

ARTIST MESHES FISHING NETS INTO WORKS OF ART

BY NANCY MCCARTHY

Emily Miller's art looks like pieces plucked from the ocean.

She creates sea urchin bowls and ceramic sea turtles, paints ocean scenes and sews baskets from fisherman's rope. Each piece tells a story about transformation.

Miller's work appears in Fairweather House and Gallery in Seaside and Astoria Visual Arts.

Miller is especially interested in using "ghost" nets and ropes — pieces that have been abandoned in the ocean and are headed to a landfill when they wash ashore.

"I've always worked in different mediums," Miller said. "The ghost net project is the newest medium I've started exploring."

Miller also collects rope from commercial fisheries. She keeps a huge pile of reclaimed rope and nets in the garage of her home.

Lost or abandoned fishing gear makes up 46% of the debris in the North Pacific Gyre,

according to Miller. Surfrider Kauai, an organization that works to "protect Kauai's ocean resources," collects 10,000 pounds of ghost nets and ropes a month and sends Miller boxes of the material.

Miller was born in California but spent her summers in Deer Isle, Maine. She moved to Kauai at 16 and stayed for 12 years before moving to Oregon.

In 2015, Miller learned how to sew baskets with cotton rope in Deer Isle. While walking the beach one day, she picked up a piece of ghost rope.

"It's really colorful and it has all this history and personality. Some of the pieces are tangled. They don't look fresh and I like that," Miller said. "They've already got a story to tell visually."

The rope's material determines what Miller will create. She unravels the ropes until thinner strands are available to sew her baskets and create her wall hangings.

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Photos by Nancy McCarthy

TOP: Artist Emily Miller unravels a piece of 'ghost' rope, used by fishermen, before she stitches the strands into bowls and wall hangings. **LEFT:** Sorted by its natural colors, 'ghost' rope is collected by artist Emily Miller from Surfrider Kauai and from commercial fisheries. She brings piles of it to galleries for interactive art projects. **RIGHT:** Sea urchins inspired the ceramic bowls created by artist Emily Miller. Her works reflect the ocean.