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The fruits of Van Aken's labour



Sam Van Aken, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, P94/949

Syracuse-based artist Sam Van Aken has been nurturing a mini orchard of hybrid fruit trees for three-and-a-half years. *New Edens*, 2011, on show at Ronald Feldman, consists of 13 trees that have been genetically altered to each bear five fruits: peach, plum, cherry, nectarine and apricot. Van Aken has timed the growth cycle so that the trees are in bloom during the Armory Show.

"The idea comes from the philosophy that if nature equals truth, what happens when we affect nature itself? Do we construct new truths?" says Van Aken, who grew up

on a Pennsylvania farm where his grandfather grafted trees. "I'm interested in what drives us to want to modify nature. It's like we are attempting to construct order out of chaos using nature as a vehicle."

Despite the success of Van Aken's project, he says it is futile to try to tame nature: "Any change that you make is temporary. After 30-odd years, the trees go into reverse and return to the root stock you started with."

While the trees are for sale for \$12,000 each, and Van Aken will plant and tend to them twice a year, less green-fingered collectors can buy large-scale prints of hybrid seed packets (priced at \$1,800 each, edition of eight). ■