

NEW MUSEUM, NEW YORK

APRIL 23–JULY 6, 2014

EVER

HEAR

JEANINE OLESON

During her intensive residency at the New Museum, Jeanine Oleson has developed a group of interrelated new works, constituting an exhibition, public programs, workshops, and an experimental opera. An exploration of different kinds of voices—from the musical voice of opera to political acts of speech—Oleson’s project both investigates language and points beyond it. Looking for alternative models, “Hear, Here” asks questions such as: How can we attune ourselves to each other? Where is the agency in language? What does it really mean to listen?

In this context, during the run of the show, Oleson presents an expanded video installation for the Museum’s Fifth Floor gallery. This installation is based on the public program “The Rocky Horror Opera Show,” an event that took place in the New Museum Theater on March 7, and includes a set and objects for an experimental performance (to be staged in the New Museum’s Theater, June 13–14). Centering on a paradoxical landscape—a mountain that is also a cave—the exhibition and its constantly shifting elements (including musical instruments, staging tools, and performance artifacts) produce a reactive space that focuses on the politics of vocalizing perspectives and the necessity of participation in lived experience.

HEAR

GALLERY SESSIONS

A series of public events that take place within the Fifth Floor exhibition. Each session is led by invited guests who react to the concepts and objects being presented in “Hear, Here.” Free with admission to the Museum.

Thursday May 1, 7 PM
Another Protest Song: Karaoke with a Message

“Another Protest Song: Karaoke with a Message” looks to the karaoke song-book as a potential source of political enunciation through song. This event is an open invitation for visitors to sing these songs of protest on International Worker’s Day!

ANGEL NEVAREZ and VALERIE TEVERE’s projects and research investigate contemporary music and sound, the electro-magnetic spectrum, dissent, and public fora. Their work has been exhibited internationally in museums and biennials and they have received numerous fellowships including a Creative Capital fellowship, an Art Matters grant, and an NEA project grant.

Sunday May 4, 3 PM
Jean Casella and Five Mualim-ak: Voices from Solitary

Tens of thousands of men, women, and children live in solitary confinement in US prisons, spending twenty-three to twenty-four hours a day alone in small, bare cells. Jean Casella and Five Mualim-ak will present a series of letters and drawings reflecting lives lived in complete isolation, and the hosts and audience will collectively read these letters.

JEAN CASELLA is Codirector and Editor-in-Chief of Solitary Watch, a watchdog website founded to help bring the hidden human rights issue of solitary confinement in US prisons into the light. FIVE MUALIM-AK was released in 2012 from New York State prison, where he spent five years in solitary confinement. He is a prison reform activist and Founder and Director of the Incarcerated Nation Campaign.

Friday May 9, 3 PM
Joy Askew: Songs for Animals

Joy Askew will perform a series of songs about animals and their rights as an extension of ethics. She will use piano and live multilayered vocal tracks and loops to build up layered sound.

Originally from the North of England, JOY ASKEW has made New York City her home for thirty years. She has played and sung in bands with such luminary artists as Joe Jackson, Peter Gabriel, and Laurie Anderson, and released eight solo albums, the latest of which is *Drunk On You*.

Saturday May 10, 3 PM
Rainy Orteca: Field Recordings
Rainy Orteca will make field recordings of the exhibition, finding the voice/char-

acter of some of the objects presented in “Hear, Here.” Recording, editing, looping, and playing these respective “voices” back from their physical location, Orteca will generate diegetic and non-diegetic sounds that riff on “public” versus “private.”

RAINY ORTECA is a musician, sound designer, DJ, and composer based in New York. Recent work has been performed at Exit Art, Recess Art Gallery, and 25CPW in New York. As a performing musician, she has worked with notable artists, such as Sarah Silverman, Antony and the Johnsons, Lou Reed, Lloyd Cole, The Blow, Divinyls, Nina Persson, Maggie Cheung, Lesley Gore, Mascott, and Cat Power. She performs under the moniker Dead Air.

Sunday May 18, 3 PM
Courtesy the Artists: Choir Practice
Courtesy the Artists will work with the audience to make a provisional choir, interpreting songs of self-empowerment and transforming individual narcissism into group feeling.

Courtesy the Artists is a collaboration between MALIK GAINES and ALEXANDRO SEGADE, based in New York. Courtesy the Artists invites artists and others to interpret, react to, and enjoy historical texts that inform present creative conditions.

Saturday May 24, 4:30 PM
Beatriz Santiago Muñoz: An informal séance with the ghost of Carlos La Sombra

Carlos La Sombra was a charismatic prisoners’ rights activist, anticolonialist, and Founder of the Netas, a prisoners’ organization. In 1974, he spoke to law students at the University of Puerto Rico. A recording of this talk has been recovered and made public. During this afternoon, Beatriz Santiago Muñoz will attempt to call up, talk to, play with, and break free the spirit of Carlos La Sombra using his powerful voice. The original audio recording of Carlos La Sombra was made by Gache Franco.

BEATRIZ SANTIAGO MUÑOZ is an artist based in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Her work draws from experiments in film, ethnography, and theater, and develops out of periods of observation and documentation. Her work has been exhibited recently at the Mercosul Biennial, Brazil, San Juan Triennial Polígrafica, Glasgow International, and Tate Modern. She is Co-founder of Beta-Local.

Saturday May 31, 3 PM
Cara Baldwin: Human Microphone
Engaging the audience as a human

microphone, Cara Baldwin will attempt a total occupation of acoustic space in the New Museum. The experiment is twofold: first, the space will be collectively claimed through reflexive vocal generation(s); and second, the limits of our voices and the space as cultural site and material form will be explored.

CARA MICHELLE BALDWIN is a PhD candidate in Art History, Theory, Criticism, and Practice in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of California. Her current research is an examination of the cultural imaginary and aesthetic forms embedded within the Occupy Movement. As a Co-founding Editor of *Occupy Everything* (and/or *evacuated*) and the *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, Baldwin has participated in an extended exploration of the boundaries and interstices of aesthetics and protest.

Sunday June 1, 3 PM
Jaleh Mansoor: Negative Articulation Toward Revolution

Jaleh Mansoor will explore forms of negative articulation (silence, negative space, spacing, figure/ground hierarchies) that tend toward both micro and macro “revolution” in everyday life: on an intimate level, subtle yet fundamental transformations in interpersonal relationships; and on the macro register, anticapitalist strategies of resistance ultimately in the service of direct action against industries of resource extraction from mining to oil.

JALEH MANSOOR works on problems located at the intersection of aesthetic abstraction and abstraction (capitalism) in both modern and contemporary art. Her first book, *Marshall Plan Modernism*, which addresses formal and procedural violence in the work of Alberto Burri, Lucio Fontana, and Piero Manzoni, is forthcoming from Duke University Press. She is an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of British Columbia.

Thursday June 5, 7 PM
Kelly Pratt: Live Aurihorn Performance

Kelly Pratt will compose and perform a piece of music specifically for the Aurihorn (conceived and designed by Jeanine Oleson) that will highlight unique characteristics and quirks of the ear-shaped instrument.

KELLY PRATT is an in-demand composer, arranger, and instrumentalist. He has worked with hundreds of artists (in many different capacities) including Arcade Fire, David Byrne/St. Vincent, Beirut, Coldplay, and LCD Soundsystem.

VOICE MUSIC SERIES

In conjunction with Jeanine Oleson’s exhibition, guest music curator Cori Ellison (Dramaturg at Glyndebourne Festival Opera and previously at New York City Opera, 1997–2010) has organized a series of musical events exploring the possibilities of the operatic voice. Purchase tickets online at newmuseum.org.

\$10 Members
\$12 General Public

Friday March 7, 7 PM
The Rocky Horror Opera Show

A quartet of opera singers performs operatic standards to live accompaniment while an audience of die-hard opera fans and the general public are encouraged to dress up, sing along, dance, or do whatever they’re moved to do, but normally restricted from doing.

Friday April 25, 7 PM
The Voice of Joseph Keckler

Transposing mundane lived experiences into an operatic medium, Keckler shares an evening of new work, including fragments from a work-in-progress in which he playfully skewers televised singing competitions.

Friday May 2, 7 PM
The Voice of Kristin Norderval

Norderval presents a selection of works for voice and laptop with a focus on live vocal sampling, real-time audio processing, and sounds recorded from discarded and decaying pianos.

Friday May 30, 7 PM
The Voice of Toby Newman

Newman melds traditional classical vocalism with vanguard extended vocal methods and ancient and diverse ethnographic techniques.

FINAL PERFORMANCE

Friday June 13, 7 PM
Saturday June 14, 3 PM
Jeanine Oleson: Opera Premiere

Beginning on a mountain and ending in a cave, this new experimental opera is presented in two acts and moves between absurd impossibility and a new terrain on which to voice agency.

EMBODYING THE PARADOX: JEANINE OLESON’S “HEAR, HERE”

In 1939, Winston Churchill coined the phrase, “A riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” He was, of course, referring to Russia and its then-pending response to the Nazi regime. Yet, for all the particularity of that initial context, Churchill’s depiction of an unanswerable question stuck—perhaps because his formulation is, counterintuitively, undeniably spatial. Sigmund Freud, too, put forward a remarkably textured metaphor to depict the most obtuse objects of the unconscious. In his famous study *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud argues that many dreams contain one detail truly impossible to plumb and decode. This, he writes, “is the dream’s navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown.”

Churchill and Freud hardly seem the most natural figures with which to frame a short essay devoted to Jeanine Oleson, an artist whose work often foregrounds feminist and queer representation, and looks to collective modes of production. But politics and the psyche—the respective purviews of Churchill and Freud—can be said to bracket Oleson’s practice, even while serving in her hands as tools to posit overtly unconventional histories and narratives. Indeed, these “other” histories and narratives are frequently the ones left untold, undocumented, unrecognized, suppressed, or, on the other hand, produced via fantasy, desire, or sheer willpower. Oleson’s are, impossibly, *future* histories that upend embedded, naturalized hierarchies and ideologies simply by offering visible alternatives to them.

To this end, the artist’s ongoing research around the concept of the “paradox” produces a kind of strange spatial analogy, rhyming with and complicating those recounted above. Etymologically, “paradox” is defined as “against popular opinion,” and can be understood aesthetically as a vessel capable of holding together two incompatible ideas or things. Oleson pursues the promises and perils attending paradox by looking closely at culture, both contemporary and historical, and by mapping paradox’s material contours, finding its form within, say, the physical landscape, or as portrayed through society’s most ubiquitous inherited allegories.

This mapping takes literal shape most obviously within the “mountain/cave” that is presented as a sculptural form during Oleson’s exhibition at the New Museum and as part of a theater set during the run of her related experimental opera (the piece migrates between the Fifth Floor gallery and the Museum’s performance space). Playing on Plato’s famous parable, in which knowledge is so often revealed to rest upon illusion, Oleson creates a topological structure at once interior and exterior—both a mountain (a structure often aligned with power, sovereignty, and sight) and a cave (associated with the subterranean, submission, blindness). Yet, while calling upon Plato’s long-standing binary, Oleson’s rendition has little fidelity: She ultimately disavows hard-and-fast distinctions between outside and inside, and, in a related vein, insists that the aural is as vital as the visual when it comes to the premises on which Plato’s story rests.

As part of this endeavor, the overdetermined, if also mostly ignored, aspects of landscape, language, and Plato’s cave itself are pressured by Oleson’s project. While the artist insists in her “mountain/cave” that two seemingly opposite structures share a single skin, she also highlights the feminist origins, in every sense, driving her project. Alongside the hand-made, felt-lined “mountain/cave” are images of hollows and cleaves in nature—caves—so sensuous that they cannot help but recall

similar openings in the human body. This kind of metaphoric slide happens yet again when Oleson presents images and allusions to the biological apparatus that produces spoken word and sung sound—the vocal cords, which, even when presented clinically, undeniably mimic the look of female sex organs.

Rather than some solution to a riddle, Oleson’s project offers a kind of mise en abyme, in which constellating objects are less clarified than *thickened*. “Hear, Here” began as an inquiry into opera: What conventions does opera necessarily employ? Why does it create a special breed of connoisseurs? What is the ontological nature of its audiences? Yet, when understood alongside Oleson’s other multivalent inquiries, the project is necessarily inflected with the artist’s commitment to, among other things, social justice. While nowhere evident in “Hear, Here,” it bears mentioning that Oleson is currently involved in a long-term project focused on the conditions around solitary confinement in American prisons. A fundamental aspect of torture, that project argues, is enacted by removing the ability to communicate with—to speak with and hear—another.

Oleson describes an interaction she had while interviewing a dedicated opera “fan,” who described his first experience of the form as having affected him viscerally—literally indicating the area of his body, from neck to mid-thigh. Yet for Oleson, such embodiment is anything but a move away from intellect or language. Indeed, in “Hear, Here” viewers will find nearly all such expectations inverted (she presents an ocular apparatus that produces, rather than absorbs, light; and a custom brass horn instrument modeled on the inner ear that nevertheless emits sound instead of receiving it). Oleson highlights the status of objects that sit between performance and sculpture, situated within a theater of “visual art,” and less “displayed” than waiting for their next act. Here, there is no mind/body split, and polemical political positions are converted to songs—and nearly always delivered in key.

—Johanna Burton, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement

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*Jeanine Oleson: “Hear, Here” is on view at the New Museum from April 23 to July 6, 2014, and is curated by Johanna Burton, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement.

*Jeanine Oleson: “Hear, Here” is made possible, in part, through the support of the New York State Council on the Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Additional support for artist residencies is made possible by Laurie Mullert. Generous endowment support is provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Skidmore, Arps Education Programs Fund, and the William Randolph Hearst Endowed Fund for Education Programs at the New Museum. Education and public programs are made possible by a generous grant from Goldman Sachs Gives at the recommendation of David B. Helle & Jerome Roger Heller. The curator would like to extend a special thanks to the Foundation for Contemporary Art, Parsons The New School for Design, and Dazim Creative Fabric Environments.