

# Andrea Fraser. *L'1%, c'est moi*

**Exhibition from 22 April to 4 September 2016**

'It's not a question of being against the institution: We are the institution. It's a question of what kind of institution we are, what kind of values we institutionalize, what forms of practice we reward, and what kinds of rewards we aspire to.'<sup>1</sup>

Andrea Fraser

What do we want from art? Andrea Fraser addresses this question in her work and looks at the motivations of a wide range of cultural agents including artists, collectors, gallerists, patrons and audiences. Developing on site-specific and research-based approaches that emerged with Conceptualism, combined with feminist investigations of subjectivity and desire, her methods are rooted in the psychoanalytic principle that one can only engage structures and relationships in an immediate way, in their performance.

Associated with the practice of institutional critique, the core of Fraser's work is a critical analysis of the art world. Her approach has also been strongly influenced by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of reflexive sociology and social fields. From this perspective, institutions are understood not only as specific organisations, such as museums, but as fields, like the art world, that encompass a range of social structures. These structures are not only institutionalised in museums and objectified in art works but are also internalised and performed by individuals. Fraser herself performs this process in her work, not by taking on the role of a specific person, but by enacting different social positions and the relationships between them. Infused with intellect and humour, her work challenges us to reflect on these different perspectives, as well as our own as participants in the field of art.

*L'1%, c'est moi* is Fraser's first solo exhibition in Spain and brings together a selection of works from over thirty years of critical engagement with the art field, ranging from performance to installation, text-based works and documentation. The works are arranged in the following loosely organised and permeable groupings.

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<sup>1</sup>Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,' in *Artforum*, September 2005.

## Museums

Museums communicate to their audiences in many ways: brochures, wall texts, guided tours, websites, social media, etc. The works in this section look at museums as the primary institutional frame of art and their role in establishing social values and hierarchies. Appropriating museums' own languages and formats, Fraser presents us with works that take the form of gift-shop posters coupled with elaborate marketing copy; multimedia presentations that compete for the attention of audiences; gallery talks that preach dominant class values; and audio guides that dictate how art should be consumed.

Before entering the exhibition galleries, we are greeted at the museum entrance with the video *Little Frank and His Carp* (2001), in which Fraser is captured on hidden cameras submissively obeying the voice of the audio guide of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, demonstrating how museums not only inform but also seduce us to invest in the values they institutionalise.

## Globalisation

The 1990s witnessed the rise of art fairs and biennials worldwide, in which art became a commodity in the global tourism economy. The works in this section are a reflection on the effects of this continuing phenomenon. Fraser's *Cologne Presentation Book* (1990) explores the mid-century roots of our globalised art world in the official exportation of American art to postwar Germany. *White People in West Africa* (1989/1991/1993) applies reflexive critique to post-colonialism in a first-person examination of Fraser's experience as a global tourist. The audio installation *Garden Program* (1993), a project for the Austrian Pavilion of the Venice Biennale, dramatises the first meeting of the Biennale's national commissioners as they debate – and perform – the nationalist premise of the exhibition's pavilion structure. *Inaugural Speech* (1997) examines how conflicting political agendas are melded together in the rituals of legitimation that mark the opening of global art exhibitions. In *Reporting from São Paulo, I'm from the United States* (1998) Fraser, as a journalist, explores the 24<sup>th</sup> Bienal de São Paulo's theme of anthropophagy while also tackling the relationships between international biennial exhibitions, neocolonialism and economic globalisation.

## It's a beautiful show, isn't it?

In addition to providing individual and social enrichment, contributing to cultural development and other functions, art and how we engage with it can also serve to manifest social hierarchies and legitimacy. Pierre Bourdieu has described legitimacy as 'the fact of feeling justified in being (what one is), being what it is right to be'.<sup>2</sup>

Influenced by Bourdieu's landmark research on cultural consumption and social stratification, Fraser has undertaken a range of projects examining art, taste and social class. Her multi-voice performance *May I Help You?*, presented here in three different versions (1991/2005/2011), cycles through a class hierarchy to explore how art (as well as architecture and design) can serve as an instrument of distinction, legitimation or de-legitimation depending on one's access to the competencies and dispositions that it demands. On the gallery's outer wall is *Collected: The Lady Wallace's Inventory* (1997), that together with documentation of other projects, examine the process of inclusion and exclusion in the formation of public and private collections.

## Discarded Fantasies

*Fantasia* in Portuguese means both costume and fantasy. Once a year in Rio de Janeiro hundreds of thousands of people don elaborate costumes to partake in carnival parades, an unparalleled mass celebration, and perform a collective fantasy replete with feathers and beading. At the end of the festivities, many of these glamorous costume items, once animated by individuals, become disposable identities that litter the streets. Some of these have been recuperated by Fraser in *Um Monumento as Fantasias Descartadas* (A Monument to Discarded Fantasies) (2003). Art can also be seen as a parade of collectivised fantasies that crystallise in artistic identities as well as in artworks.

Fraser explores these identities as points of intersection between our emotional investments in art and the political and social contexts of their performance. In *Kunst muss hängen* (Art Must Hang) (2001), her ambivalent tribute to the late Martin Kippenberger, she takes on the perennial archetype of the hard-drinking, decorum-bashing, (male) painter genius. In *Soldadera* (*Scenes from Un Banquete en Tetlapayac, a film by Olivier Debroyse*) (1998/2001) she appears as both a Mexican revolutionary and a wealthy U.S. patron scheming to subdue communist ideologies among the Mexican avant-garde. In *Official Welcome* (2001/2003) Fraser alternates between

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<sup>2</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 228.

artist and supporter, performing 18 different positions as she tests the visions of superlative achievement that draw so many participants to the art field.

In the audio piece *Why Does Fred Sandback's Work Make Me Cry?* (2006), located on the second floor landing where the listener has a sweeping overview of the museum's atrium, Fraser delves into the psychological and emotional aspects of the aesthetic experiences of art and the spaces in which they are shown.

## **The Personal and Political**

Feminism revolutionised both art and activism by linking personal, private and emotional experience to political structures. While Fraser's work can appear to vacillate between extremes of psychological and sociological, emotional and economic investigations, maintaining their link is one of the fundamental principles of her approach. This exhibition takes its name from a work entitled *L'I%, c'est moi* (2011), an essay accompanied by statistical graphs, including *Index* (2011), which leverages social and economic research to reveal the correlation between income inequality and the art market boom in the United States and beyond.

Taking a radically different form, Fraser's *Untitled* (2003) performs the fraught connection between our most intimate relationships and the economic relationships that define our public and private selves. Appearing both as herself and a consulting psychiatrist in *Projection* (2008), Fraser again uses her own body and mind to interrogate the emotional conflicts that haunt artistic positions. In *There's No Place Like Home* (2012), Fraser's contribution to the 2012 Whitney Biennial, she explores the structural links between emotional conflicts that define so many artistic positions and the social and economic conflicts that may define the field of art itself. Finally, *Men on the Line, Men Committed to Feminism, KPFK* (1972/2012) takes us out of the artistic world and back to her roots, growing up with the feminist movement in California in the 1970s, as she performs four men exploring the politics of their own personal experiences of gender.

## **Collected and Archived**

Institutional critique developed through a dual critique of the museum as the site of exhibition and the studio as the site of production of art works that must then circulate to museums and galleries to be seen. Site-specific and project-based approaches to art making developed in response to this critique, both to limit art's circulation as a cultural commodity and to enable effective critical engagement in

specific contexts. One consequence of Fraser's commitment to these approaches is that many of her projects exist only as documentation.

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Curators: Cuauhtémoc Medina and Hiuwai Chu

### **Publication**

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### **Downloads on macba.cat**

Andrea Fraser, *There's No Place Like Home* (2012)

Andrea Fraser, *L'1%, c'est moi* (2012)

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