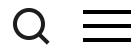THE NEW SCHOOL Tishman Environment and Design Center

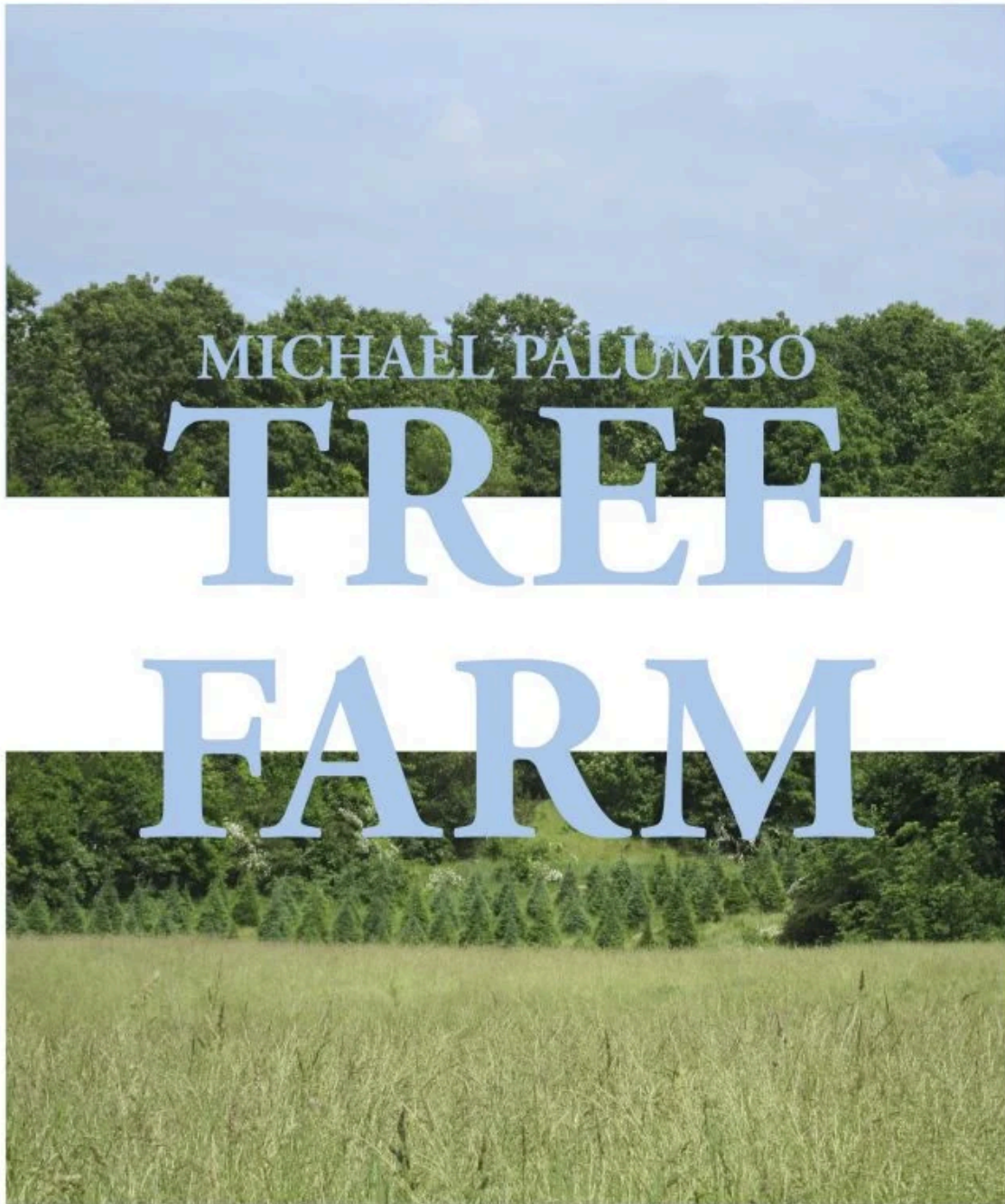TISHMAN CENTER · AUGUST 27, 2018

"Tree Farm" to Invite Community to Participate in Nature-Based Art

November 7 - December 14

University of Rhode Island Fine Arts Center

MICHAEL PALUMBO

TREE FARM

University of Rhode Island Fine Arts Center

105 Upper College Road Kingston, Rhode Island 02881

Monday - Friday: 12pm to 4pm

michaelpalumboart.com

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. An exhibition of his work, "Tree Farm" opens in the Project Space at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston, R.I. on November 7th, 2018.

Q: The Title of your upcoming exhibition is "Tree Farm." Where did this come from, and what do you hope to inspire in the people who visit the exhibit?

A: I was planting a tree where people place small memorials in Chase Farm Park in Lincoln, Rhode Island. When I got up and looked around I saw a tree farm in the distance and was fixated. I wondered if instead of planting one marker what it would be like to plant many of them? But it was Ron Onorato, Chair of the Fine Arts at the University of Rhode Island, who thought my planting project might be a good fit for the Fine Arts Project Space in the Fine Arts Center. So, with the image of the tree farm fixed in my imagination, I realized it would be more exciting to

have a collective planting project exhibition that involved people at URI and the surrounding community planting many trees rather than only having an exhibition that documentated my planting project.

Q: You'll be showing new paintings at your exhibition. How has your inspiration evolved in creating your new works?

A: The new paintings were a long time evolving. I have always worked with nature but needed to bring my painting and drawing practice together. The paintings now come out in a much more immediate way as if I am drawing with paint. With the very newest paintings, I have begun to paint images of some of the trees I have planted in Lincoln, Smithfield, and Kingston Rhode Island. So, the work is getting more integrated as it evolves. These paintings were a pure joy to make, they may be the first works I have not obsessed over.

Q: Your tree planting project so far has been based in your personal connection to places, how will the project be affected by inviting others to plant trees?

A: I like your question. If people feel comfortable enough to walk out of the project space with a tree which they would then plant, then, ideally, I would like them to feel their way

forward, maybe live with the tree awhile and finally plant it in a space that is particularly self-defining. The work is, in part, about the relationships people have to the space around them and marking that space with a living growing life form, that may involve constructed spaces (indoors) or space as it manifests itself in nature. I have no idea if people are going to participate or not, I have purchased extra trees in case the gallery is emptied of all the trees over time. Given the number of trees I need, I should mention that the Parsons Staff Development Fund has been generous in supporting this project.

Q: Will the "Tree Farm" exhibition be the first time your paintings and the trees for planting are housed in the same space? How does the physical exhibit space impact the art or vice versa?

A: Yes, this will be the first time the plants, paintings, and photos will all be in the same space. Right now, it seems like there will be a visual interconnectedness between the actual trees and the painted and photographic images of trees, I hope it works as much as I am expecting it to. I would like the actual trees themselves to dominate the space, if that does not happen I fear that people will view the trees as

sculptural objects when, in fact, their
participation in planting is the art.

11/21/25, 12:04 PM "Tree Farm" to Invite Community to Participate in Nature-Based Art — Tishman Environment and Design Center

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