

## GAGOSIAN

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### Dan Colen is Using Streetwear to Support Food Banks

Andrea Whittle



*Photographed by Lexie Smith.*

**You came into prominence as a young artist in the aughts, as part of a downtown New York City scene that included Ryan McGinley and the late Dash Snow. In 2011, you bought a 40-acre farm in the Hudson Valley, where you've been working on large-scale pieces and donating every ounce of food produced from the land. Earlier this year, you turned Sky High Farm into a nonprofit. How would you say the events of the past year have affected your practice as an artist and your relationship to your work on the farm?**

Very early on, I decided that the idea of mastery wasn't interesting to me, and that the feeling of comfort wasn't an experience I was looking to get out of my creative process. As an artist, I think it's important to work in a space that you don't understand. Another thing is making sure that I use cues from the world around me as a guide for my work, as opposed to relying solely on my internal ideas. I'm at that precipice with the farm where I'm not sure what its boundaries are, what the art is. Is the vegetable the art or the process the art? Or maybe the art hasn't even happened yet. But the farm is essential to my creative practice.

**You just launched a 100 percent charitable collaboration with Dover Street Market to benefit the food banks that you work with through Sky High Farm. What can people expect to see on the shelves?**

For the first of five phases, we invited a group of streetwear brands—Supreme, Nine One Seven, Awake NY, Better™ Gift Shop, Brain Dead, Cactus Plant Flea Market, Denim Tears, Fucking Awesome, IRAK, MadeMe, Noah, and Total Luxury Spa—to create items using Sky High’s iconography and to add whatever they wanted to it. All of the funds will be used to buy food from other farms, which is extending Sky High’s work, not only by bringing food to food-insecure communities, but also by supporting local small farmers. For the next phases, we’ll be tapping into different creative industries. One of the phases will have to do with food and farming and working directly with chefs. And obviously we’ll be tapping into the art community.

**What would you say your relationship was with fashion before you got into doing the merch for Sky High? Did you think about style in a critical way, or was it something you didn’t really consider?**

The farm and this fashion project are really allowing me to think about my art and how I want it to function. Because at the end of the day, the work does what it’s meant to do after the audience has experienced it: The audience walks away and continues to be affected by it. But such a limited group of people can continually consume art, can take it home with them, can live with it. I mean, it’s not even affordable to go to museums nowadays. And so the idea of creating an object that a wider audience can interact with in a more open-ended way is interesting for me to think about, whether that’s a head of lettuce or a bag.



*Photographed by Dan Colen. Shirts by Sky High Farm in collaboration with Dover Street Market, Denim Tears, and Awake NY.*

**What does originality mean to you?**

Doing things even though you don't understand why you're doing them or why they need to be done, which, I guess, means finding a deeper source of faith, whether that's internal or external.

**How are you feeling about the rest of 2020?**

We're all staring outside, looking at smoke from the West Coast, so that's crazy. But at the same time, so much clarity has been offered to me and a lot of the people I've been talking to in terms of what we want to spend our energy and time with. I'm not even talking about some giant answer to any global issue. But if we could each get a little more clarity on what we value most, together we could really change a lot.