

July 16, 2021

ICEHOUSE project space installation  
Sharon, CT

“Bitter/Sweet”

During the Coronavirus lockdown, I found refuge in daily walks along my street in Hillsdale. Trying to identify the roadside plants, I discovered that almost all of them were non-native invasives. My growing awareness of the dangers of these plants coincided with our growing understanding of the invading virus. The coronavirus model, round with orange spikes around the edges, inspired the circle motifs of the installation; the orange represents threat and warning.

Invasive plants are a huge threat to our environment, robbing native plants of light, water, and nutrients, and leading to a loss of biodiversity. Learning to identify and name the plants and distinguish them from similar benign species was the first step in my research.

I eventually narrowed my focus to the 12 most destructive invasives in our area. In the tradition of the amateur artist/naturalist, I painted images of the plants on round canvases with their common and Latin names, outlined in orange. These tondi are arranged in a clock-like circle, hinting at the urgency of preserving biodiversity.

The most aggressive invasive local plant is Oriental bittersweet. The vines themselves are quite lovely and in the fall the orange and red berries are stunning. But birds eat those berries and spread them, creating more and more of the ubiquitous vines that strangle the trees they climb. I have woven a giant wreath from bittersweet vines I uprooted, turning their menace into art.

Around the upper frieze of the ICEHOUSE are wood disks (“cookies”) cut from a Norway maple tree on our property, playfully emblazoned with the message, “‘No’ to Norways,” since their dense canopy and shallow root systems drive out native plants.

The circular forms throughout the installation play against the geometric structure of the ICEHOUSE. By circling things we draw attention to them; my goal is to draw attention to the danger of these invasives.