

◆ PERFORMA 11

NEW VISUAL ART PERFORMANCE

For Immediate Release

PERFORMA 11

PERFORMA ANNOUNCES FIRST FIVE PERFORMA COMMISSIONS  
FOR UPCOMING VISUAL ART PERFORMANCE BIENNIAL

ACCLAIMED INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS TO INCLUDE  
SHIRIN NESHAT, ELMGREEN & DRAGSET, RAGNAR KJARTANSSON,  
IONA ROZEAL BROWN, AND GUY MADDIN

November 1–21, 2011 in New York City

New York, NY April 15, 2011 — **Performa is pleased to announce the first Performa Commissions** for **Performa 11**, the upcoming visual art performance biennial, **this November 1–21, 2011, in New York City**. Among the acclaimed artists who have received these prestigious awards and who will create new work for the biennial are **Shirin Neshat, Elmgreen & Dragset, Ragnar Kjartansson, Iona Rozeal Brown, and Guy Maddin**. The centerpiece of Performa's biennials is its internationally renowned Performa Commissions program. **Initiated by Performa Founding Director and Curator RoseLee Goldberg in 2005** to create new performances for the twenty-first century, the Performa Commission invites artists—many of whom have not worked live before—to create exciting and engaging new work specifically for the biennial.

“Performa invites artists to take their work in entirely new directions,” Goldberg explains, “and in each case, the results have been riveting. **The Performa Commissions have had a great impact on contemporary art and have also generated enormous interest in performance art around the globe.**”

The Performa Commission provides unparalleled support for artists at all levels of development and production, and presents the final work in the context of a world-class biennial. Performa's curators spend many months with each artist to help develop visionary projects that are artistically innovative and emotionally and intellectually compelling. Each Performa Commission creates an extraordinary live experience that engages the viewer and allows for a strong connection between artists and audiences.

**“The Performa Commissions create a completely new idea of what it means to experience art,”** states Goldberg. “They give the viewer time to absorb an artist's ideas, and give the artist time to express richly layered content. For many artists, their Performa Commissions were their first major projects and they have subsequently gone on to build new work based on the ideas explored in Performa. I am thrilled to be working with such a talented group of artists for Performa 11 and to watch each project close up, as it develops from concept to final production.”

**To date, Performa has awarded twenty-four Performa Commissions** with several Commissions touring internationally following their New York premieres. Beginning with the first Performa 05 Commissions by artists Jesper Just and Francis Alÿs, Performa has gone on to present Commissions by a wide range of artists including Isaac Julien (Performa 07); Nathalie Djurberg (Performa 07); Japanther (Performa 07); Sanford Biggers (Performa 07); Kelley Nipper (Performa 07); Adam Pendleton (Performa 07); Yvonne Rainer (Performa 07); Francesco Vezzoli (Performa 07); Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster (Performa 09); Omer Fast (Performa 09); Mike Kelley (Performa 09); Candice Breitz (Performa 09); Arto Lindsay (Performa 09); Yeondoo Jung (Performa 09); and Wangechi Mutu (Performa 09), among others.

Along with the Performa Commissions, Performa presents a series of Performa Premieres, which in 2009 included a remarkable live work by William Kentridge, and a host of other new work that will be shown during the biennial by over 100 international artists. In early summer 2011, it will **announce additional Performa Commissions and Premieres** as well as programs from the **Performa Consortium**. With Performa 05, Performa established an entirely new collaborative model for a biennial, **working with more than 40 cultural partners and over 25 curators**. For Performa 11, Performa will once again collaborate with local arts and cultural organizations to bring the best programs to New York City.

## **PERFORMA COMMISSIONS**

For her Performa Commission, **Shirin Neshat** (b. 1957, Qazvin, Iran) will present live actors and projections in a riveting courtroom scene based on an earlier film by the artist, *The Last Word* (2003). Looking at the censorship of women artists in the Muslim world by interweaving an overarching narrative of human suffering with lyrical fragments from controversial feminist poet Forugh Farrokhzād's work, the Qur'an, and the Old Testament, *OverRuled* was written by artist and filmmaker **Shoja Azari**. The production will feature **Mohsen Namjoo**, one of the most celebrated Iranian musicians living today, and Iranian actor **Mohammad B. Ghaffari**. It will also mark the tenth anniversary of RoseLee Goldberg commissioning Shirin Neshat to create her first live work, *Logic of the Birds*, in 2001, an experience that eventually led to Goldberg establishing Performa.

The artists **Elmgreen & Dragset** (Michael Elmgreen, b. 1961, Copenhagen, Denmark and Ingar Dragset, b. 1969, Trondheim, Norway) will present a theatrical performance titled *Happy Days in the Art World*, a darkly comic self-portrait of the two artists, drawing references from Samuel Beckett's play *Happy Days* (1961). The play tells the story of two main characters, played by renowned actors **Joseph Fiennes** and **Charles Edwards**, using a droll sensibility to unveil their personal history together, their experience of being a "single work of art," and their fears about what will happen to their substantial art careers when they break up. In the tradition of Beckett's absurdist theater, the production will take place on a traditional proscenium stage with minimal sets designed by the artists and will also feature a cameo by the artists themselves.

For Performa 11, artist **Ragnar Kjartansson** (b. 1976, Reykjavík, Iceland) will present a twelve-hour long performance, entitled *Bliss*, that will repeat the delirious final aria of Mozart's 1786 opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. In the final act of this opera, the Count asks the Countess forgiveness for his arrogant blunders, which she grants, inspiring the entire court to celebrate. Kjartansson's performance will replicate the lavishness of traditional opera with a full orchestra, elaborate scenery, and period costumes, and will feature renowned Icelandic tenor **Kristján Jóhannsson** and members of his master class, as well as the artist himself, continuously replaying the two-minute musical, visual, and narrative pinnacle of the opera, approaching a euphoric state for performers and listeners alike.

**iona rozeal brown** (b. 1966, Washington, DC) will extend the aesthetics and content of her paintings in her first work of live performance, *battle of yestermore*. In homage to the "onnagata" of Japanese Kabuki theater, the story will revolve around an epic battle between a princess and the guardians of her family's gravesite. brown's wide ranging influences include myth-based genres like Kabuki and Noh theater, as well as 'voguing' made famous in the Harlem ballroom scene of the 1960s. With performances by voguing legends Benny Ninja and Javier Ninja, and an original sound score by brown.

Filmmaker and artist **Guy Maddin** (b. 1956, Winnipeg, Canada) will present *Tales from the Gimli Hospital: Reframed*, a live re-imagining of his 1988 feature film of the same name. *Tales from the Gimli Hospital* tells the dreamlike story of the jealousy and madness that develops between two men sharing a hospital room in a remote Canadian village. This performance will literally reframe the film, adding new video projections on both sides of the original. A new score by composer Matthew Patton—featuring live foley sound effects by the Aono Jikken Ensemble and an all-female Icelandic ensemble (including members of Mum and Sigur Ros)—will be presented through an innovative, three-dimensional sound system specially created for the performance.

## FUNDING

Lead support for has been provided by Toby Devan Lewis; Lambent Foundation Fund of Tides Foundation; and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Major support has been provided by Sharjah Art Foundation; National Endowment for the Arts; The David and Elaine Potter Foundation; Christie's; Imagine Ireland; and Paddle8. Additional support has been provided by Depart Foundation for the Discussion Exhibition and Production of Art;

Royal Norwegian Consulate General in New York; The Cultural Services of the French Embassy/Maison Francaise and Institut Francais; New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; Consulate General of Denmark in New York; Etant Donnés Contemporary Art; FUSED: French U.S. Exchange in Dance, a program of the National Dance Project/New England Foundation for the Arts and the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in New York, and FACE (French American Cultural Exchange), with lead funding from Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Florence Gould Foundation; The Dedalus Foundation; Office for Contemporary Art Norway; Danish Arts Council Committee for International Visual Arts; Arts Council Norway; SAHA, Toshiba; Dorothea Leonhardt Fund, Communities Foundation of Texas; Mondriaan Foundation, Amsterdam; Office of Cultural Affairs, Consulate General of Israel in NY; Artis – Contemporary Israeli Art Fund; The American-Scandinavian Foundation; Helena Rubinstein Foundation; Moon and Stars Project of The American Turkish Society; Foundation of Contemporary Arts; the Performa Board of Directors; the Performa Producers Circle; the Performa Curators Circle; and the Performa Visionaries. Media sponsorship has been provided by Art in America, W Magazine, Art Asia Pacific, Frieze, artnet, and Whitewall.

### **ABOUT PERFORMA 11**

Performa 11, the fourth edition of the internationally acclaimed biennial of new visual art performance presented by Performa, will be held in New York City from November 1–21, 2011. The three-week biennial will showcase new work by more than 100 of the most exciting artists working today, in an innovative program breaking down the boundaries between visual art, music, dance, poetry, fashion, architecture, graphic design, and the culinary arts. Presented in collaboration with a consortium of more than 50 arts institutions and 25 curators, as well as a network of public spaces and private venues across the city, Performa 11 will ignite New York City with energy and ideas, acting as a vital “think tank” linking minds across the five boroughs and bringing audiences together for brilliant new performances in all disciplines.

Founded in 2004 by art historian and curator RoseLee Goldberg, Performa is the leading organization dedicated to exploring the critical role of live performance in the history of twentieth-century art and to encouraging new directions in performance for the twenty-first century. Performa launched New York’s first performance biennial, Performa 05, in 2005, followed by Performa 07 (2007), and Performa 09 (2009). [www.performa-arts.org](http://www.performa-arts.org)

### **Media Contacts**

Ashley Tickle  
Press and Marketing Manager  
Performa  
+ 1 212 366 5700  
[ashley@performa-arts.org](mailto:ashley@performa-arts.org)

Concetta Duncan  
Senior Account Executive  
FITZ & CO  
+ 1 212 627 1455 x232  
[concetta@fitzandco.com](mailto:concetta@fitzandco.com)