

# Message in a (water) bottle

HRAP's Trash Talk turns beach plastic into art

By **KATHERINE LACAZE**  
FOR COAST WEEKEND

**I**n the words of regional artist Pooka Rice: “Art is the best way to facilitate messages.”

During a recent workshop, she showed a handful of participants what that means by demonstrating how to integrate bits of recycled beach plastic into a collection of attractive paintings that send a strong message of ocean stewardship and environmental protection — “art that tells a story,” as Rice put it.

The workshop, held at the Cannon Beach History Center & Museum, was offered as part of the Haystack Rock Awareness Program and Cannon Beach Arts Association’s collaborative Environmental Art Series: Trash Talk Art Workshops.

The Arts Association, whose mission includes education, received funding from the Oregon Coast Visitors Association to help offer the workshops at a lower cost, making them more accessible to the public, said Meagan Sokol, arts education director.

## From trash to treasure

The mammoth issue of plastic pollution negatively impacting beaches, bodies of water and marine life in general is not unique to Cannon Beach, but there is no better place for people to contribute to mitigating the problem than in their own community, said Rice, who is also HRAP’s outreach coordinator.

“If we all work together and do our part, we can impact it,” she added.

Cannon Beach’s iconic Haystack Rock is protected under the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge and as a Marine Garden. HRAP is dedicated to preserving the site’s natural resources, including the intertidal and bird ecology, primarily through education, such as citizen science and stewardship programs that draw locals and visitors alike.



Katherine Lacaze

**Artist Pooka Rice demonstrates how to incorporate plastic marine debris into artwork during a workshop. As the outreach coordinator for the Haystack Rock Awareness Program, she is heavily invested in protecting marine ecology and the area’s natural resources.**



Katherine Lacaze

**Community members work with paint and recycled marine debris during a workshop that was part of an environmental art series organized by the Cannon Beach Arts Association and Haystack Rock Awareness Program.**

In the course of pursuing that mission, bringing awareness to the plastic problem has surfaced as a key component. Microplastics are permeating various levels of the food web and causing widespread damage. For example, the bright colors of the plastic pieces attract wildlife. “We’re giving them junk food — literally,” Rice said.

## Art for all

While the bouquet of multicolored plastics and other debris is harmful to marine life, it can be repackaged as an alluring art material. Participants worked with fragments of old beach toys, pieces of rope, and twisted bits of plastic of unidentifiable origin collected from the shore.

Each person ended up with a piece of multidimensional artwork that can now be “a storytelling device,” Rice said.

Because ocean plastics are known to concentrate toxic pollutants — an additional danger to marine ecosystems — she goes through a cleaning process to help detoxify the plastic before it is handled. Even still, she encouraged participants to wash their hands after crafting with the debris and before consuming food. When the art pieces are in schools or other areas frequented by children, she said, they are encased in plant-based resin to ensure the kids “aren’t exposed to anything.”

The Art Association is working to take similar environmental art workshops into area schools with the help of working artists in the community.

“It is really important to me that art is getting to students,” Sokol said.

Rice agreed: “There’s not a lot of art left in schools. Bringing it in along with science is awesome.”

*The next workshop in the series is “How Does Your Garden Grow: Beach Plastic Floral Assemblage,” with artist Mary Bess Gloria, on Saturday, March 23. For more information or to register for a workshop, visit [cannonbeacharts.org](http://cannonbeacharts.org) or call 971-361-9308.* 

