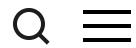


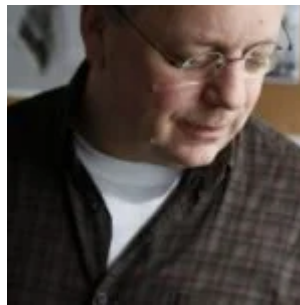


Tishman Environment
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Painting and Planting the Trees of Northern Rhode Island







Michael Palumbo, Senior Office Manager at the [School of Art, Media, and Technology at Parsons](#) has been studying and creating art since his undergraduate years at the University of Rhode Island. His

artistic practice is inspired by nature.

We caught up with Mike to learn more about his latest project, which centers on strategically placed tree plantings in Rhode Island. **Q: WHEN DID THE TREE PLANTING PROJECT BEGIN?**

A: This current project began in 2015 in the wetlands off Albion Road in Lincoln, Rhode Island, I planted these trees as “markers.” I made my first marker by putting plaster “extensions” on a few tree stumps in a wooded area on the campus of the University of Rhode Island in 1978 so that is really where this project began. In that instance, there was the absence of the trees with only stumps left behind, in this recent work there was the absence of the healthy trees and animal life in the Lincoln wetlands. A response to what is absent has always been present in my image making too. **Q:**

HOW HAS THIS PROJECT GROWN OVER TIME?

A: Since 2015 I have had these repeated empathic responses to the landscape and, after I planted my first tree-marker in the wetlands (I continue to track the tree’s growth), I continued with more markers that I planted in historical graveyards in both Lincoln and Smithfield Rhode Island. Given my melancholy nature and my sense of the past, it was only natural that I would be drawn to these sites, but I plant in other locations as well. In the Lincoln Historical cemetery numbers 8 and

21 and in the Smithfield cemetery number 71 I planted dwarf Alberta Spruce trees, I like the fact that they grow to be about the size of a person. I recently returned from northern Rhode Island and planted a tree-marker in Smithfield. The wetland area I came across contained acres of dead trees that looked ghostly, but also attractive in some way. As I got closer to this site it smelled as if the area was being used as an open sewer and this is what killed the trees, so I planted my Leyland Cypress tree on the edge of this site where other plants are growing. Leyland Cypress trees grow up to fifty feet tall. I have seen other ghostly, dead, tree landscapes in the neighboring towns. I am pleased with the minimal impact my work has on the landscape. In fact, once the trees take root and become a part of the landscape, there is no trace of my having ever been there. Q:

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO BEGIN

THE PROJECT? A: While the trees themselves are inspirational, my work is dark and simply existential-empathic responses to the environment I come in contact with. The melancholy nature of this work lends itself to bereavement and so historical graveyard sites make sense. If you think about it we have always planted our sorrow in the earth, taking our dead out into the landscape and putting them in a plot

of land we deem sacred is basic human behavior, but this behavior is also peculiar if we have been fouling the land during our lifespan. Apart from the tree planting itself and checking in on its growth, there is also the feeling that I have completed something, that something maybe myself.

Q: HOW DOES THE TREE PLANTING PROJECT FIT INTO YOUR WHOLE BODY OF

WORK?A: That is a difficult question because the image making and the planting of tree-markers are both intimately connected to my growth as an artist and, at the same time, are two different processes with nature at their source. I would like to begin drawing the trees that I have been planting -that would be a point of convergence- but for now the processes, for the most part, run parallel to one another. Both digging in the earth to plant tree-markers and mark making to make images both are very satisfying and both define me. Finally, the dynamics of nature itself provides the broadest possible arena in which these creative processes can play out within me. I just have to trust that the work will develop in a meaningful way.

