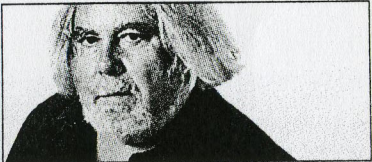


## Art Without Walls

## A time of institutional inspiration



Peter Goddard  
Visual Art

The latest front in Vera Frenkel's ongoing efforts at world domination opens Tuesday at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery in University of Toronto's Hart House, with "The Institute: Or, What We Do For Love."

While domination isn't on the mind of the otherwise soft-spoken, gentle and quirky/funny Toronto artist, it seems it cannot be avoided when it comes to her work.

Her output has been called multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary, even multi-awful by some critics who hate what they claim is its foggy formlessness. Frenkel deals simultaneously in fact and fiction. Sometimes it cannot even be called all her own as it begs anyone who clicks onto her Internet site to jump right in and fool around.

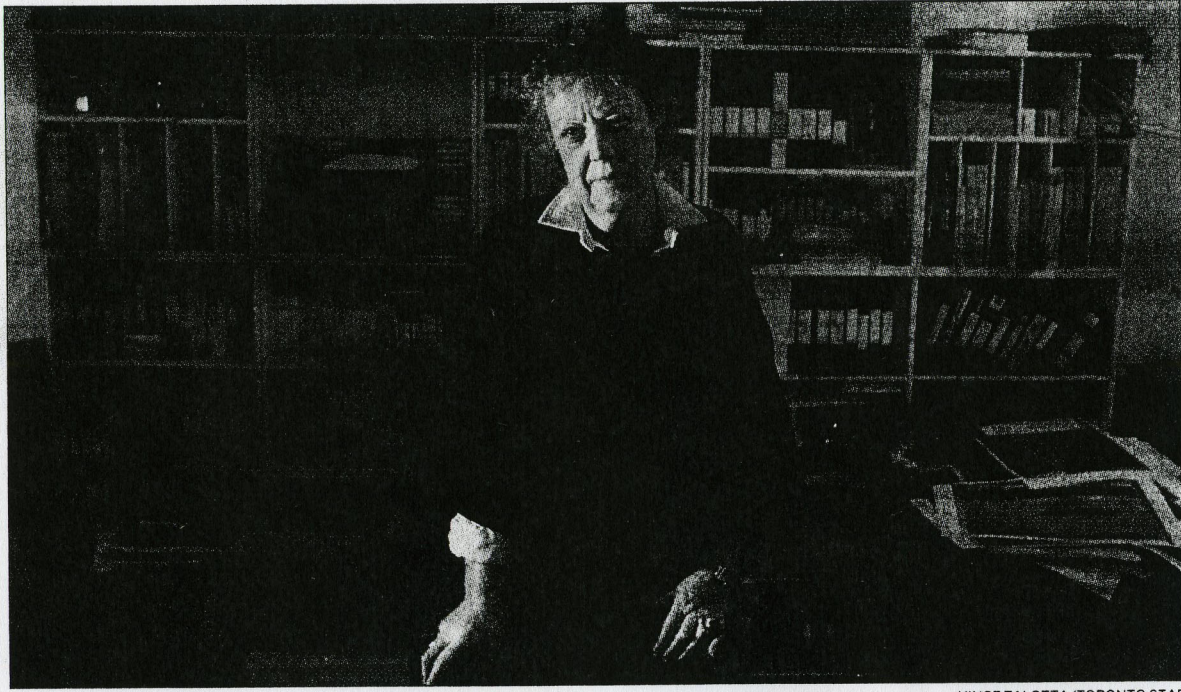
Once started, a Vera Frenkel piece never really ends.

For Frenkel, the "the work on The Institute won't end until I have that first glass of wine in my hand at (Tuesday's) party," she says. "But for the work itself, Tuesday is just the beginning when we'll be launching the Web site," to be found starting Tuesday at [www.utoronto.ca/gallery](http://www.utoronto.ca/gallery).

"I see it as a form of testimony. It then becomes a place for the testimony of others to come forward."

Check into The Institute. This might be any soulless, bureaucrat-infested joint. You know, the kind of place where the writing on the wall says, "Kafka was here. The Smiths, too."

But Frenkel's fictional Institute is a



VINCE TALOTTA/TORONTO STAR

Toronto artist Vera Frenkel sees her upcoming show at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery as "a form of testimony."

Alt Aussee, near Linz, Austria for a mammoth Hitler art gallery.

"I was invited to respond to the place I was in," she says. "And there I was on the street where Hitler lived. But what I thought was a site-specific work ended up being shown on every continent except India. I could have worked full-time on just the e-mails coming to The Body Missing Project."

If Hitler's mystery place could generate so much interaction, why not invent a mystery all her own?

"I've never bought the notion that artists are particularly delinquent or

work within a kindergarten frame of reference," she says. "I really see the artist as being particularly responsive to the pulse of culture."

The Institute is at the Barnicke Gallery Tuesday to Dec. 18.

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Speaking of institutions, with the new book, *Treasures Of The National Gallery Of Canada*, edited by David Franklin, (National Gallery with the Yale University Press, 288 pages, \$49.95), the story seems to be the museum itself, not the collection.

In his preface, the gallery's well-travelled but beleaguered director, Pierre Théberge, states that, "the mandate of the National Gallery of Canada clearly states, 'the collections are its principal assets.'"

Yet the first inside photo of a night-lit Gallery at night, and the next 12 glorious images, mostly of the Gallery interior, suggest that our tax dollars have been gloriously well spent on the packaging, if not the contents.

There are jewels in *Treasures Of The National Gallery*, like the late Montreal painter Paraskeva Clark's *Pe-*

*troushka* (1937), but unfortunately they're cast in the shadows by the image of the gallery itself. But that's the way of the National Gallery, out-muscling and out-hyping anything inside however great.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Another institution of sorts — the Stephen Bulger Gallery — celebrates last week's move to its new site at 1026 Queen St. W. with "Light Horses," an elegant new show by photographer Alison Rossiter made up of shadowy, silvery images of horses drawn from art history.

Revisiting, if not exactly reinventing, the camera-less process best-known through Man Ray's "Rayographs," Rossiter would trace the image of a horse — taken from something like an Edgar Degas or Eadweard Muybridge original — on light-sensitive gelatin silver paper to create a dark image on a white background. To achieve the reverse effect (a white image on a dark background), she used solarization, where a print is exposed to bright light during its development.

The new gallery boasts more space than at 700 Queen St. W., and a neighbour in filmmaker Atom Egoyan, who owns the building with his business partner Hussain Amarshi.

The Bulger-Egoyan relationship goes back to when Egoyan found inspiration for *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) in a photograph of Quebec's Bertrand Carrière, a Bulger artist showing a family in the snow.

Plans are to eventually have a connecting door from Bulger's gallery in to a future Egoyan film-based gallery and screening room.

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But Frenkel's fictional Institute is a supposedly abandoned hospital in Hamilton — closed by government cuts, of course — that was soon filled with artists. Hamilton also happens to be home to Heritage Minister Sheila Copps.

Frenkel's thinking would seem to be, hey, if you're going to ruffle feathers, make sure they're on the biggest bird.

"Things happened quite quickly," goes a fictional "private and confidential report found by chance on the floor beside the photocopier."

The Institute, so Frenkel's yarn goes, "grew out of a need to combine hospitals and cultural agencies at a time of political upheaval and what was affectionately called downsizing... not for the first time in Canada attention was being paid to what constitutes an artist."

"I do ask myself what kind of artist I am," Frenkel says in an interview. "But usually it's an unconscious question. I mostly ask, 'why do I keep doing this?'"

Frenkel's traditional art roots will show at Tuesday's opening, which will have a number of large digital printouts on canvas taken from the Web site, as well as smaller works and a large video projection.

When it comes to her Institute, Frenkel has many models. They're mostly places she had worked or appeared in, including the Banff Centre, Ottawa's National Gallery, York University and even the CBC, which has already posted one audio component of The Institute at [radio.cbc.ca/programs/artstoday/artontheweb/frenkel.html](http://radio.cbc.ca/programs/artstoday/artontheweb/frenkel.html)

"They all see themselves reflected in some way in The Institute," says Frenkel.

But The Institute also has models in Frenkel's past work, mostly from 1996's "The Body Missing Project" ([yorku.ca/BodyMissing](http://yorku.ca/BodyMissing)), where Frenkel investigated the enormous cache of Nazi-stolen art hidden in the