

Andreia Santana

A Door Handle, A Handshake

04 October 2025–07 February 2026

Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens

Exhibition Text by Séamus Kealy,
Executive Director and Curator, Oakville Galleries

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OAKVILLE GALLERIES

Gairloch Gardens | 1306 Lakeshore Road East, Oakville ON L6J 1L6
Centennial Square | 120 Navy Street, Oakville ON L6J 2Z4

GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Closed Sundays and statutory holidays
Monday (available by appointment)

Admission is always free.
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Oakville Galleries presents solo exhibitions by Andreia Santana at Gairloch Gardens and by Hugo Canoilas at our Centennial Gallery. The artists are both 2025 artists in residence at Oakville Galleries. *The Ship of Tolerance* by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov remains lakeside at Gairloch Gardens until September 2026. Please visit Hugo Canoila's concurrent exhibition at our Centennial Gallery.

A Door Handle, A Handshake is Andreia Santana's first solo exhibition in North America. Developed during her residency at Oakville Galleries, the exhibition features a new series of sculptures that respond directly to the gallery architecture and surrounding environment. This exhibition has been a work in progress in Oakville during the artist's residency, and as such, the artist has drawn upon a few references—architectural, literary and sculptural—while producing her works here on site at Oakville Galleries.

Firstly, the exhibition title quotes Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa from his book, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. In his book, Pallasmaa argues that Western architecture has become too focused on vision, leading to an impoverished, "ocularcentric" constructed environment. This western-centric vision, he argues, goes back to ancient Greek culture, where sight has been privileged over other senses. Modern architecture and its pedagogies are thus less sensory, leading to a detached, more alienated experience and diminishing our interaction and awareness altogether. Pallasmaa speaks in terms of an "imagery of persuasion" in modern architecture, which leaves aside artistic, societal, and ethical autonomy while emphasizing a techno-economic, professionalized logic. Pallasmaa advocates instead for

a return to multi-sensory experiences, where haptics, sound, smell, and even bodily sensation and temperature are integrated into the design and creation of architecture, fostering a deeper, more palpable connection between people and their surroundings. He emphasizes the notion of bodily experience as a central aspect for designing and being within architecture. Ultimately, Pallasmaa contends for a more humane approach to architecture as a kind of playful, suggestive manifesto for our future. We might see much of the modern urban architecture surrounding us therefore as lacking from this perspective, and in a dialectical manner, then itself being an invitation to try things differently in the future. That is, the cold and brutalistic tendencies found in modern and contemporary architecture might spur new open and humanistic approaches to future architecture.

The artist has been inspired by these notions, especially in the context of this exhibition. Drawn to the architecture of the gallery here at Gairloch Gardens, the artist makes and arranges her work in the spaces, emphasizing the first tactile impressions a person has with a building. Her sculptures come off the walls as if themselves inspired by and emerging from the more humanistic elements of the architecture, or indeed its very human histories both as a domestic setting and a very active gallery for art—also emphasizing a sense of touch and tenderness especially. Just as a handshake can portray a sense of someone's character, she notes, a door handle communicates and reinforces its connection to the user, and to the architectural experience through touch, material, and design. The large windows that look out to the seasonally changing landscape of the gardens come into play with the exhibition, and are echoed in her sculptures—here even more than our usual exhibitions, as the tactility of the gardens - and not simply their appearance - are called into play. Having spent much of this past summer as well as the early parts of the autumn here, Andreia Santana

has immersed herself in this architecture and place, and all her work in the exhibition arises or is included in keeping with her sensitivity to the place—tactile, audible, sensory, as well as, visual. There is also a thoughtful interplay of light and shadow created from the placement of the screens and frames of the sculptures as well as the glass sculptures and small glass encasings in the screens. Within these small glass encasings, which are carefully soldered into the mesh-sculptures, one sees fossil-like shapes, suggestive of the passing of time and the temporality, vulnerability and fragility of all life.

The artist also references Canadian author Lisa Robertson's first novel *The Baudelaire Fractal* in her exhibition. This 2020 book blends magical realism, literary criticism, and arcane memoir. In this complex work, a female poet wakes up one day in a hotel room having written all of Charles Baudelaire's works. The book explores intersections of identity, authorship, and notions of artistic canon, especially with a feminist rereading of literary tradition. In a gesture of curiosity and admiration, as well as a nod to Robertson's unorthodox rereading of Baudelaire, Santana references another artist - namely, the sculptures, commissioned public art works and interventions of Canadian artist Ron Baird from the 1970s to the 1980s. Indeed, Ron Baird was commissioned to design the gates at our Centennial Gallery site, which are there to this day. These gates can be seen both outside the building as well as within, where they are adjacent to the interior and exterior gallery entrances. Throughout many of the works in this exhibition, we see curious shapes, often appearing like arcane letters or numerals, that sit within the mesh-screen sculptures. These arise out of Ron Baird's historical works - both the doors at the Centennial Library and Gallery in downtown Oakville, as well as other sculptural works that the artist has found through researching Ron Baird's oeuvre over the many years he has been producing.

With a practice focused mainly on sculpture, Andreia Santana's works are often marked by a minimalist approach. Her sculptures convey a sense of fragility and vulnerability while expressing a poetic force. Her work also often explores notions of collective “transcorporeality” and material performativity, utilizing sculpture as a platform for interventions that incorporate movement and action. We see these approaches at work here in a site-specific set of sculptural and architectural gestures, arising from and at play with the spaces she has so carefully come to know. Consciously arranged in the gallery space, her translucent, metal-mesh sculptures integrate the interior architecture of the space and the external landscape of the garden, while also revealing near-invisible glass elements within their interiors. They invite us to ponder on themes of architecture and space, human presence as well as authorship, gender, and the relationship between language and the self.

We thank Andreia Santana for her stay with us and also her commitment to onsite production, where the near entirety of this exhibition has been developed while she has been in residence between July and October 2025.

About The Artist

Andreia Santana (Lisbon, 1991) lives and works in New York and Vienna. Her work has been exhibited at the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art (Porto); CCB (Lisbon); MAAT (Lisbon); In Extenso (Clermont-Ferrand); CIAJG (Guimarães); Hangar (Lisbon); Spazio Leonardo – Generali (Milan); Sans Titre (Paris); Wiener Art Foundation (Vienna); Chiado 8/Culturgest (Lisbon); UNA (Milan); Filomena Soares Gallery (Lisbon); Scherben (Berlin); Galeria Municipal do Porto; Hunter College Galleries, and Louis Reed (New York).

Special Program in Gairloch Gardens:

Ilya & Emilia Kabakov: *The Ship of Tolerance*

Gairloch Gardens

Until September 2026

Welcoming hundreds of visitors daily, *The Ship of Tolerance* continues to compel visitors to envision our future together with hope, resilience, imaginative foresight and a global conscience. After engaging in workshops with the artists and gallery team, two thousand children created paintings that express their visions of tolerance and how that influences robust notions of humanitarianism in society. These paintings make up the ship's sails. The Ship of Tolerance is presented in collaboration with the Ilya and Emilia Kabakov Foundation, and with The National Gallery of Canada. The National Gallery of Canada's National Engagement initiative is generously supported by Michael Nesbitt, with additional funding from the National Gallery of Canada Foundation.

Ilya & Emilia Kabakov have long been amongst the most celebrated artists of our times, widely known as pioneers of installation art. Ilya and Emilia began their artistic partnership in the late 1980s, and were married in 1992. Together, they have produced a prolific output of total installations, paintings and other conceptual works addressing ideas of utopia, dreams, and fear, all reflective of the universal human condition. Their work has been exhibited world-wide in leading museums and biennials. ArtNews Magazine listed the Kabakovs amongst the ten most important living artists in the world. Since Ilya passed away in 2023, Emilia continues realizing their projects into the future.

Related Exhibition

Hugo Canoilas: *Hold Your Breath*

04 October 2025–07 February 2026

Oakville Galleries at Centennial Square



About Oakville Galleries

Oakville Galleries is a contemporary art museum in two locations presenting international and Canadian artists. Housed in a unique lakeside mansion in the magnificent Gairloch Gardens and a white cube gallery downtown, Oakville Galleries is one of Canada's leading contemporary art institutions. Supported by The Town of Oakville, Canada Council, Ontario Arts Council, sponsors, patrons and members. All curatorial programming is by Séamus Kealy, Executive Director.