

Philip Martin Gallery


Performa 2021 Biennial
New York City

Ericka Beckmann: *STALK*
Performa Commission

Friday, October 29 – Sunday, October 31, 2021
Brooklyn Bridge Park Pier 3, DUMBO



Ericka Beckman, film still from *STALK*, 2021. Performa Commission for the Performa 2021 Biennial.

Ericka Beckman will create her first live performance: an alternative version of the fairy tale *Jack and the Beanstalk* as a critique of contemporary capitalism. The idea developed from themes in her recent film *Reach Capacity*, 2020, about which she states: “I want my audience to feel they have capability to alter the economic structure in which we are living now.” *STALK* is a story about farm workers uniting to revolt against conglomerate, corporate, and capitalist domination, in order to upend that power and change the balance of the system. *STALK* will be staged on an open-air site in New York City where the

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hyper-colored, surreal world of Jack and the workers will play out as an epic, live musical against the Manhattan skyline.

The function of early fairy tales was to present a moral position, often integrating frightening, violent and sexual scenes within a wondrous, magical story to emphasize underlying morals by dramatically splitting good and evil. For Beckman, fairy tales present a picture of anxiety, felt by a person or a community, in which a lead character frequently takes action that produces comic catharsis or relief—to push the individual or the community through a necessary cultural change.

Jack and the Beanstalk is a story of power. First written in 1734 as *The Story of Jack Spriggins and the Enchanted Bean*, the story was popularized in the late 19th century with the rise of merchant capitalism. It was written to provide the poverty class with a vision of broader opportunities, paths to success, and an entry into capitalism. Written at the time of zero sum thinking—when one person's gain is another person's loss—and scarcity of means, the tale has been adapted by Beckman to the world of material abundance, sped up by late capitalism of the 21st century.

Beckman's *STALK* is a spurious digression from the original story. She retells it as a contemporary myth about agriculture that has become a capitalized industry, exploring the economics associated with this and its encroachment on the earth's sustainability. The original fairy tale contains metaphors that mirror many of the issues of the modern —and the current plight of small farmers and small business. *STALK* is a story that explores the issues of contemporary power-structures, particularly those of late Capitalism and its dire impact on natural resources.

Beckman's performance will comprise an original musical soundtrack (by Beckman's long term collaborator Brooke Halpin) performed live by a vocalist, accompanied by a lip-synching chorus, and a circus acrobat. The live scene will be set against a stage formed from multiple LED screens playing Beckman's animated film, showing scenes that reflect and mirror the live action.

Curated by Kathy Noble, Senior Curator & Head of Curatorial Affairs.