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"Sam Falls Rewilds Champagne Country Through a Vivid New Series"

By Alina Cohen

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Sam Falls. Photo: Alice Jacquemin and Ruinart

Last October Ruinart invited artist Sam Falls to visit its historic Taissy vineyard, on the edge of Reims. Having recently reseeded the site with native plants, the Champagne house was keen to engage with an artist whose practice is based in ecology, as part of its ongoing "Conversations with Nature" program. Here, Falls pruned sumac and wild dandelions, maple leaves and pine, taking care not to harm the local flora. He also gathered grapevine leaves, and ventured into Ruinart's medieval chalk cellars. Down the road, he was inspired by Marc Chagall's stained glass windows at the famed Reims Cathedral. A Joan of Arc statue reminded him of the women who have guided his own creative development, from painter Helen Frankenthaler to his late mother, who was also an artist.

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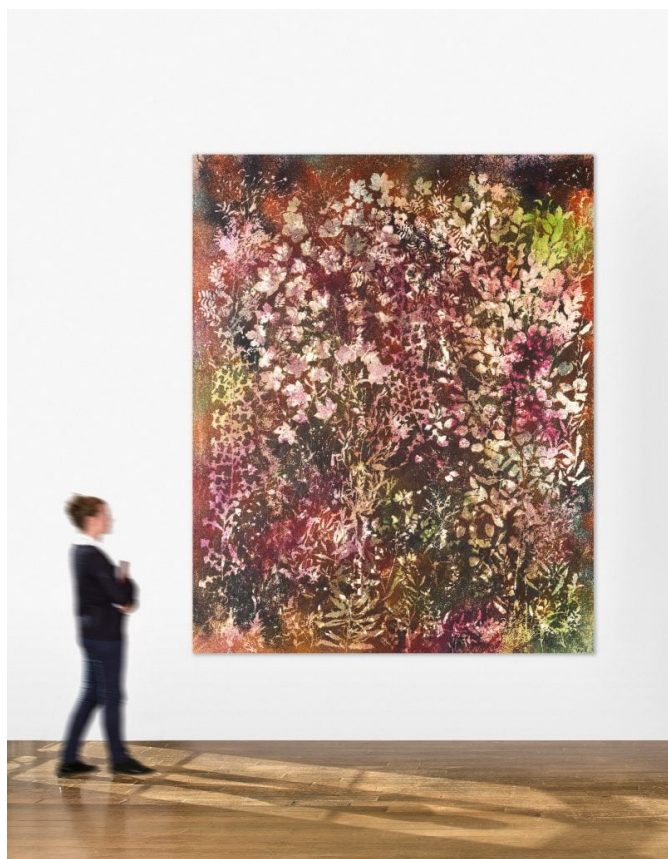
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Falls made a series of paintings based on his experience, two of which will be on view at Art Basel Miami Beach this December, in the Ruinart lounge. *Rewilding* (2024), features two bright, white floral arches. They appear to cocoon a couple of female forms, one holding a sword like Joan of Arc, and are set against a rainbow backdrop and the outlines of vines. Meanwhile *King's Crossing* (2024) features a riot of leaf and flower forms tinged with greens and purples that evoke vineyard hues.

These pieces will subsequently travel to 4 Rue Des Crayères, the brand's Reims headquarters. Falls's paintings commemorate the terroir that served as a collaborator for these works. They also celebrate the ecological diversity that the Champagne house is bringing back to its vineyards, through reseeded, banning herbicides, and engaging in vitiforestry (bringing trees into the ecosystem to increase sustainability and soil health).

"These 'Conversations with Nature' reflect our long-standing commitment to restoring harmony with the natural world, and raising awareness about this conviction through art," Frédéric Dufour, President, Maison Ruinart, shared in the press materials. The program launched in 2017 with Spanish artist Jaume Plensa, known for his epic sculptures. In the intervening years, the company has invited artists including Eva Jospin, Jeppe Hein, David Shrigley, Vik Muniz, and Liu Bolin to participate. They have alternately created sculpture in situ, designed packaging, and taken photographs on the Ruinart premises.



Sam Falls, *King's Cross* (2024). Photo: Alice Jacquemin and Ruinart

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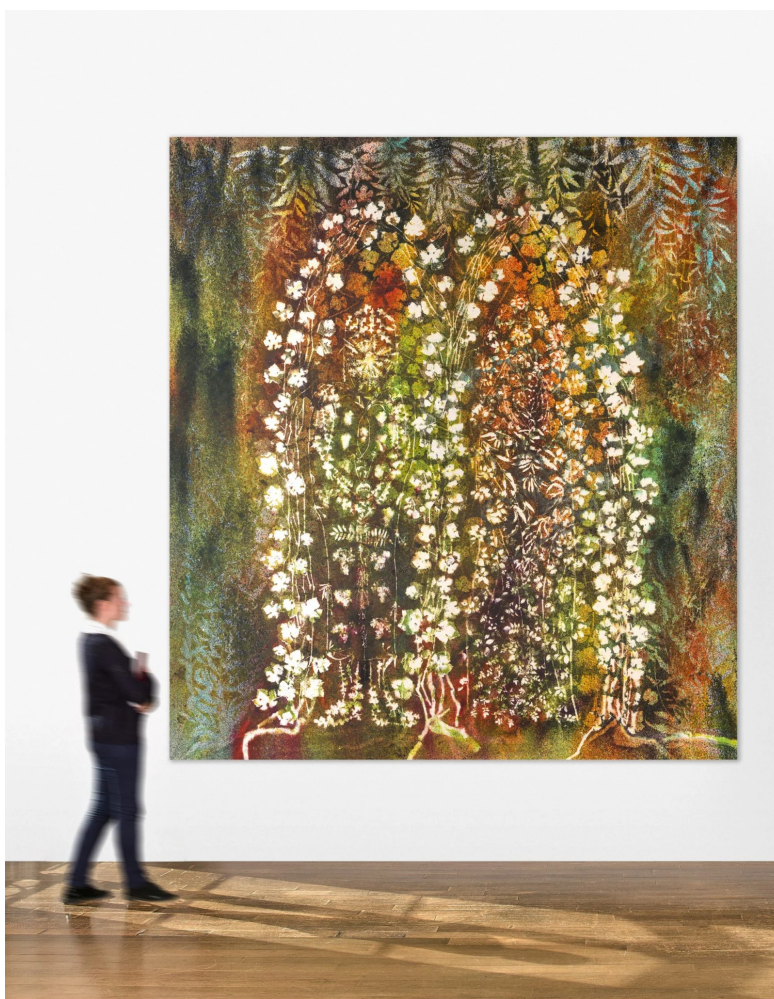
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Ruinart tapped Falls for this iteration in part because of his unique ecological processes. Based in upstate New York, the artist gathers plants at a specific site and arranges them atop canvas, spreading pigment over the composition. The dye sets overnight; humidity in the air wets the canvas. During the day, Falls might set down subsequent layers, and the sunlight can alter the colors as well. "There's a collaboration with the atmosphere, not just the plants," Falls told Artnet. Rain will wash out his hues, while drier evenings keep them more saturated.

In Reims, Falls was just as interested in the history of the cathedral—where French coronations once took place—as the ecosystem of the vineyard. The artist said he thinks about the secularization of religion "in context with agriculture". He uses the natural world as some cultures have used such religious spaces: as sites for transcendence.

The Ruinart collaboration is meaningful to Falls because of the company's commitment to biodiversity and lack of monocropping (which involves planting with a single crop, exhausting the soil). Though Falls is usually more comfortable working with the outdoors than with brands, Ruinart's environmental focus encouraged him to participate.



Sam Falls, *Rewilding* (2024). Photo: Alice Jacquemin and Ruinart

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The artist's Miami presentation kicks off a busy winter and spring. In January, he will present ceramics at Tomio Koyama gallery in Tokyo, inspired by his time at the city's Sogetsu School of Ikebana. Isamu Noguchi designed the institution's plaza, taking an experimental approach to the Japanese art of flower arranging. This artform resonates with Falls's own floral curation. Manhattan's 303 Gallery is also mounting a solo exhibition of his work this April. It is informed by the recent, devastating fires in southern California. "There's already a lot of new growth from areas that were burned," Falls said.

As in much of his work, the artist is thinking about loss and celebrating the new life in its wake. His verdant materials, like saints and organized religion, are perishable. His practice, like a reseeded vineyard, aims for sustainable creation, one harvest at a time.

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