

# JANE ALDEN STEVENS

## SEEKING PERFECTION: *TRADITIONAL APPLE GROWING IN JAPAN*

### ELEMENTS

Jane Alden Stevens carefully composes square and panoramic format images, then juxtaposes them to create complex statements. The resulting layouts are as classically measured as the traditional Japanese apple growing practices she documents. Significantly, Stevens arranges images within the borders of each page with austerity, paying specific attention to sequencing within and between pages. Her methods tell the story in a style reflective of her subject, while beckoning us to consider the larger meanings created by the interrelationship among the images.

### ARTIST STATEMENT

Growing apples in the traditional way is a laborious, hands-on process in Japan. At the moment of harvest, an apple raised in this manner has been touched by the farmer's hands at least ten times since its

blossom was set. This includes picking off unwanted flower buds, hand-pollinating the blossoms, pruning the branches, covering individual fruit in colorful bags, hand-culling imperfect fruit, hand-turning them to ensure even coloring, and, in some cases, affixing stencils to the apples.

This approach to raising fruit is slowly disappearing. When asked why fewer apples are being bagged now than 15 years ago, the farmers will hold up their hands in front of them and say, "There are simply not enough hands!" This is a reflection of the lack of migrant workers in Japan, as well as the desire of young people to move off the farms and find work in the cities.

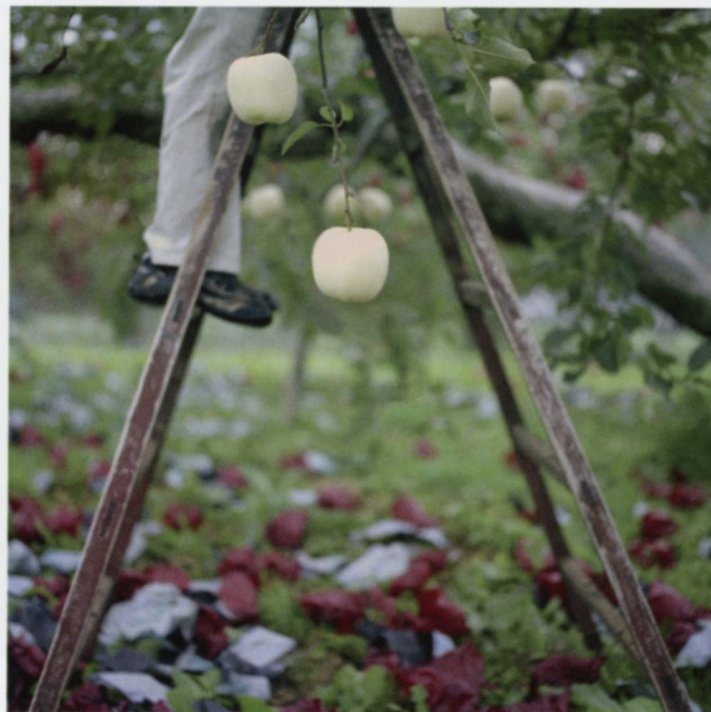
Over the course of two growing seasons, I photographed this process on the apple farms in Aomori Prefecture. The resulting body of work is a meditation on the time, care, and attention that farmers using this method lavish on their orchards. Speaking to a tradition that is becoming increasingly marginalized, these photographs preserve for future generations a memory of the agricultural past.





*Bagging Apples in June, Aomori Prefecture.*

# JANE STEVENS



*Culled Apples, Aomori Prefecture.*





*Hand-Pollination of Blossoms in Spring, Aomori Prefecture.*



*Stencils on Apples in Autumn, Aomori Prefecture.*





*Apples After Inner Bags are Removed, Aomori Prefecture.*

PHOTOGRAPHS © JANE ALDEN STEVENS, FROM HER SERIES *SEEKING PERFECTION: TRADITIONAL APPLE GROWING IN JAPAN*; ARCHIVAL PIGMENT PRINTS ON WATERCOLOR PAPER, 22" × 17".