

Andrea Fraser (b. 1965, Billings, Montana) is widely recognised as one of the most influential artists of her generation, Fraser has been a leading figure in institutional critique since the mid-1980s. Working across the media of performance, video, sculpture, photography and text, Fraser examines the social, economic, political, financial and emotional structures that shape institutions within art world. She investigates the motivations of artists, collectors, dealers, patrons, and audiences, exploring how financial interests, prestige, desire, and personal fulfilment intersect within systems of artistic production and reception.

Andrea Fraser, *May I Help You?* (1991)

May I Help You? is a performance and video work by Andrea Fraser, created in collaboration with Allan McCollum during his exhibition *Plaster Surrogates* at American Fine Arts, Co. in New York. McCollum's installation of nearly identical plaster objects questions notions of originality, uniqueness, and mass production, providing a fitting conceptual framework for Fraser's institutional critique. The choice of McCollum's work is deliberate: his exhibition becomes the stage for Fraser's performance, while his *Plaster Surrogates* function as its props, reinforcing the critical dimension of the work. *May I Help You?* examines the ways in which the art world produces and legitimises social distinctions. During the original performance, gallery staff members—who were in fact performers—delivered a scripted monologue to each visitor who came to see the exhibition while appearing to carry out their usual roles. Based on interviews, publications, and sociological research, Fraser's script shifts through six distinct voices representing different social positions, ranging from the knowledgeable collector and connoisseur to a person who feels excluded from museums and galleries. Each voice asserts its own perspective while implicitly or explicitly rejecting those articulated by the others. By juxtaposing these conflicting perspectives, Fraser exposes the social and ideological structures that shape the experience of art. *May I Help You?* demonstrates that museums and galleries are not neutral spaces but institutions that produce and reinforce cultural authority, social class, and exclusion.

Allan McCollum's (b. 1944, Los Angeles, CA) *Plaster Surrogates* consist of cast plaster objects painted to resemble framed monochrome paintings. Each object simulates a frame, a mat, and a black rectangular "image," yet none contains an actual picture. Rather than emphasising the aesthetic qualities or meaning of individual artworks, McCollum investigates the cultural and social role of art itself. Through a series of nearly identical, endlessly reproducible objects—which he described as "surrogates" or stand-ins for paintings—he questions the idea of artistic uniqueness and originality. The work suggests that the value of art often derives less from its visual or formal qualities than from its social function, serving as a marker of cultural status, taste, and prestige within private collections and museum settings.

Sem Lala | Andrea Fraser
04.09 – 03.11.2026, Opening 03.09.2026
chess club in collaboration with **Archiv Becker**

Archiv Becker

Seit den 1980er Jahren setzt sich Andrea Fraser (geb. 1965) in ihren performativen Arbeiten kritisch mit dem Kunstbetrieb und seinen Akteuren auseinander. In ihren *Gallery Talks* beschäftigt sie sich mit Präsentationsformen, Hierarchien und Ausschlussmechanismen des Kunstbetriebs. Ihre Performance *May I Help You?* (1991) befasst sich mit Konventionen und der Rhetorik der Kunstwelt. Das Video zeigt Mitarbeiter der Galerie American Fine Arts bei ihrer Arbeit. Statt die Besucher der Galerie wie üblich höflich zu ignorieren, halten sie einen mehrminütigen Dialog zu den ausgestellten Werken - Allan McCollums Plaster Surrogates. Dabei wechseln sie mehrmals ihre Perspektive auf die Werke, scheinen mit unterschiedlichen Stimmen zu sprechen. McCollums Ausstellung wird zur Bühne für Frasers Performance, seine Werke zur Requisite. Grundlage der Monologe ist ein von Fraser verfasstes Script, für das sich die Künstlerin stereotypische Aussagen von Händlern und Sammlern aneignet und miteinander verwoben hat.

Andrea Fraser's work '*May I Help you*' was presented at Galerie Juergen Becker in 2017 as part of an exhibition that looked back at seminal examples of artists' films from the 1980s and 1990s. Alongside works by Tracey Emin, Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, and Bill Viola, the exhibition explored the human condition, interpersonal relationships, and the ways people communicate and interact within groups, addressing themes of both cooperation and togetherness as well as conflict and opposition.

Andrea Fraser

May I Help You?, 1991

Single-channel video, colour, sound, 20 min 7 s

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NFS

E Box, 1987

Published by Josh Baer Gallery, New York

Painted wood box by Nancy Dwyer containing the other 4 artworks

Box size: 52.7 x 59.7 x 27.9 cm (20 3/4 x 23 1/2 x 11 in)

Edition of 10

Artists: Allan McCollum, Alan Belcher, Laurie Simmons, Nancy Dwyer, Frank Majore.

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