



## **WILL COTTON: COCKAIGNE**

Curated by Stacy Engman for Performa 11

*November 18, 2011*

7PM Cocktails and Cotton Candy  
8PM Performance

Prince George Ballroom  
14 East 28th Street, New York

*Cockaigne* is a live performance conceived of, designed, and directed by Will Cotton.

The performance is divided into two distinct parts, the first being a celebration of whipped cream and the second of cotton candy. It is a material exploration incorporating music and dance, in addition to smell, as a means of expressing the peculiar nature of these two ephemeral confections.

Primarily known as a painter, Will Cotton's work in the studio over the last decade has become increasingly more performative, incorporating large sets, props, costumes, and video, all made as reference material for the paintings.

*Cockaigne grew out of my deepening interest in time-based art after working on the music video for Katy Perry's California Gurls. There, I had the experience of bringing some of my paintings to life as very large three-dimensional sets. But I wanted to work with the notion that the candy itself could take on the role of main character within the narrative. In this piece I see the dancers as representative of the material in question, addressing the ethereal, but inherently unstable, properties of each of these substances.*

Cotton employs the forms of both ballet and burlesque to this end. Beginning with the *Whipped Cream Dance* as choreographed and performed by Miss Ruby Valentine (a burlesque dancer Cotton has often painted). The movements for this piece come out of the tradition of the erotic fan dance, and are set to music composed by Caleb Burhans, to be performed live on violin by Conrad Harris and Pauline Kim. An accompanying whipped cream scent, which will be dispersed during the dance, was developed in conjunction with senior perfumer Pascal Gaurin, flavorist Marla Wright, and Nicolas Mirzayantz, Group President, Fragrances, of International Flavors and Fragrances.

In part two of *Cockaigne*, the *Cotton Candy Dance* will be performed by three ballerinas, as choreographed by Charles Askegard, to music composed by John Zorn. The dancer's movements evoke the airy strands of spinning sugar that become clouds of cotton candy. This segment will be played live by Keith Cotton on keyboard, with Heung Heung on triangle.

The title is a reference to the *Land of Cockaigne*, a mythical land of plenty as described in medieval poetry written during a time of famine. The theme has been explored by artists as diverse as Pieter Brueghel, Umberto Eco, and Voltaire.

Will Cotton has painted the backdrops and designed the costumes.