



Michelle Lougee *Sanctity of Nature*

November 6 – December 7, 2025

Plastic horrifies and beguiles me. It is ever-present and miraculous, life saving and life threatening, essential, overused, enduring and disposable. My work, created from post-consumer plastic, examines the relationships between humans, plastic, and nature amidst irreversible environmental changes.

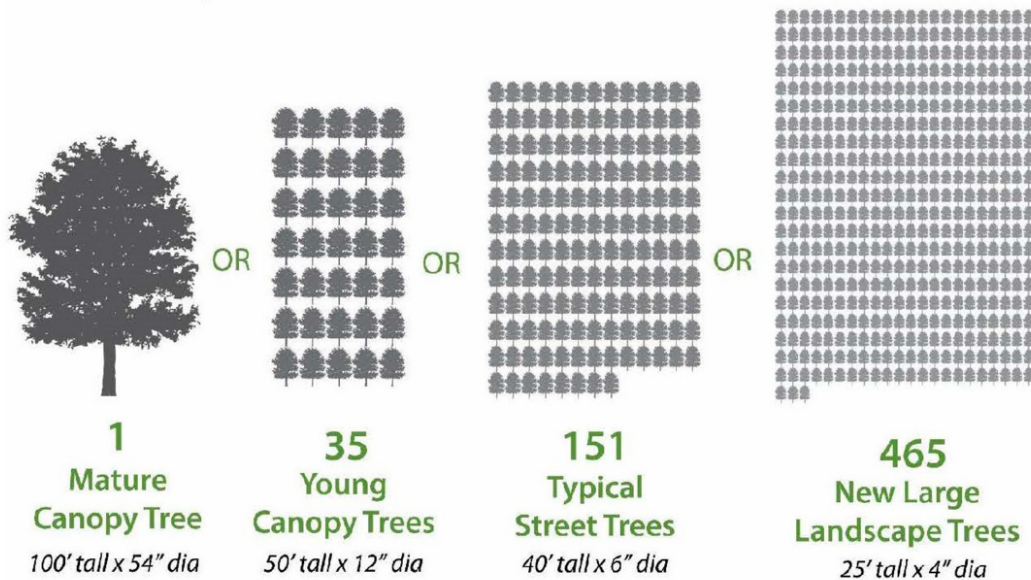
Committed to working with discarded materials while embodying Victorian era resourcefulness results in a labor-intensive and obsessive practice of collecting, sorting, and processing plastic. I create material confusion by making visual associations between found plastic and organic materials. Plastic objects are often transformed or embellished (with more plastic) using traditional fiber hand techniques introducing the element of time and nostalgia. Natural objects are incorporated or referenced to memorialize and reflect upon the exquisite magic of our planet. Humor, hope and loss coexist in work that is simultaneously about past, present, future, nature and a material that never goes away.

Sanctity of Nature continues my material investigation of post-consumer plastic debris, and a dialogue about the divinity of nature and the persistence of waste. Dystopian reliquaries that pair natural objects with transformed plastic in uncanny collections are displayed as altars. My work alludes to the scale of plastic pollution while questioning what our culture chooses to value and worship.

The work in the exhibit: a baptismal gown, reliquaries and altars, and large-scale drawings, refer to a broader sense of divinity rather than any specific religion. In these devotional totems, carefully curated artifacts intermingle to evoke a sense of nostalgia for forgotten values. The work is at once mournful and optimistic, serving as a call to consider our stewardship of a generous planet.

CARBON ROCK STARS: LARGE, OLDER TREES AND FORESTS

How many oak trees does it take to store 8 tons of carbon?



"A large northern red oak measures 14 feet in circumference [54 inches diameter at breast height (dbh)]. Its height is 100 feet. Approximately 50% of this dry weight is carbon, or 7.7 tons. This amount of carbon has a CO₂ equivalency of 28.2 tons. Let's say we have a 12-inch dbh, 50-foot tall, young northern red oak. It would take 35 young trees to match the carbon of the one large oak. Using a 6-inch dbh, 40-foot tall oak, the number of young trees needed to match the one big tree soars to 151! Finally, let's drop to a 4-inch DBH and 25-foot height. The number of oaks required skyrockets to 465! It takes 10 or more years to get a young red oak up to this [4-inch dbh] size...Let's take a young, newly planted tree from nursery stock...its diameter is 1 inch and it is 4.5 feet tall...it would take 61,364 newly planted trees to match the carbon in our one large oak, and they would be three years old!...Assuming each 1-inch diameter seedling controls only 5 ft² of ground space, then the total area needed to hold the seedlings becomes...7.0 acres... The lesson is clear: Save big trees where possible." - Robert Leverett, Cofounder, Native Tree Society

Source: Leverett R.T. 2021. Carbon Storage in Large vs Small Trees – an Example. Unpublished Text.

Also See: Leverett R.T., Masino S.A, and Moomaw W.R. 2021. Older eastern white pine trees and stands accumulate carbon for many decades and maximize cumulative carbon. *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change* 4: 620450. doi: 10.3389/ffgc.2021.620450