inquiry Group CIÉCO, she also directs CIÉCO-UQO pole and the third research axis (the Expanded Collections) of the Partnership *New Uses of Collections in Art Museums* (SSHRC-CRSH 2021-2028). Mélanie Boucher is also the lead researcher of the Art and museum Team (FRQSC 2022-2026). In 2023, with the Université du Québec Press, she co-edited, along with Marie Fraser and Johanne Lamoureux, *Réinventer la collection: l'art et le musée au temps de l'événementiel*, which filled an important gap in the study of institutional collections. Mélanie Boucher has been recognized for her curatorial work, and has solid expertise in museum practices and art presentation and dissemination. She has worked for small, medium, and large institutions, including the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, the Musée d'art de Joliette, the National Gallery of Canada, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, the Centre d'exposition Expression, AXENÉO7, and Galerie UQO. Since 2002, she has curated and coordinated over twenty major exhibitions and events.

Andrea Fraser is an artist and Professor of Art at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her work investigates the social, financial, and affective economies of cultural institutions, fields, and groups. Identified with feminism, performance, and institutional critique, she combines the site-specific and research-based practices of conceptualism with feminist investigations of subjectivity and desire to explore the forms of power and domination produced and reproduced in the field of art and its institutions. A retrospective of her work was recently on view at Zacheta National Gallery of Art. Previous retrospectives of her work have been presented by the Museum Ludwig Cologne (2013), the Museum der Moderne Salzburg (2015), the Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona and MUAC UNAM Mexico City (both 2016). Her most recent books include *Andrea Fraser: Collected Interviews 1990-2018* (2019, co-published by A.R.T. and Walter Koenig); and

2016 in *Museums, Money, and Politics* (2018, co-published by the CCA Wattis Institute, Westreich/Wagner Publications, and MIT Press), which documents the political contributions of the board members of over 125 major US art organizations in the 2016 election cycle and its aftermath, examining the intersection of cultural philanthropy and political finance in the age of plutocracy.

Marie-Hélène Leblanc holds a PhD in Visual Arts Studies and Practices from UQAM, and has been Galerie UQO's Director-Curator since 2015. She has curated more than thirty projects for various exhibition spaces across Québec, Canada, and in Europe. Between 2006 and 2015, she worked in artist-run centres, as an independent curator, and a visual arts teacher at the college and university level. In 2018, she received the emerging award from the Société des musées du Québec, and in 2025, she received the award for excellence in management innovation from the Université du Québec. Leblanc has served on many boards of directors, notably for the University and College Art Galleries Association of Canada (UCAGAC/ACGAUC), for the Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ), and Culture Outaouais. An associate professor at the École des arts et cultures (UQO) since 2025, Marie-Hélène Leblanc is co-researcher in the FRQSC's research chair on creative economy and wellbeing (Culture in the regions axis; dir. Julie Bérubé, UQO), and the Art and museum Team for the research and creation project *Créer avec les collections*, also supported by the FRQSC (dir. Mélanie Boucher, UQO).

Galerie UQO is open
Tuesday to Friday
from 10 AM to 6 PM and
Saturday from noon to 4 PM.
Entry is free, and activities
are open to all.

Université du Québec
en Outaouais
101 St-Jean-Bosco Street
Gatineau, Quebec
Canada J8X 3X7
Doors 6 and 17, Room A-0115
galerie.uqo.ca

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