(SEPTEMBER 1, NEW YORK CITY)—Performa, the internationally acclaimed organization dedicated to live interdisciplinary performance by visual artists, is pleased to announce details for the ninth edition of its city-wide biennial. The program will focus on New York City as it re-emerges from the prolonged trauma of the pandemic that has radically altered our way of life, affecting the larger social infrastructure as well as the everyday details of our day-to-day existence. Taking place almost entirely outdoors from October 12-31, the Performa 2021 Biennial will use the city as its backdrop, and feature new live performances by Kevin Beasley, Ericka Beckman, Sara Cwynar, Danielle Dean, Madeline Hollander, Andrés Jaque (Office for Political Innovation), Tschabalala Self, and Shikeith. For the first time in its sixteen-year history, the entire Biennial will be open to the public free of charge.
Set against Manhattan’s skyscrapers, Pictures Generation artist Ericka Beckman will present STALK, an alternative version of the fairy tale Jack and the Beanstalk in which workers revolt against capitalist domination. Kevin Beasley will stage his first outdoor live performance at a downtown Manhattan intersection: using microphones to magnify the faint sounds that usually disappear into the white noise of Manhattan—of performers, the happenings of our surroundings, and his own sculptures—Beasley will ‘play’ the street and its inhabitants back to audiences.

Artist and choreographer Madeline Hollander will collaborate with 25 professional dancers from New York City’s iconic dance companies who were forced to cancel public performances due to the pandemic shutdown. Together, on stage, Hollander interweaves these cancelled choreographies as an ode to the dancers of New York City. Pittsburgh-based artist Shikeith will present a bio-mythographic opera that, through the dancing body, shines a light on the metaphysical qualities of the color blue alongside a story of becoming a symbolic spill, expressed through the psyches of Black queer men that remain possessed by Western colonization. Tschabalala Self will present her first live performance, an intimate play about a couple, taking place on a sculptural stage in a Harlem park that incorporates the iconography of Self’s paintings, including brightly colored geometric patterns and allusions to human figures.

British-American artist Danielle Dean will bring together a cast of online gig workers and actors to revisit events that took place at Fordlândia, a short-lived rubber plantation established by Henry Ford in the Amazon in the 1920s, drawing connections to the global monopoly of the e-commerce company Amazon.com. Architect Andrés Jaque (Office for Political Innovation) will create a performance exploring New York’s use of UltraClear™ glass, an environmentally toxic yet highly sought-after new building material that has superior optical clarity, creating the illusion of “clear skies.” For her first live performance, photographer Sara Cwynar will transform an empty commercial store front into a photo studio and explore how image and language are used to create false social and political realities, online and in real life. By performing various tasks that lead to the construction of a new image, mixed with voiceovers and musical interludes, the artist will address the overwhelming media bombardment that we experience in contemporary society.
“We are thrilled to be forging ahead with the Performa 2021 Biennial after an unimaginable eighteen months, and to once again be working with a remarkable group of artists to present ambitious new performances, some working live for the first time,” says RoseLee Goldberg, Founding Director & Chief Curator of Performa. “Each artist has barreled through the limitations and pressures that this period has imposed on us all, as well as their working methods as artists, to arrive at poignant and inspiring productions that will reveal very different facets of the city. The ninth edition of the Performa Biennial will capture the powerful energy that drives New Yorkers and will show that its artists and art communities are as resilient and bold as ever.”

Kathy Noble, Senior Curator & Head of Curatorial Affairs, continues: “We always begin with the artist’s idea. This is central to our thinking. We then work with the artist to develop and produce complex, ambitious works—on this occasion nearly exclusively in outdoor spaces all over the city. This year we are looking at New York anew through the lens of the artist’s eyes, while supporting them to make works they would not be able to make in a traditional brick and mortar institution. We chose to focus on mostly New York based artists, to think about the city, its communities, and its transformation.”

Coinciding with the Biennial, the organization will release *On the Town, A Performa Compendium: 2016–2021*, a new publication providing a vivid account of some of the most important conversations and debates of the past five years around performance and the visual arts. Edited by Charles Aubin, Curator & Head of Publications, *On the Town* features documentation, interviews and texts about Performa Commissions and projects by more than one hundred international artists, choreographers, architects, musicians, theater and film directors, including Nairy Baghramian and Maria Hassabi, Yto Barrada, Elizabeth Diller, William Kentridge, Barbara Kruger, Kia LaBeija, Julie Mehretu and Jason Moran, Nicholas Hlobo, Zanele Muholi, Gaetano Pesce, Paul Pfeiffer, Yvonne Rainer, Bunny Rogers, Kemang Wa Lehulere, Mabel O. Wilson, and more.

Performa is also pleased to debut the Performa 2021 Biennial website, designed by Special-Offer and featuring a full schedule of performances, commission descriptions, in-depth video interviews with artists, and more. An outdoor Press Conference with many of the Performa 2021 Biennial artists, curators, and producers will be held on Friday, September 10th at 10:00am EST at 620 Loft & Garden at Rockefeller Center. For more information, contact performa@culturalcounsel.com.

**PERFORMA 2021 BIENNIAL COMMISSIONS:**

Kevin Beasley: *The Sound of Morning*
Thursday, October 14 – Saturday, October 16, 2021
Lower East Side Intersection
Kevin Beasley will present his first outdoor live performance staged at a downtown Manhattan intersection where two distinct neighborhoods meet marking the contrasts inherent to the architecture, inhabitants, and histories that have evolved over the past several decades. Taking place in the Lower East Side—on streets demarcated for closure in NYC’s Open Spaces initiative—Beasley will insert a series of his sculptures, comprised of industrial and utilitarian materials, into the existing infrastructure, creating objects that appear to be interchangeable with existing street furniture. A group of performers will adapt and alter everyday gestures and movements, shifting these actions from the familiar to the foreign. With microphones, that faint sounds that usually disappear into the white noise of the city will be enhanced, creating a sonic sculpture live mixed by the artist.
Sara Cwynar: Down at the Arcade
Friday, October 15 – Sunday, October 17, 2021
Manhattan
Sara Cwynar manipulates found imagery from commercial advertising, investigating how popular imagery infiltrates our consciousness as well as our ever-changing ideals of value in the beauty industry. For her first live performance, Cwynar will illustrate how image and language are used to create false social and political realities—online and in real life—to address the overwhelming media bombardment that we experience in contemporary society. Audiences will enter the familiar setting of a retail establishment—with its display vitrines and wall-size photo backdrops—and encounter visual extravaganza akin to Cwynar’s photographs, complete with video monitors, pulley systems, conveyors, and other analog methods of transporting images. Cwynar will author an original script, delivered by the artist herself in a lecture-style performance, assembled from commercial jingles, theoretical tracts, and Internet slang. Through a stream of consciousness performance of different tasks leading to the construction of a new image, audiences will become both viewers and consumers.

Danielle Dean: Amazon (Proxy)
Thursday, October 21 – Saturday, October 23, 2021
Amant, Greenpoint
Amazon (Proxy) originated during British-American artist Danielle Dean’s period of research in the archives of the Ford Motor Company in Detroit, where she came across “Fordlândia”—a city founded in the Brazilian rainforest in 1928 to control the production of raw material for Ford’s car tires, which was abandoned in 1934 after the workers rebelled against harsh conditions. In 2021, Dean shifts the focus to the global monopoly of the on-line e-commerce company, Amazon.com, and its crowdsourcing marketplace “Amazon Mechanical Turk”—a global platform where humans train Artificial Intelligence (AI). With its website, Amazon has reconfigured the typical Ford assembly line into a globally fragmented yet deeply intertwined system of gig workers, all working separately from home. Taking place both online and in person in a gallery space at Amant Foundation in Williamsburg, the live performance will build on the historical narrative to create a contemporary drama that riffs on our current modes of working and socializing remotely.

Tschabalala Self: Sounding Board
Friday, October 22 – Sunday, October 24, 2021
Jackie Robinson Park, Harlem
Known for her critically acclaimed paintings, Tschabalala Self will present her first live performance in the form of brief scenes from a play that she has written and directed. Taking place on a stage designed by the artist as a sculpture that closely resembles her collage-paintings, a male and female actor will perform scenes of dialogue using humor and exaggerated sincerity in a conversation that ranges from literal to nonsensical, to explore emotional communication, gender roles and power play within intimate relationships. A Boney M cover band will perform some of their greatest hits to emphasize moments of the staged drama, akin to a chorus in a Greek play. The sculpture-esque stage—set in the amphitheater bandstand of Jackie Robinson Park in Central Harlem—will be designed and painted by Self, using the brightly colored geometry of her paintings. In collaboration with UGG, as a prelude to the launch of her capsule collection with them in 2022, Self will design costumes and footwear for the performers, who appear to step out of her paintings onto the stage, bringing the domestic scenes she depicts in her canvases to life.
Shikeith: notes towards becoming a spill
Saturday, October 23 – Sunday, October 24, 2021
Rockaway Beach, Queens
Philadelphia-born, Pittsburgh-based artist Shikeith will create an experimental opera that tangles history, myth, and biography into an epic story of metamorphoses, using the elemental nature of the beach—the ocean, the ebb and flow of the tide, and the never-ending sand—to explore transformation in all its forms. The aesthetic and staging of Shikeith’s first major performance is inspired by his artistic contemplations on hauntology, a concept referring to the return or persistence of elements from the past along with African-American histories attached to the color blue. Working with choreographer Morgan Bobrow-Williams, musical artist Rashad McPherson, and costume designer Carlos Soto, as well as an array of performers from inside the New York queer community, the artist will re-contextualize dominant ideas of Black masculinity in a tale of a contemporary man whose identity is, in part, marked by the history of American colonialism.

Madeline Hollander: Review
Thursday, October 28 – Friday, October 29, 2021
Lower East Side, Manhattan
Artist and choreographer Madeline Hollander will collaborate with 25 professional dancers from New York City’s iconic dance companies who were forced to cancel public performances owing to the pandemic. The new work is made up of the kinesthetic memories of these unseen performances, told through “marking”, the universal sign-language of hand gestures used to indicate movements and spatial blocking by dancers in rehearsals. Entitled Review, numerous distinct dance styles from companies as diverse as Trisha Brown, Bill T Jones and Arnie Zane, and Martha Graham, or Broadway productions West Side Story and Fiddler on the Roof, are interwoven on the same stage, creating a seemingly nonsensical, humorous yet epic, composition. Hollander will use this conceptual premise to choreograph an ode to dancers and dance communities of New York City.

Andrés Jaque (Office for Political Innovation): Being Silica
Thursday, October 28 – Saturday, October 30, 2021
Manhattan
For architect, writer, and curator Andrés Jaque (Office for Political Intervention), architecture is as much politics as it is design. Being Silica will address the codependent relationship between New York City and its neighboring territories encapsulated in UltraClear™ glass, a new building material that is seemingly transparent with a 91% light transmission rate. Made of silica, a low-iron mineral, this new type of glass has become a fixture of new towers across the city in the past two decades, aligning with Michael Bloomberg’s ideals of a pollution-free city, in which skyscrapers residents enjoy expanses of clear blue skies. The highly sought-after Silica, however, is produced through fracking—a highly toxic process that is banned in New York State. Set in a Manhattan skyscraper, Being Silica will comprise a sound installation interspersed with conversations with anti-fracking activists, and reveal the complex trail of damage behind technologies of civic beautification.
Ericka Beckman: *STALK*
Friday, October 29 – Sunday, October 31, 2021
Brooklyn Bridge Park Pier 3, DUMBO

Set against Manhattan’s skyscrapers, artist Ericka Beckman will present *STALK*, an alternative version of the fairy tale *Jack and the Beanstalk* reconfigured as an anti-capitalist proposition. Jack, and his friends, the workers on the ground, unite to revolt against the Giant in the sky—an overt metaphor representing corporate conglomerates—to illustrate the consequences of the agricultural industrial complex. Beckman’s performance will comprise an original musical soundtrack, created with Beckman’s long term collaborator Brooke Halpin, performed live by a vocalist in the role of Jack, accompanied by a chorus of workers, and a circus acrobat. The live scene will be set against a stage formed by multiple LED screens playing animated film of the cast performing scenes that both reflect and mirror the live action, implicating the viewer in determining which is more real, the screen or the stage.

**NOTES TO THE EDITORS:**
The Performa 2021 Biennial is organized by RoseLee Goldberg, Founding Director and Chief Curator, Esa Nickle, Managing Director and Executive Producer, Kathy Noble, Senior Curator and Head of Curatorial Affairs, Charles Aubin, Curator and Head of Publications, Job Piston, Associate Curator at Large, and Sasha Okshteyn, Senior Producer.

Major support for Performa 2021 Biennial is provided by Founding Patron Toby Devan Lewis, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the City of New York Department of Cultural Affairs, and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

**ABOUT PERFORMA:**
Founded in 2004 by art historian and curator RoseLee Goldberg, Performa has expanded the possibilities for visual artists working in performance, providing essential curatorial and production support, and, with its dedicated biennial, providing a worldwide platform for performance of the 21st century. Performa Commissions have entirely changed the possibilities of the form and its educational programs have shown its rich history as an integral part of artistic practice, reaching back through the centuries to the Renaissance. This visionary organization has entirely transformed every art institution’s approach to visual art performance, now a staple in art museums and galleries throughout the world. Since 2005, Performa has presented eight editions of its three-week international Performa Biennial that have animated every borough of New York City every other year.

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