

Jane Alden Stevens

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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. Over the course of two growing seasons, I photographed this process on the apple farms in Aomori Prefecture. The resulting body of work, titled "Seeking Perfection: Traditional Apple Growing in Japan", is a meditation on the time, care, and attention that farmers using this method lavish on their orchards.

This approach to raising fruit is slowly disappearing, as more and more young people move off the farms to find work in the cities. 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, "Not enough hands!"

These photographs speak, therefore, to a tradition that is becoming increasingly marginalized, and thus preserve for future generations a memory of the agricultural past.

Jane Alden Stevens is a Cincinnati, OH based artist and teacher.

To view more of Jane's work, please visit her [website](#).



Culling Blossoms #1, Spring, Aomori Prefecture



Culling Blossoms #3, Spring, Aomori Prefecture



Burning Trimmed Branches, Spring, Aomori Prefecture



Culling Blossoms #2, Spring, Aomori Prefecture



Pollination Wands, Spring, Aomori Prefecture



Hand Pollination #1 - Spring, Aomori Prefecture



Bagged Apple Tree, Early Summer, Aomori Prefecture



Putting Bags on Apples #1, Early Summer, Aomori Prefecture



Bags for Apples, Early Summer, Aomori Prefecture



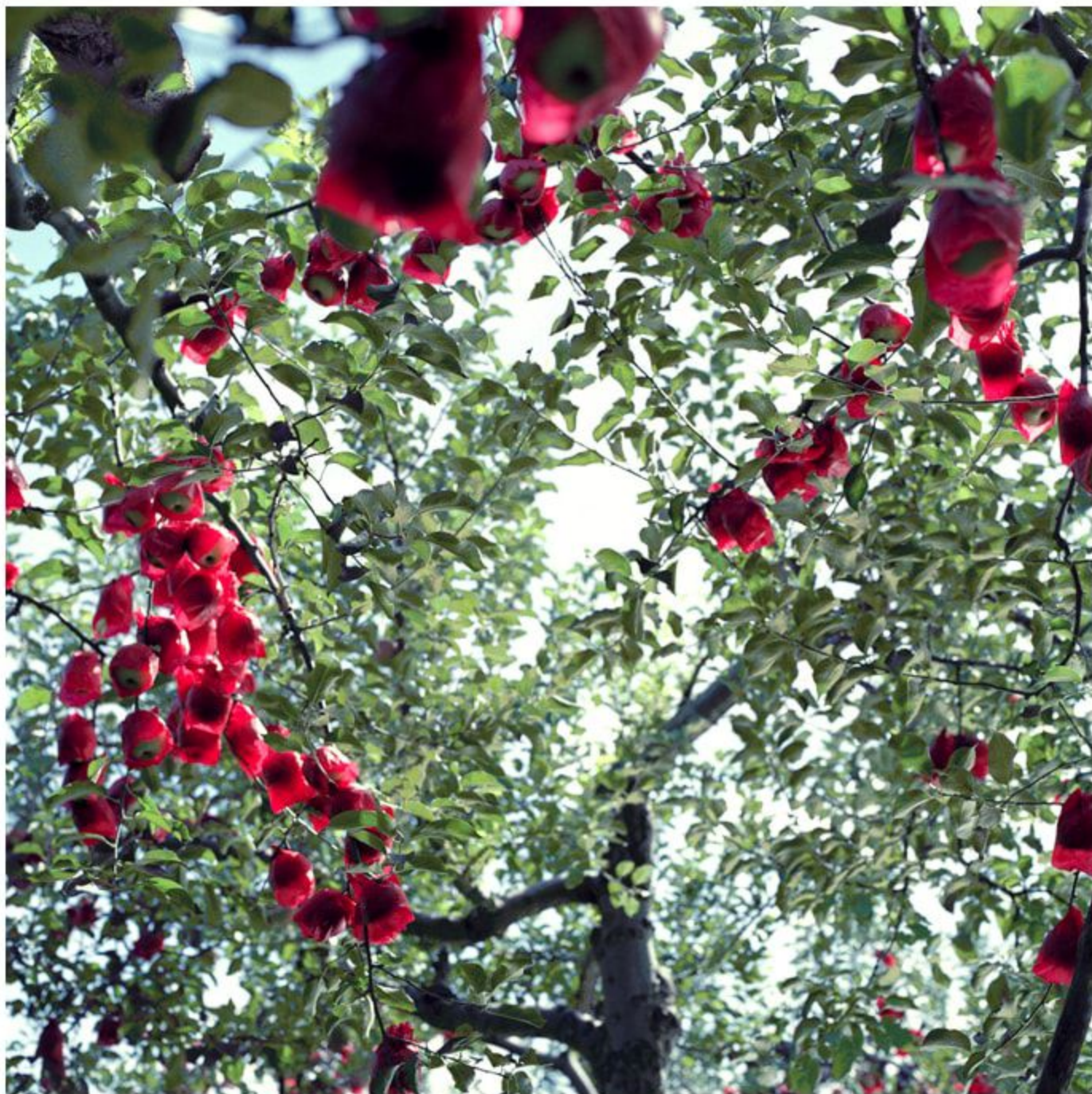
Culled Apples & Branches, Early Summer, Aomori Prefecture



Apples Outgrowing Their Bags, Fall, Aomori Prefecture



Removing Outer Bags #1, Fall, Aomori Prefecture



Apples With Red Inner Bags #1, Fall, Aomori Prefecture



Apples With Red Inner Bags #2, Fall, Aomori Prefecture



Removing Inner Bags #1, Fall, Aomori Prefecture





After Inner Bag Removal, Fall, Aomori Prefecture



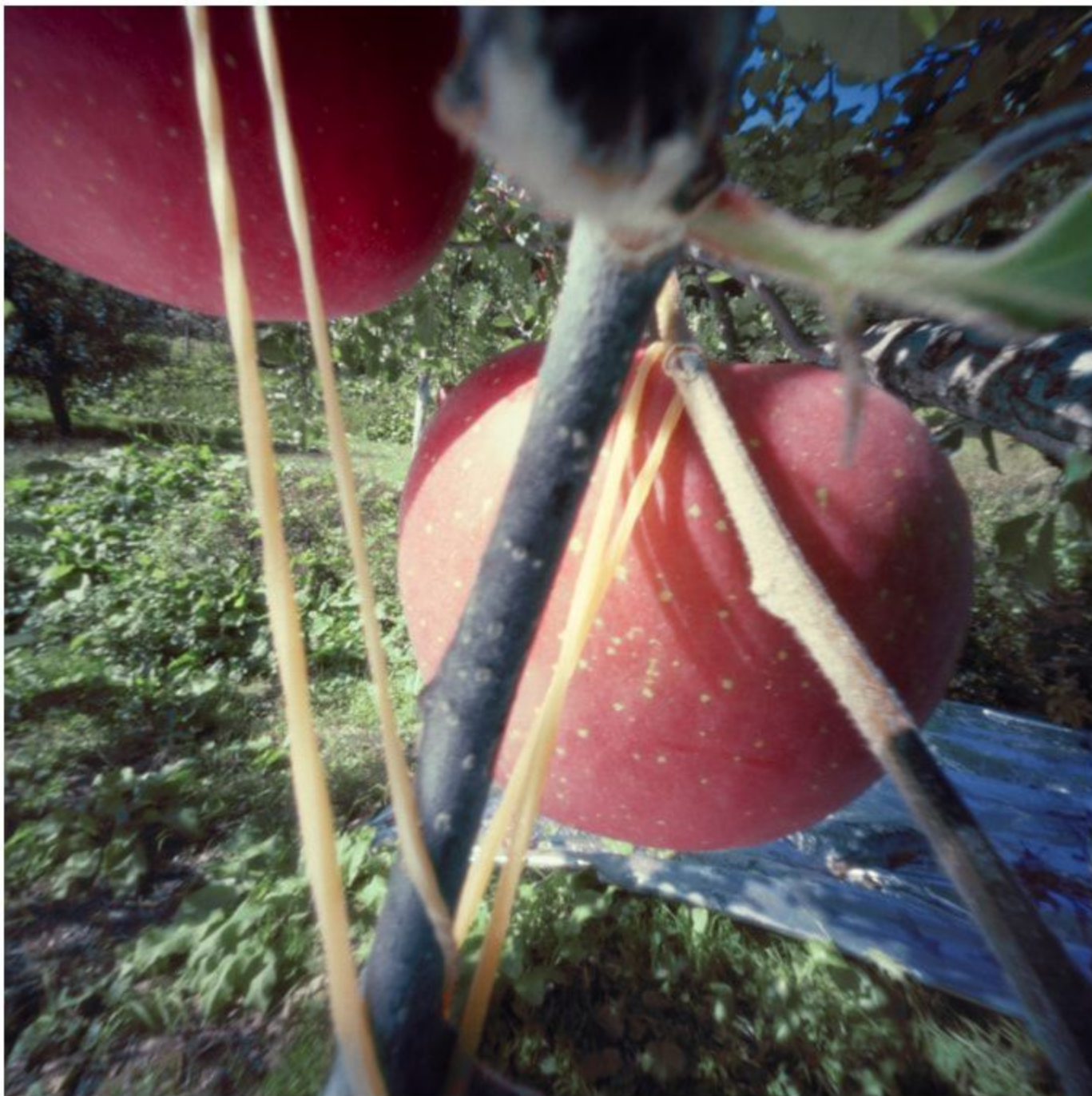
Rejected Apple, Fall, Aomori Prefecture



Culled Apples, Fall, Aomori Prefecture



Imperfect Apple, Summer, Aomori Prefecture



Rubber Bands Holding Apples in Place, Fall, Aomori Prefecture



Stencils Being Applied to Apples, Fall, Aomori Prefecture



Field Worker & Stenciled Apples, Fall, Aomori Prefecture



Photogram Beneath the Stencil, Fall, Aomori Prefecture