

RECLAIM, REINVENT, RELEASE

Ecological artist makes her mark

BY RAY GARCIA

Somewhere along the coast, Shelby Silver wades through the sand, scanning the wrack line for any treasures that washed ashore.

As she sifts through strewn pieces of seagrass and kelp, Silver finds what she's looking for: plastic marine debris. Collecting the scattered bits one by one, she plops them into a container before continuing her trek along the waves.

"If I want to really bring in the raw feeling of the ocean into my work, I will not

wash them because I want that energy of the ocean to still be felt," Silver said.

Silver is an Oregon-based ecological artist who repurposes recovered items in her artwork, such as plastic marine debris and fish netting. Her art has appeared in galleries throughout the state, including in Astoria, Seaside and Cannon Beach.

Silver started working in ecological rehabilitation 10 years ago. She works as a marine conservation and ecological art educator, and has held several educator positions.

A native of Grays Harbor, Washington, Silver spent much of her childhood between the Wishkah River and Copalis Crossing. For as long as she can remember, she has found herself looking for things on the beach. She traces her upcycling and stewardship values to her mother.

"She is a Jenny of all trades so she would do all kinds of things," Silver said.

Silver grew up on a llama ranch. Her mother assumed the role of an on-call animal midwife, helping llamas in labor. Silver and her sister assisted as needed. Apart from delivering baby llamas, Silver's mother had many side gigs, from cutting children's hair to helping fishermen in the Westport Marina in Grays Harbor repair fishing nets. Silver said her mother demonstrated how to care for the planet.

Her mother's lifelong expertise as a seamstress and tailor also impacted Silver. An influential part of her youth, Silver said, was becoming a fiber artist at an early age. She and her sister were the youngest members of their local fiber guild. At one point, the eldest member in the guild was 83 years old. In comparison, Silver and her sister were respectively 9 and 7 years old.

"I never questioned whether or not I could actually physically accomplish something. I've just known that no matter what it is that I want to get done, I'll find a way,"



Photos by Michelle Bauer

ABOVE: Shelby Silver. **RIGHT:** Silver sorts plastic marine debris.



Photos by Shelby Silver

ABOVE LEFT: 'The Sacred Painting' by Silver. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Silver's art installation, 'We've Made Our Bed.'



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