

SICP

Reinterpretation:

Feminism in Opera

Development

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1. Overall Exhibition Statement

The main purpose of this exhibition is to explore the origin and development of feminism in the ancient and great art form - opera, to reinterpret opera with a contemporary perspective and artistic creation method, and to stimulate people's thinking about the continuous development of feminism by comparing the situation of women in the old era with the lifestyle of women today.

I came up with this idea at the beginning because I have studied opera before, and I understand that the roles and responsibilities of women in different operas are different, and the social status of women in different periods is also different. Therefore, I try to explore the connection between opera and the rise of feminism, explore their correlation in time, and look at the situation of women in the old era through opera from a modern perspective, so as to reflect on the status of women and their rights that still need to be improved at present, and reflect people's thinking on history and the current situation of women's society through contemporary art.

My individual project is based on the research of Simon Lewsen's article. He pointed out that the content adaptation of the opera Carmen is a kind of aversion towards women. Although Carmen is romantic, rebellious and anti-authoritative, as a woman, she still cannot escape the shackles of society. However, due to the adaptation of the opera Carmen, subsequent works about Carmen no longer emphasize the misogynistic plot of society, but rather reflect on feminism and sexual freedom to varying degrees.¹

Therefore, this project aims to explore the connection between the history of opera and the development of feminism. By analyzing the roles played by women in operas of different periods, their costumes and lines, as well as the changes in their status in the performing arts industry, it seeks to examine the development of feminism and when women truly gained freedom and liberation. Additionally, it will re-interpret feminism in opera from a contemporary art perspective, in collaboration with artists Zhuorui Han and Sijia Chen, and present the essence of opera through visual art forms.

This is an interweaving of contemporary art and history, as well as a joint presentation of various art forms. Amid the continuous collision between opera and feminism, it brings people a multi-sensory enjoyment.

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¹ Lewsen, Simon. "Desire, Misogyny, and Official Power in Mark Dornford-May's U-Carmen eKhayelitsha." *Safundi (Nashville, Tenn.)* 13, no. 3–4 (2012): 231–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2012.715415>.

2. Artists

(1) Zhuorui Han

An artist in CAP in Edinburgh college of Art. Her works are distinctive and highly avant-garde, emphasizing natural expression and gender equality.

Her artwork:



Arbor X Hermaphroditum (2025)

Creative concept:

Her works incorporate ceramics, branches, human hair, and quail eggs. By combining ceramics with branches, she creates male and female sexual organs and imitates the texture of skin, symbolizing the coexistence of humans and nature. Zhuorui discovered that the shapes of some plants resemble the private parts of the human body. In human society, there is a natural sense of shame when it comes to sexual organs, but they are just like other organs, all bestowed by nature. Gender should be a gift from nature, and we should have true sexual freedom. Sex should be freely discussed, and the public should receive proper sex education.

At the center of the work are three eggs, symbolizing the fragility and continuity of life, as well as nature's constant blending, nourishing and regenerating. It also implies

that as part of the cycle of rebirth, we should view ourselves from a more natural perspective, reject sexual shame and advocate sexual freedom.

Integration of Concepts:

The concepts mentioned in her works, such as "cherishing the equality between the two sexes" and "viewing sexuality with a natural perspective", are all in line with the content of my exhibition. Exploring the development of feminism in operas is also to release the voices of women, advocating gender equality, sexual liberation and sexual freedom. Women should bravely express themselves, strive for their own rights, and no longer be bound by the worldly perspectives.

(2) Sijia Chen

An artist in CAP in Edinburgh college of Art. Her works emphasize breaking away from traditional social discourses and focus on highlighting the voices of women in her creations.

Her artwork:



Matree, Patree (2025)

Creative concept:

This is a tree made of metal wires wrapped with colorful silk threads. It requires visitors to continuously add new colorful metal wires to the tree, thus forming a larger new tree. It is an art form that involves audience participation. The tree itself represents the patriarchal clan structure of traditional society, while the colorful metal wires symbolize the awakening of women and also represent breaking the shackles of traditional patriarchal society and striving for more women's right to speak, forming a new family and social system.

Audience members can incorporate their own ideas into the creation of the art piece, bending the metal wires into any shape and attaching them to the tree. Everyone can reshape this tree, with each new branch representing a redefinition of tradition. The audience witnesses and participates in the critique and reshaping of patriarchy.

Integration of Concepts:

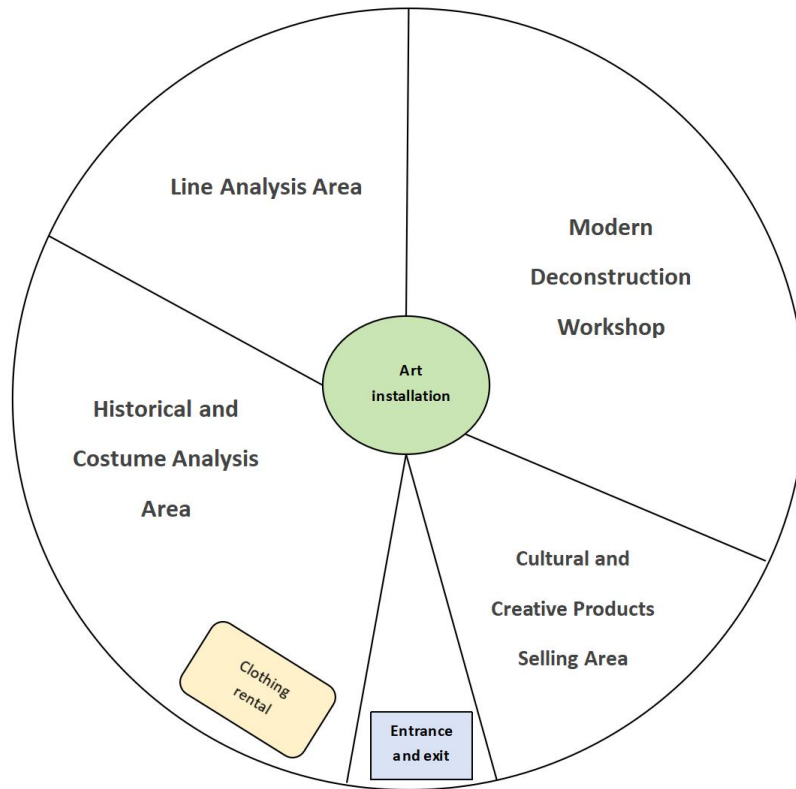
Her work also fits in perfectly with the concept of my exhibition. What I emphasize is the history of the evolution of opera, which is also a history of women gradually gaining social status and rights. They have evolved from roles serving men to new era women who understand the pursuit of freedom and are no longer bound by social morality. The process of women's awakening is like the process of colorful iron wires constantly weaving onto a tree. As more and more new era women emerge, the reconstructed tree grows step by step.

3. Exhibition design

(1) Duration

(2025.08.01-08.15) two weeks

(2) Venue: Summer Hall



The exhibition is set in a circular shape to better present the changes over time, clearly showing the audience the changes in the social status of women in operas, the continuous growth of the feminist movement, and the process of women moving from darkness to light.

- **More details:**

①**Personnel arrangement:** 2 to 3 college students will be recruited as volunteers to manage and operate the exhibition venue. During the early preparation stage, volunteers will also be recruited for moving and exhibition setup.

②Every week, one day is chosen to invite artists to the scene to introduce their artworks to the audience and communicate with them, enabling the audience to have a better understanding of the artworks and the content of the exhibition.

4. Exhibition Contents

The entire exhibition will be divided into four sections, arranged in a clockwise direction from the past to the present. At the center of these four sections, there will be an interactive experience area with a mirror and a visitor's comment book. Visitors can observe the differences between themselves and the images and clothing of women in the past through the mirror, thereby contemplating the significance of women's liberation, and write down their thoughts in the comment book. At the end of the exhibition, there will also be a cultural and creative product sales area to lay the groundwork for further promotion of the exhibition. At the same time, online promotion will be carried out by creating an Instagram account and posting advertisements.

(1) Historical and Costume Analysis Area

The focus of this section is a timeline that combines the history of opera with the development of feminism. This timeline will start from the birth of opera and extend to the modern era. The exhibition will revolve around this timeline, presenting the evolution of female costumes in opera through pictures and exploring the changes in women's social status from the perspective of clothing. Visitors can also rent opera costumes in this area to experience the attire of women in the past. The experience lasts for two hours and there is a dedicated changing room. Detailed information about renting costumes will be provided in the funding section.

Detailed description:

①The specific timeline is roughly as follows:



- The timeline begins from the early days of opera development, when women were not allowed to perform on stage and castrato singers were used instead. Moreover, female characters in operas were mostly goddesses, princesses and other glamorous figures serving men.

- As the feminist movement began, women's social status was constantly rising, and female characters in operas also started to pursue their freedom and rights.

②Visitors can rent opera costumes at the entrance of the exhibition and enter the exhibition hall wearing them for a visit and take photos as souvenirs.

(2) Line Analysis Area



In the dialogue analysis section, an in-depth analysis will be conducted on the changes in dialogues in the four operas "L'orfeo", "Don Giovanni", "Carmen" and "Breaking the waves". These four operas come from different stages of the development of opera, and the social status of women in them is also different. Viewers can make comparative analyses through them. In addition, an interactive area will be set up where viewers can try to read or sing the dialogues in the operas, step into the roles, and think from a modern perspective about how to change the tragic fate of female characters.

Detailed description:

① "L'Orfeo"² is a work by Monteverdi from the early Baroque period, the female character in this opera is one who awaits rescue by a man. "Don Giovanni"³ is an opera by Mozart from the Classical era, all three female characters in this opera to varying degrees demonstrate resistance against the patriarchal society. "Carmen"⁴ is a work by Bizet from the Romantic period, and Carmen is a very classic female character in opera who pursues sexual freedom and liberation and rebels against social dogma. And "Breaking the Waves"⁵ is an adaptation by Missy Mazzoli in 2016. This opera innovatively incorporates electronic music into the genre and downplays the male gaze present in the original film, making it a model of feminist expression in contemporary opera..

② In the interactive area, a TV and two microphones will be set up to allow the audience to select the lines they want to dub and the corresponding opera videos. By reading or singing the lines, the audience can directly experience the situation of women in the old days.

(3) Modern Deconstruction Workshop

In this section, the content of the opera will be deconstructed in a modern way. First, the artworks of the aforementioned two artists will be displayed, reinterpreting feminism from a contemporary art perspective and advocating gender equality and sexual liberation, which will form a sharp contrast with the female characters in historical opera works, provoking the audience's thoughts. Then, the audience will be invited to the interactive area in the center of the exhibition hall to participate in activities and leave messages.

Detailed description:

① The inclusion of works by two artists in this area is aimed at enabling the audience to better appreciate the contemporary artistic expressions of feminism by modern women, thereby demonstrating that modern women have broken free from the shackles once imposed upon them and are reshaping their unique social significance and advocating for a new female voice.

② The purpose of placing a mirror in the interactive area is to allow the audience to observe the differences in the clothing, figures, and aesthetics of women in the old

² "2.4: Monteverdi's L'Orfeo," libretxts humanities, accessed April 24, 2025,

[https://human.libretxts.org/Bookshelves/Music/Music_Appreciation/Music_Appreciation_I_\(Jones\)/02%3A_Baroque/2.04%3A_Monteverdis_LOrfeo](https://human.libretxts.org/Bookshelves/Music/Music_Appreciation/Music_Appreciation_I_(Jones)/02%3A_Baroque/2.04%3A_Monteverdis_LOrfeo).

³ "Don Giovanni," Britannica, accessed April 24, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Don-Giovanni-opera-by-Mozart>

⁴ "Carmen," Britannica, accessed April 24, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Carmen-opera-by-Bizet>.

⁵ "Breaking the waves," accessed April 25, 2025, <https://www.operaventures.org/breaking-the-waves>.

and modern times, enabling them to directly understand how the feminist movement has promoted social progress. Through comparing history, they can also think about what rights modern women can still strive for and what kind of progress they can make, and write their thoughts on the message board.

(4) Cultural and Creative Products Selling Area

Collaborate with artists to design cultural and creative products for this exhibition, such as postcards and badges, to generate revenue for the exhibition and reduce costs. At the same time, use these products to promote the exhibition and attract more visitors.

Detailed description:

①Print the artists' works on postcards and badges, and jointly create cultural and creative products with the artists themed on opera. Meanwhile, attach QR codes on the back of the products or their packaging. Audiences can scan the QR codes to view relevant knowledge about opera and feminism.

②Revenue from the sale of cultural and creative products can be obtained to reduce the overall cost of the exhibition, allowing the budget to be kept within a reasonable range. Detailed information about the revenue will be provided in the funds section.

(5) Online promotion

Three months before the exhibition opens, an Instagram account will be created to promote the exhibition's preparations, content, artists and cultural and creative products, attracting more people to visit. At the same time, knowledge about the development of opera and feminism will also be shared.

• More details:

①**Ticket price: Free.** This exhibition is a small-scale one by unknown artists. If we charged for admission, it would not attract a large audience. Therefore, we adopt a model where the exhibition is free of charge, but other experience projects and cultural and creative products are subject to fees.

②**The reason for choosing this period of time:** The Edinburgh Festival will be held in August. During this period, there will be many theatrical performances, which are highly consistent with the theme of this exhibition - opera. In addition, the festival

will bring a huge influx of people, and the number of tourists will increase, which is a great opportunity for less well-known exhibitions.

5. Audience and accessibility

(1) Avant-garde art enthusiasts and experimental theater groups

- Basis for positioning: Summerhall is one of the core venues of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, renowned for its experimental and interdisciplinary art. It has hosted highly-acclaimed avant-garde plays such as "Genius" and "Insider".

- Feasibility: The exhibition features an interactive opera deconstruction zone (recreating female character lines through voiceovers and reinterpreting feminism through installations), attracting audiences passionate about innovative expressions.

(2) Local university students and young creators

- Basis for positioning: Students from the University of Edinburgh, the College of Art, and other institutions are an active group at Summerhall, with high participation during the Fringe Festival.

- Feasibility: Invite students to serve as exhibition artists to attract more young artists to visit and exchange.

(3) International Art Festival Visitors and Tourism Industry

Stakeholders

- Basis for Targeting: During the Edinburgh August Festival, there are over 200,000 visitors per day, and tourists from all over the world gather in Edinburgh to participate in the festival. Summerhall is a popular venue for art exhibitions.

- Feasibility: Implement a multilingual tour guide system, highlighting the connection between the exhibitions and international feminist issues (such as comparing the portrayal of women in European and Chinese operas).

(4) Local women and feminist advocates

- Basis for targeting: Edinburgh is a city that highly respects women, and Summerhall has previously hosted an exhibition paying tribute to a feminist punk band.

- Feasibility: This exhibition is centered around the development of feminism in opera and features many innovative elements that can spark discussions.

6. Ethics

(1) Gender Equality and De-stereotyping Representation

- In the interpretation of female characters in opera, it is necessary to avoid reinforcing gender biases, critically analyze stereotypical labels such as "victim" and "redeemer" in traditional narratives, and instead highlight the subjectivity and spirit of resistance of women.

- Show the multi-faceted nature of female characters, and use multiple works for comparison, avoiding simplifying their complexity into a single symbol.

(2) Language and Accessibility

- Offer multilingual tour services (such as English, Scottish Gaelic, etc.) and barrier-free facilities (such as Braille introductions, sign language guides) to ensure the participation rights of people with disabilities and non-native English speakers.

- Avoid using overly academic terms to prevent raising the threshold of understanding. Balance professionalism and public acceptance through narrative storytelling (such as character dialogue analysis).

(3) Safety and Ethical Review

- For sensitive plots involving violence, suicide, etc. (such as the murder ending in "Carmen"), content warnings should be set and psychological counseling resources provided.

- When using interactive devices, positive guidance mechanisms should be designed to avoid triggering traumatic experiences for the audience.

(4) Physical Security and Compliance

- Adherence to UK exhibition safety regulations: This includes the use of fire-resistant materials for booths, setting up emergency exits (aisle width ≥ 1.5 meters), and compliance testing of electrical equipment, etc.
- Protection of labor rights: Employ local union-registered workers to build booths and avoid handling high-risk construction tasks independently.

(5) Environmental Sustainability

- Use recyclable materials to make exhibition boards (such as bamboo fiber composite boards), reduce single-use printed materials, and adopt digital guides instead of paper brochures.

(6) Academic Integrity and Transparency

- Pay attention to copyright and citation norms, clearly marking the sources of opera excerpts, academic papers and artworks.
- When using digital exhibits (such as opera video clips), obtain authorization from the copyright holder or select resources in the public domain.

(7) Respect the Copyright and Interests of Artists

- Fully respect the artists' rights to interpret their artworks and their copyrights. Any operation must be approved by the artists, and artworks must not be used as exhibits or commodities without their consent.

(8) Potential Risks and Recommendations for Response

- Cultural controversy risk: If the content involves religious or gender-sensitive issues, set up a feedback wall for the audience to collect diverse opinions.
- Technical ethics risk: When using audience portraits, comply with the UK's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), clearly inform the audience of the purpose of the data and obtain written consent.

7. Budget

(1) Expenses

Items	Quantity/Duration	Amount(s)
Venue rental	Two weeks	£ 2100
Purchase of costumes	10	£ 600
TV	2 units / 14 days	£ 840
Microphones	2 units / 14 days	£ 200
Artist	2 people / 5 days	£ 2264
Other materials	(Display boards and display stands)	£ 500
Cultural and creative products	200 (100 postcards + 100 badges)	£ 200
Emergency funds		£ 200
Total		£ 6904

- Buying ordinary material costumes is cheaper than renting them, and they are newer and cleaner.

- The rental fee for one TV is 20 pounds, so two TV sets for 14 days cost 560 pounds. The remaining 280 pounds are for the transportation, maintenance and deposit of the TV sets. The total rental cost of the microphone is £140, and the remaining £60 is for transportation and maintenance.

- The time for hiring the artist is divided into two days for explaining the artworks at the exhibition and three days for creating cultural and creative products.
- The cost price of all cultural and creative products is one pound per piece.

(2)Income

Items	Quantity	Amount(s)
Costumes rental	10(10 pounds per piece, two weeks)	£ 2800(Minimum)
Cultural and creative products	200(Postcards:£2/each, Badges:£3/each)	£ 500(Minimum)
Total		£ 3300

•The minimum income of £2,800 for clothing rental is calculated based on each piece of clothing being rented out only once a day. If the footfall increases, the income from clothing rental will rise further.

• Cultural and creative products are also sold at the lowest price. If the design is good enough or the sales volume is large enough, the unit price can be further increased or additional production can be added.

8. Timeline

(1) Timeline Overview

Stage	Time node	Key tasks
Preliminary preparations	03-07/2025	Resource integration, publicity launch, material procurement

Transportation and Exhibition Setup	25-31/07/2025	Equipment transportation, site arrangement, technical commissioning
Exhibition operation	01-15/08/2025	Daily management, event execution, data collection
Dismantling the exhibition	16-18/08/2025	Site clearance, equipment return, summary and feedback

(2) Detailed schedule

Time	Task	Execution details
March	Confirm the venue	Sign a venue rental contract with Summerhall, confirm details such as electricity and security, and apply for event insurance covering equipment damage and public liability.
April	Team formation and content design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit and train 8 volunteers, who will be respectively responsible for transportation, guiding, and venue security. Confirm the exhibits with the artists and complete the design and sampling of cultural and creative products.
May	Arrangement of Material Procurement and Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Order 10 sets of clothing, rent 2 display screens, customize display boards, and confirm the mode of transportation. Produce digital tour guide content.
June	Launch of publicity campaign	Create an Instagram account and post exhibition previews.
The first two weeks of July	Final confirmation	Test the interactive device (voiceover system) and print 200 copies of cultural

		and creative products.
25-26/July	Equipment Transportation and Reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The display screens and board, clothing and cultural and creative products are directly delivered to Summerhall by the suppliers. • Check the integrity of the equipment and products.
27-29/July	Venue arrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up exhibition areas, place artworks and interactive installations. • Install televisions and adjust the audio system.
30/July	Technical testing and safety review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test the stability of the interactive device. • Check the emergency exit signs.
31/July	Final adjustments and rehearsals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers simulate the guided tour process, and artists confirm the placement of exhibits. • Launch countdown promotion.
01-15/August	Daily operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers take turns to be responsible for guiding tours, monitoring equipment, selling cultural and creative products, and ensuring the safety of the exhibition hall. • Every Saturday is the artist-in-residence day, when artists interact with the audience in the exhibition hall. • Collect audience feedback, tally the daily number of costume rentals and sales of cultural and creative products, and make timely adjustments. • Gather the contents of

		the message board for the operation of the Instagram account and the closing report.
16-18/August	Dismantling the exhibition	Volunteers dismantled the display boards, returned the rented equipment and cleared the garbage on the site.
17/August	Financial settlement and feedback	Sum up total expenditures and income, generate financial reports. And pay fees to artists.
18/August	Digital archiving and publicity wrap-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upload the exhibition content to the Summerhall digital archive. • Post the closing tweet on Instagram, and release the selected photos of the exhibition and audience comments.

The above is all the content of my SICP. I hope Summerhall will adopt my planning proposal and create an outstanding exhibition together!