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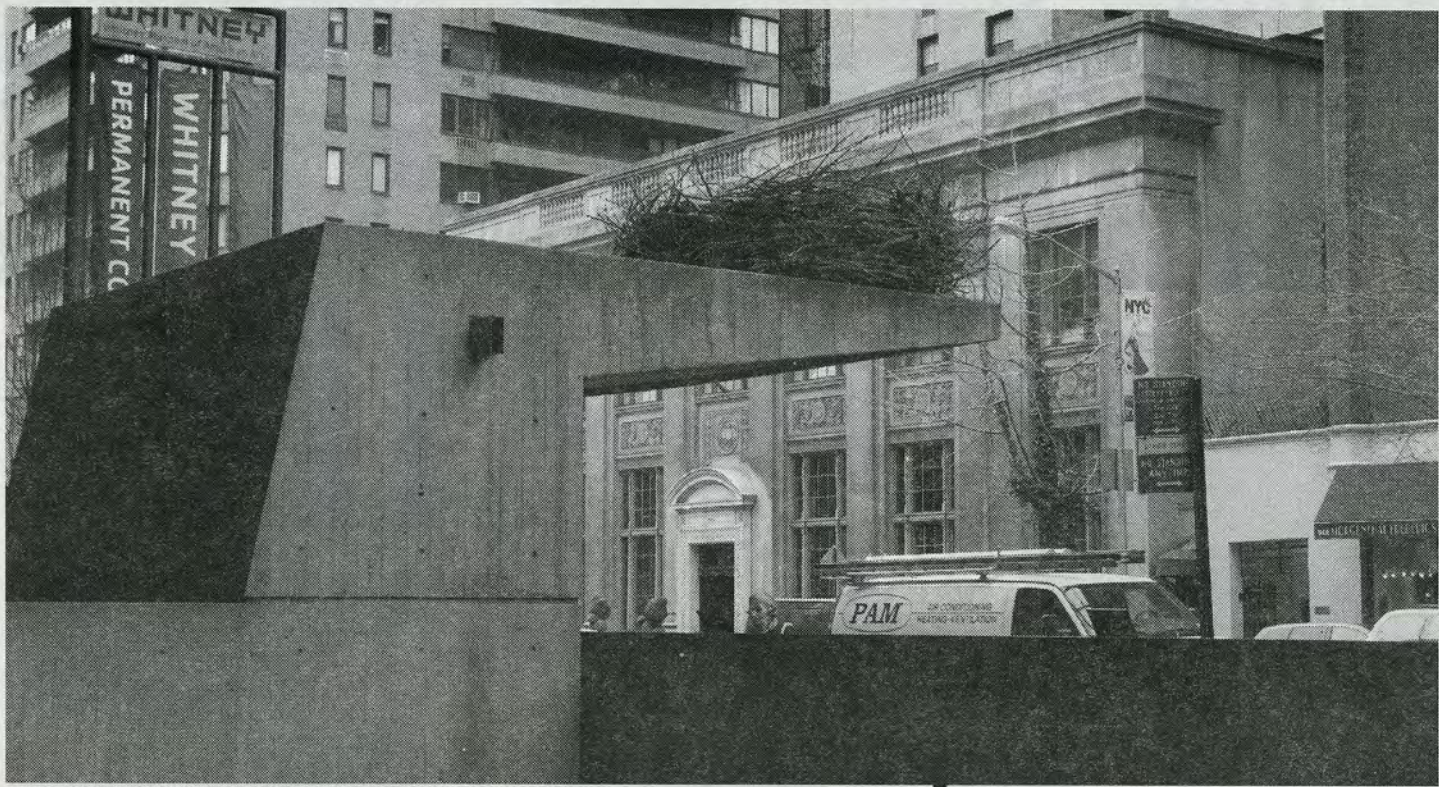
ART/CULTURE/MUSIC/STYLE/PEOPLE

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heatwave



ANIMAL ESTATES, REGIONAL MODEL HOMES 1.0, BALD EAGLE NEST ATOP ENTRANCE TO WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, WHITNEY BIENNIAL, NEW YORK CITY, 2008.

JUST EAT IT

**ARTIST/ARCHITECT FRITZ HAEG'S
GREEN PLATE SPECIAL**

“A city without any plants or animals would really be impossible and unpleasant.”

ABOVE: **EDIBLE ESTATES**, REGIONAL PROTOTYPE GARDEN #3, MAPLEWOOD, NEW JERSEY, JULY 2007.

Words: Emily Schroeder | **Images:** Courtesy of Fritz Haeg Studio | www.fritzhaeg.com

Fritz Haeg investigates what belonged before cities, before suburbs, before our modern society and pays tribute to plants and animals worldwide. He explores natural and native habitats with localized experts and has created a new community of urban dwellers; ones that enrich not just the physical earth or plot of land, but our contemporary practices in art and architecture. He can be credited as being one of only a few artists working today who have dealt directly with urgent ecological and social issues in practice, actually *adding oxygen* to the air we breathe. Haeg's most notable works include *Edible Estates*, a project started in 2005 as a plan to replace American front lawns with edible landscapes and has since broadened in scope to include locations worldwide. In addition to his architecture practice, Haeg, speaking with USELESS from his geodesic dome home/studio in Los Angeles, discussed his project for this year's Whitney Biennial, and some of those that he's looking forward to.

What were some initiatives that you took towards *Edible Estates* in your art making history?

Going back, even when I was in college, I began to make things with plants- installations with plants, even ones that were edible. I lived in a farmhouse in Italy for a while. I was around a lot of agriculture. And then I was in New York and

all that disappeared. It wasn't until I moved to LA in '99 that I started to get back into gardening. In 2001 I started this community garden at Art Center College of Design and it turned into a whole series of projects with studios and classes that I taught and an exhibition that I curated. The more recent work deals with issues of longevity and creating sustainability in an art space. Coming from an architecture background, I'm really comfortable with ambitious projects that take a long time to realize. Ultimately, *Edible Estates* may last more than five years. For an art project, it is pretty unusual, but for an architecture project it is pretty typical for a time span from beginning to end.

Then there's a crossover from plant kingdom to animal kingdom with your habitats.

Edible Estates is about reconsidering that space which is the front lawn and what other functions we can give to it; weaving agriculture back into the city. The *Estates* don't just refer to people who have homes, but also plants, which have a place for particular functions and reasons. For *Animal Estates*, it is similar, reconsidering our cities and thinking about what else do we want to make our cities for. A city without any plants or animals would really be impossible and unpleasant. To think it's just opening ourselves up to how we really want to live and what's a more evolved way of naturalizing ourselves in our environment is key; very strategically identifying animals that are

native to a place and making homes for them is a focus of mine.

The ongoing *Edible Estates* seems to compliment *Animal Estates*- on view this past Whitney Biennale- where you built eight animal 'dwellings' in and around the Whitney, bringing to light their displacement from a natural habitat.

What I'm really interested in with these two projects is how incredibly diverse they can be depending on where I do them. I am working now in Portland. The issue in the Pacific Northwest is that over 40% of the animals are dependent in some way on dead trees. The design is to stimulate the dead tree, which is called a stag. There will be a vertical section and a horizontal section so the birds can nest in the cavity. These animal houses are simulations of natural features that no longer exist. This is the idea of absence and creating something that can stimulate something that is currently not being stimulated.

These projects cross over and become architectural and a natural part of our environment.

Some of them are quite invisible, like a pile of brush. In other cities, the animal houses become much more designed and complicated, but I like the variety of working and responding to place.

Do you find that there are different levels of engagement in the different regions?

Certainly. Portland has been really responsive.

And in a rather small town in the Netherlands, to which I am going to work in, there are amazing animal experts. There are people devoting their whole lives to really important issues, even as they might not get enough exposure. I think there is an opportunity for them to tell stories about things that we need to hear... to make it public in some big way.

It's the narrative that becomes engaging. The Netherlands project seems unlike projects you have been working on, with its topography and geography.

It's surprising how much these sites have in common. Animals don't recognize political boundaries!