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**THE TRUST FOR GOVERNORS ISLAND LAUNCHES CULTURAL CAMPAIGN,
WILL UNVEIL *THE OPEN ORCHARD*, A MONUMENTAL LIVING ARTWORK
BY SAM VAN AKEN, IN SPRING 2022**

Orchard of 102 trees commissioned through Governors Island Arts will act as a living gene bank for hundreds of fruit varieties once native to New York but have gone extinct due to climate change

Permanent artwork opens to the public on Arbor Day, Friday, April 29

“Governors Island Arts” a Key Commitment to Invest in the Creative and Cultural Economy in Mayor Adams’ “Rebuild, Renew, Reinvent: A Blueprint for NYC’s Economic Recovery”

NEW YORK (April 11, 2022)—The Trust for Governors Island announced today the opening of a new commissioned artwork by multidisciplinary artist Sam Van Aken within Governors Island’s award-winning park. Taking the form of a public orchard comprising 102 fruit trees, *The Open Orchard* will act as a living archive for antique and heirloom fruit varieties that were grown in and around New York City in the past 400 years but have mostly disappeared due to climate change and the industrialization of agriculture. *The Open Orchard* will open to the public on Arbor Day, April 29, 2022.

The Open Orchard represents the first initiative under “Governors Island Arts,” a groundbreaking campaign to invest in New York City’s creative and cultural economy that delivers on a promise outlined in Mayor Eric Adams’ [“Rebuild, Renew, Reinvent: A Blueprint for NYC’s Economic Recovery.”](#) “Governors Island Arts” will create transformative encounters with art for all New Yorkers, inviting artists and researchers to engage with the issues of our time in the context of the Island’s layered histories, environments, and architecture – achieving this mission through public art commissions, organizations in residence, and public programming.

The fruit varieties present in *The Open Orchard* all are indigenous to, originated in or have been historically grown in New York City. Using a unique grafting process, Van Aken combines multiple fruit varieties into a single tree—so different varieties grow alongside one another and the trees blossom in a rainbow of white, pink, and crimson. Beyond their aesthetic appeal, these hybrid trees undertake the critically important work of preserving dozens of rare fruit varieties in a safe environment, providing a road map for innovative techniques to maintain vital biodiversity in the face of a changing climate.

The Open Orchard is the first commissioned artwork announced under the Trust for Governors Island’s expanded cultural program, Governors Island Arts. Over the next several months, the City and the Trust will announce additional art commissions and public programs and launch a new marketing campaign and advisory committee dedicated to supporting Governors Island Arts.

“Arts and culture are essential to the well-being and vitality of New York City, and Mayor Adams’ economic recovery blueprint reflects that,” **said Deputy Mayor for Economic and Workforce Development Maria Torres-Springer.** “As our city continues its recovery,

Governors Island will play a major role in supporting artists, arts organizations, and audiences in delivering accessible cultural experiences. I encourage all New Yorkers to experience this new artwork and explore all that Governors Island has to offer.”

“Sam Van Aken’s vital work transforms preconceived notions about what public art can be, preserves the ecological history of our region, and allows New Yorkers from all five boroughs to enjoy a beautiful public orchard in the heart of New York harbor,” **said Clare Newman, President and CEO of the Trust for Governors Island.** “The Island is an ideal location to explore issues of environmental preservation and the felt impacts of climate change through art and public engagement. We cannot wait to welcome Island visitors to experience this ambitious work in person.”

“Sam Van Aken’s *The Open Orchard* is a once in a lifetime project that could only exist in the magical landscape that is Governors Island,” **said Meredith Johnson, Vice President of Arts & Culture and Head Curator at the Trust for Governors Island.** “It is a gift to work with such a visionary artist whose work is a combination of sculpture, archive and public space, providing New Yorkers the rare opportunity to physically time travel by seeing, touching, and tasting history while also reflecting on our collective future.”

“*The Open Orchard* on Governors Island, and the expansive orchard taking place across the entire city in community gardens in all five boroughs, wouldn’t have been possible without the time, energy, and generosity of so many invested in art, biodiversity and revisiting this forgotten history of New York,” **said artist Sam Van Aken.** “After eight years in development and five years of the project growing at Governors Island, I remain indebted to all those involved and humbled to find a place and community with the shared vision of rethinking not just agriculture but the culture that surrounds it.”

Nearly 100 additional trees that have been cultivated and cared for in a nursery on Governors Island since 2018 will be donated and planted in community gardens throughout the five boroughs in partnership with NYC Parks GreenThumb.

“We are grateful to the Trust for Governors Island and the talented Sam Van Aken for the cultivation and donation of these historic heritage fruit trees to our GreenThumb community gardens,” **said NYC Parks Commissioner Sue Donoghue.** “With the addition of these trees, and the care of our dedicated volunteer community gardeners, our gardens will diversify their horticulture adding resiliency to the greenspaces and contribute to the rich arboreal history and legacy of our city.”

Inspired by Van Aken’s earlier project *Tree of 40 Fruit*, which included single trees grafted to contain up to 40 different varieties of fruit, *The Open Orchard* builds upon the artist’s longtime dream of an expansive orchard of trees containing hundreds of fruit varieties located in the heart of New York City. Fruit trees cannot be saved in seed banks and must be grown as living trees to be preserved, so Van Aken planned and created his dream orchard that would preserve these fruits for future generations while allowing contemporary audiences to experience fruits that have not been available to the public for centuries.

Once open, *The Open Orchard* will invite visitors to Governors Island to experience a range of public programs including a continued workshop series, talks and performances, fruit tastings, harvest events, culinary lessons, and more. Additional programs will be announced in coming months. *The Open Orchard*, commissioned through Governors Island Arts, is co-curated by Meredith Johnson, Vice President for Arts and Culture and Head Curator at the Trust for Governors Island, and Shane Brennan, former Director of Public Programs.

The Open Orchard by Sam Van Aken is made possible through generous contributions made by The Gottesman Fund, the Charina Endowment Fund, Stavros Niarchos Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Lily Auchincloss Foundation, Sleepy Cat Farm Foundation and Dorothea L. Leonhardt Foundation. Additional in-kind landscape support is generously provided by BrightView.

“Governors Island Arts” presents its program with the visionary support of the Ford Foundation, as well the Charina Endowment Fund, Donald R. Mullen Family Foundation, Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, The Gottesman Fund, Donald A. Pels Charitable Trust, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New York State Council on the Arts.

Since opening to the public in 2005, Governors Island has been home to hundreds of artists and arts and cultural organizations from across New York City, bringing a robust calendar of commissions, exhibitions, and events to the Island’s diverse audience. Current Governors Island Arts commissions include Mark Dion’s *The Field Station of the Melancholy Marine Biologist*, Duke Riley’s *Not for Nutton*, Shantell Martin’s *Church*, Rachel Whiteread’s *Cabin*, and Mark Handforth’s *Yankee Hanger*. Recent seasonal commissions include performances of Richard Move and MoveOpolis!’s *Herstory of the Universe@Governors Island*, Jacob Hashimoto’s *Never Comes Tomorrow*, David Brooks’s *Rock, Mosquito and Hummingbird* and Susan Philipsz’s *Day is Done*. Learn more about public art commissions on Governors Island at govisland.org/public-art.

Investment in Governors Island Arts advances a key component of "[Rebuild, Renew, Reinvent: A Blueprint for NYC's Economic Recovery](#)," the mayor’s vision for the future of the city’s economy. Released in March 2022, the blueprint contains 70 initiatives designed to capitalize on a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reinvigorate the city’s economy and increase equity and inclusivity, including investment in the city’s cultural and creative economy.

Governors Island is open to the public daily year-round from 7am to 6pm and is accessible by ferry. For more information, visit govisland.org.

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About The Trust for Governors Island

The Trust for Governors Island is the nonprofit corporation created by the City of New York that is responsible for the redevelopment and operation of 150 acres of Governors Island. The Trust’s mission is to realize the full potential of Governors Island for the inspiration and enjoyment of all New Yorkers, demonstrating a bold vision for public space. For more information, visit govisland.org

About Governors Island Arts

Governors Island Arts creates transformative encounters with art for all New Yorkers, inviting artists and researchers to engage with the issues of our time in the context of the Island’s layered histories, environments, and architecture.

We achieve this mission through:

- **Public Art Commissions:** Long term and temporary works from multidisciplinary artists that are sited within Governors Island’s park and historic landscapes

- **Organizations in Residence:** An annual open call inviting cultural organizations to present exhibitions, hold free public programs and host artist residencies within the Island's historic former military houses. Over the next decade, the City and the Trust will invest in evolving this seasonal program into year-round permanent homes for cultural organizations on Governors Island
- **Public Programs:** Free events and programs, often presented in partnership with a diverse range of NYC cultural organizations

Governors Island Arts presents its program with the visionary support of the Ford Foundation, as well the Charina Endowment Fund, Donald R. Mullen Family Foundation, Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, The Gottesman Fund, Donald A. Pels Charitable Trust, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New York State Council on the Arts.

About Sam Van Aken

Sam Van Aken combines new technologies with traditional modes of art-making to create projects that cross boundaries and engage public spaces. Since receiving his MFA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2001, his work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, receiving numerous honors including a Joan Mitchell Award, an International Association of Art Critics Award, and a Creative Capital Grant. He is currently the Graduate Program Coordinator for the School of Art at Syracuse University.