

# Jeanine Oleson

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Jeanine Oleson, *The Rocky Horror Opera Show*, 2014, still from two-channel video installation.

Jeanine Oleson is an interdisciplinary artist based in New York. This spring, the New Museum is hosting the first museum presentation of her work, which springs from her four-month residency at the institution and which will include an experimental opera, an exhibition, and a series of public programs and workshops. The exhibition, “Hear, Here,” is on view from April 23 to July 6, 2014.

**I’VE BEEN THINKING** about the importance of the audience, and more specifically about what constitutes an engaged audience member. Fran Lebowitz once made a comment about the loss of artists, cultural producers, and audiences of people with specific knowledge during the AIDS crisis, and that left a mark on my mind—this idea of a caring engagement that’s nonprofessionalized and more like a nineteenth-

century connoisseur (as opposed to the ways in which late capitalism has made us all completely dependent on professionalism to drive, well, our drives). So I started to interview opera buffs, because I love people who hold such a vast and fascinating knowledge on this subject and I'm interested in how it is driven by a personal set of concerns. You can't buy the knowledge of opera or of dance; you actually have to invest in it. That's something that's fascinating to me: There's the accumulating information but then there's also a bodily love that's not about the information—it's more of a passion. What drives people to love ideas?

Around the same time, I began to work on *Photo Requests from Solitary*, a project in which we asked people held in solitary confinement to request an image of something they wanted to see, since they are blocked from seeing most images, and in some ways it felt like a polar opposite to the kind of work I've been planning for the New Museum. But in the end, I think that both of these projects are mostly about access, and how one cares for another or for the external, and also how one does something that isn't necessarily connected to them directly or doesn't benefit them, as well as the need for connection or outlet.

I've also been thinking about how to hold two incompatible ideas and produce something new from them, and so in the show and its public performances there will be objects that grapple with this—for instance there's a brass instrument based on the shape of the inner ear, and there's a light that is based on an eyeball, but instead of collecting light it actually emits light. We will have a series of nine public programs as a part of the exhibition, including talks, protest karaoke, séances, letters from solitary, and performances with objects in the show like Kelly Pratt playing the horn.

Everything I make ends up filtered through humor and absurdity. For instance: We had a two-act program at the museum in the beginning of March—*The Rocky Horror Opera Show*—which was based on a traditional opera performance situation, where singers performed a normal repertoire of beloved arias. For the audience, we invited opera aficionados—because they have a set relationship to performance—as well as a wider art crowd. It turned out to be really funny, and a two-channel video of the event will be in the exhibition, along with the eighty-plus costumes we made for it. I also asked the museum to bring in Cori Ellison, a dramaturge, as the music curator for the season and as a collaborator on the *Rocky Horror Opera Show*. It's been so inspiring to see her passion for opera and the voice, and that's something I really hope to share. With all the public programs and events, there will be a multitude of voices. There will probably be no dream of a common language—apologies to Adrienne Rich.