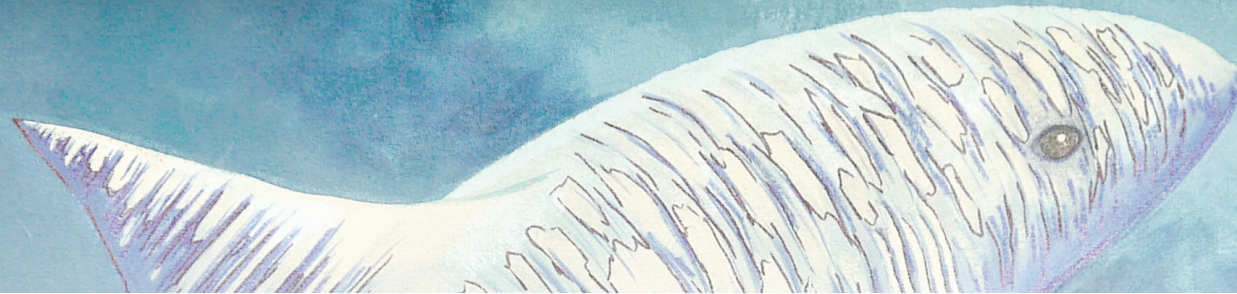


THOUGHTS AND PREY-ERS

artsy



By Tara Pierce

Wery few people would ask to be re-incarnated as a wildebeest or a minnow. You don't have to watch too many nature documentaries to know that these unfortunate creatures all too often end up as the entrée of the day. But life at the top of the food chain is no bed of roses either, as the latest exhibit at Lincoln City's Chessman Gallery shows.

"Vulnerable Predators" explores the world of apex predators through works by painter and installation artist Tara Pierce, photographer William Schweinfurth, mixed media artist Samm Newton and installation artist Carissa Smith-Burkett.

The show opens this Friday, Sept. 13, with a public reception from 5 to 7 pm offering wine, light refreshments and the chance to chat with the artists.

An art exhibit with a passionate purpose, "Vulnerable Predators" seeks to deliver a vital message. It challenges viewers to think about the importance of apex predators such as sharks and killer whales as well as much smaller creatures. Dramatic changes in the ocean environment combined with irresponsible fishing practices have caused a major decline in these important predators.

Along with acrylic paintings, photographs and drawings, the exhibit features an unusual array of materials

such as woven fishing line and by-caught salmon shark fin sculptures procured with the help of the Hatfield Science Center.

"Fins for Sale" by Will Schweinfurth aims to draw attention to the harmful tradition of shark finning, which kills between 70 and 100 million sharks each year. Dwindling shark populations in turn lead to an imbalance among lower tier predators and prey.

Born in Portland, Schweinfurth developed a love for photography in high school and went on to Oregon State University where, one term in, switched from zoology to photography, hoping to merge his love for the nature world with art. He created "Fins for Sale" in his final year at Oregon State, using real shark fins from a by-caught salmon shark in a process sanctioned by the Hatfield Marine Science Center and professor Kerry Skarbakka.

Tara Pierce explores the relationships of apex predators through her acrylic paintings on canvas. Sharks are critical to each ecosystem they inhabit and are potentially one of the world's most misunderstood animals. Orca whale species around the globe are all handling the warming waters differently. Also an apex predator, orca populations and altered territories signal massive ecological shifts.

In her bachelor's thesis, Pierce combined her studio practice with

marine biology, informing her work with scientific studies as she sought to create hopeful images about otherwise dire topics.

"The media bombards us daily with grim environmental news and implies that unless we overhaul our lifestyles and are consistently perfect, we are all going to kill the planet," she said. "This sensationalism does not promote conversation or discussion of potential solutions; it promotes only a feeling of defeat."

For this reason, Pierce chose to create inviting images with the aim of starting the conversation anew.

"Humanity has come together across borders, oceans, and cultures, to create international laws that solve environmental problems via prevention, protection and remedying mistakes," she said. "These paintings are about those mistakes, but also about the successful solutions we put forth and adhere to, to this day."

The exhibit will also feature a series of visual works by Samm Newton inspired by Cliones, tiny marine snails that swim through pelagic ecosystems with modified wings earning them nicknames including sea butterflies and sea angels. These tiny, whimsical predators, which range in size from a few millimeters to one or two centimeters, are impacted by changing ocean chemistry, which affects

availability of prey as well as their own internal processes.

Newton developed the series throughout the past two years, working with marine ecologists from the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Science and fluid mechanics engineers from the University of South Florida.

"These paintings experiment with how we know the ocean and handle vulnerable beings in the natural world," she said. "It is meant to spark curiosity, and to generate further questions, not answer them."

Guests will also be able to view sculptures of sea jellies crocheted out of fishing line by Carissa Smith-Burkett. The transparent material of the fishing line mimics the fascinating flesh of these umbrella-shaped marine animals, while also inviting the viewer to contemplate the fishing industry's impact on marine life

Smith-Burkett is a three-dimensional narrative maker, who serves as curator and arts program manager at the Chehalem Cultural Center in Newberg. She received a BA in studio art with a focus in sculptural practices at Azusa Pacific University and an MFA in visual art from Vermont College of Fine Art.

"Vulnerable Predators" will be on display through Monday, Oct. 7. The Chessman Gallery located inside the Lincoln City Cultural Center is at 540 NE Hwy. 101.