

LAWN MOWER

Fritz Haeg knows a thing or two about fecundity. It's not just that the artist has been impressively prolific in a variety of aesthetic fields over the last few years (though he certainly has); it's that, at least in the most celebrated examples of his artwork, reimaginings of nature and new life could be said to be his guiding principle.

Beginning in 2005, he declared war on the grass lawns of suburban homes, overhauling those emblems of homogeneity and wastefulness with gorgeous, functional gardens comprised of a given area's native fruit- and vegetable-bearing plants. The project is fittingly called *Edible Estates*, and a 2008 book of the same name offers a visual and conceptual tour of such spaces.

For last year's Whitney Biennial, Haeg, whose formal training is in architecture, constructed a series of wonderfully absurd houses for beavers, bobcats, eagles, and other animals that used to inhabit New York City's Upper East Side. Similar works, dubbed *Animal Estates*, can be seen in five other cities.

"One of the things that I'm interested in with all of these projects is loosening our grip on our cities," says Haeg, 40, who was born in Saint Cloud, Minnesota, and who believes a renewed appreciation for—and, more important, interaction with—wilderness is something we could all stand to experience. He has also clearly spent many a night pondering the sometimes fuzzy relationship between art and activism.

"Art can be the kernel of something that can go on to be solutions for things, but I've got a pretty adamant feeling that it's not the job of art to solve the problem," he says. "I think artists look around at the world and respond to what's happening in an honest way. If the environment is collapsing and relationships between people and communities are breaking down, then there's something to work about.

"I feel like the work that I'm doing is purposely straddling a lot of conversations in a lot of different disciplines so that it does not sit comfortably in any one of them. But that's the only way that you can have a real, broad dialogue today. If you sit too entirely in one you've eliminated dialogue outside of it in a way."

—PATRICK JAMES



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