

Gin Stone

Boston Harbor Cleanup- Fieldwork Residency, Boston, MA

Fall 2024

White Super Sacks In Situ (series)



From my residency with the Center for Coastal Studies and the Massachusetts Dept. of Conservation and Recreation, Boston Harbor Islands Cleanup- Field Work Residency, a once in a generation opportunity to clean and document the debris and trash removal from five of the Boston Harbor Islands.

The images come from the stark and lonely visage of the sacks awaiting retrieval on the islands of Boston Harbor, some of which have been off limits to visitors for decades.

The sacks themselves seem to bear the weight of abandonment and solitude.



When you see the amount of trash it's overwhelming. There is no personal way to address it on such a grand and crushing scale. When it's consolidated into the super sacks show the loneliness of the bags, the abandonment of the trash. I never touched these sacks, I did not position them for the best shot, or pose them in poignant ways, they... just are.

The paralyzingly grand scale shrinks down to the minutia within the task of a clean-up. You pick up a large block of Styrofoam and not only has the foam degraded into millions of tiny foam beads absolutely everywhere, and that will be there thousands of years, which is an estimate because of course we don't know for sure because we just started making this stuff. And it is already everywhere, just getting broken down into smaller and smaller pieces and releasing chemicals (a pretty toxic one called styrene) as it goes but it retains this chemical even in the form of microplastic, leaching it into all living things and the food for all living things. Imagine this degrading planet wide over millennia until the only thing left is barren dunes of toxic plastic powder and gas fumes. It harkens my mind to the image of Spectacle Island nearby, which smoldered for fifty years due to the industrial muck dumped on it and continued until we dropped the big dig's load on it and capped the inflamed pustule, then plant native trees on top and call it a sanctuary. As you walk that island that, which is now open as a park, remember that three feet under your toes lies the unpleasant archaeological strata of the original horse rendering plant to trash incinerators to just straight up smoking, burning and fuming garbage until the 1990's.

But for the moment on the island I am currently on in the Boston Harbor, as one expects, the gulls' nest in the attractive lobster pots piled into mazes, intricate beyond Daedalus' skill to create, and chicks become entangled in its soft netting, but when you loiter and look further... Ant colonies create tiny habitats within a portable ant hill of Styrofoam block, goldenrod takes seed on top of dock sections then dive their roots further and further until they finally reach life-giving soil on the other side of the barren foam, a grotesque method of hydroponic farming taking place on those islands. A whole foam block adapted into a climate-controlled shelter for a family of muskrats, strange bedding piled up from gnawed chunks of foam. The sterile tastelessness the family experienced making a home out of this strange and mysterious material.

The experience briefly showed me that, for a fleeting time at least, a handful of creatures will adapt to what we have done, but I am not counting us into that group. We are only so adaptable, and only when we feel 'it's convenient'. And still my heart aches for all those highly specialized, unadaptable creatures that, for a time, will suffer the most before being lost forever.



For more images from this series, visit: <http://www.ginstoneart.com/installation/>