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ANDREA FRASER

FRIEDRICH PETZEL
GALLERY / P. H. A. G.

In 1998 Andrea Fraser announced that she would no longer perform as Jane Castleton, the museum docent whose tours had left unsuspecting audiences scratching their heads over the past decade. While her work as Castleton had been based on a misrepresentation of her true status within cultural institutions, Fraser was now going to operate strictly as an artist. Yet after a five-year hiatus from showing solo in New York, these concurrent, related gallery appearances demonstrated that her sense of institutional belonging has only grown more complex and ambiguous.

Two works at P.H.A.G. examined the

possibility of upholding a critical practice in the face of the inevitable slide into complicity with the object of one's critique. In *Official Welcome*, 2001, a video of a performance before a small audience at the posh home of a collector couple, Fraser alternately plays "artist" and "supporter," gradually removing her clothes in a nod to the degrees of exposure (financial, ideological, physical) that define an artist-patron relationship. At the risk of biting the hands that feed her (including guests Barbara and Howard Morse of the MICA Foundation, which commissioned the piece), Fraser as "supporter" says things like, "We think of ourselves as connoisseurs of art subculture." Yet it's clear that her audience anticipates, even craves, such jabs. The two-screen projection *Soldadera* (*Scenes from Un Banquete en Tetlapayac, a film by Olivier Debrouse*), 1998/2002, also focuses on the dysfunctional ties between creators and benefactors. In this rather hard to follow treatment of Mexico, Sergei Eisenstein, and '30s socialist fervor, Fraser plays both a Russian revolutionary and Frances Flynn Paine, a New Yorker who backed the Mexican muralists and thought that exposing them to the West might loosen their ties with the "Reds." Here again the line between sponsorship and manipulation is blurry.

A pair of studies in exhibitionism and cultural exploitation was on view across the street at Petzel. In *Exhibition (Samba)*, 2001-2002, two parallel screens installed in a large scaffold each presented a life-size Fraser dancing a spirited samba in an elaborate sequined outfit; in one image she is in a crowd at Carnaval in Rio de Janeiro, in the other she is isolated in a dark studio.



Andrea Fraser, *Kunst muß hängen* (Art must hang), 2001, color digital video projection and acrylic on canvas, 32 minutes 55 seconds. Installation view, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, 2002.

And in *Little Frank and His Carp*, 2001, passersby gape as Fraser rubs her body against the "powerfully sensual" curves of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao interior while listening to an audio-guide paean to the building's fish-inspired forms. If Thomas Krens realizes his expansionist aims, perhaps Fraser will samba in a Guggenheim Rio someday.

The video *Kunst muß hängen* (Art must hang), 2001, also at Petzel, documents Fraser's performance at the opening of her show at Galerie Christian Nagel in Cologne last summer. Standing between two of her own new paintings (her first since 1984), Fraser admonishes the guests in halting German, babbles incoherently, and tells bad jokes—restaging in its entirety a half-hour speech given in 1995 by a drunk Martin Kippenberger on the occasion of a friend's exhibition. During a show of Fraser's work at Nagel in 1990, Kippenberger had dropped by, noticed her having trouble affixing some objects to a wall, and cautioned her that "art must hang." Fraser's decision to appropriate Kippenberger's voice a decade after their initial encounter might be understood as a delayed rebuke to his patronizing behavior. Yet the performance can also be read as both an homage to the older artist and a send-up of macho art-world posturing. Like her other recent works, *Art Must Hang* forcefully describes the impossibility of balancing the positions of insider and outsider. Fraser clearly hasn't relinquished her belief in maintaining a practice of resistance; she has simply allowed the accompanying compromises to take on a more visible presence.

—Gregory Williams