SOCIAL MEDIA TAKEOVER: EMILY MILLER

I'm a mixed Chinese-American artist whose work is inspired by my love of the ocean. I moved from Kaua‘i to the Portland Oregon area in 2014. I'm a painter, sculptor, and installation artist, and I love using natural or reclaimed materials in my work.

This week I’ll be focusing on my ongoing project “Ghost Net Landscape,” which is a community-interactive traveling installation that transforms reclaimed fishing gear into art. Ghost Net Landscape is directly inspired, and continually sustained, by my connection to Kaua‘i. The intentions of Ghost Net Landscape are to share understanding about the material itself, and how I use it as a catalyst for positive transformation, creating community, processing loss and grief, and joyful creativity.

On Wednesday I’ll introduce an interactive storytelling activity, in continuation of my 2020 exhibit of Ghost Net Landscape: Sea Stories. I’ll be posting a Sea Story video from the 2020 exhibit on the Five Oaks IGTV channel every day. On Saturday, our new interactive story will come to life!

You can see lots more about Ghost Net Landscape on the project website at www.GhostNetArt.com and on my Instagram @ejmillerfineart!
For each Ghost Net Landscape exhibit, I bring thousands of pounds of reclaimed fishing gear into public spaces and invite the community to collaborate with me, in using it to create art.

One of my intentions for Ghost Net Landscape is to share, and shift, understanding about the material itself. “Ghost net” is fishing rope and nets that have been lost or abandoned at sea. In Hawai‘i, many tons of it washes up from across the Pacific Ocean, carried by strong ocean currents in the North Pacific gyre. All coastal communities have an experience of this issue. Currently I’m using ghost net from Kaua‘i, Oregon, Ireland and Maine.

I also use responsibly recycled fishing gear collected in partnership with commercial fisheries. Although that material is not “ghost net,” it becomes a land-based disposal issue when the huge nets are worn out. All these sources of material are included in Ghost Net Landscape to share the many paths of this material’s past history and present actions toward new solutions.

Ghost Net Landscape began as a way for me to process my own feelings about the material’s complicated history. How could I ever “do enough” to make any difference to this massive, tangled global issue? For me, creating what I can, with joy, overcomes the paralysis of shame and blame often surrounding these issues. Each of us has the power to create something new and beautiful, from our own unique understanding. Ghost Net Landscape creates a space for us to explore that potential together, in response to a problem too big to solve alone.

Today I’m sharing some of my own artwork created with ghost net and reclaimed fishing gear. As an artist, I was first attracted to this abundant playground of material, its color and texture, and the weathered history of each unique piece of gear. My work is meant to honor the beauty and value that I see in this resource and its stories.

Photo credits: 1,4 Sabrina Spurlock. 5 Shelby Silver. 6 Peggy Kemp. 7 Patrick Maher.
Today's activity is to co-create a story of positive transformation for this leafy sea dragon! This incredible 3-foot-long puppet was created by @moreresponsibleliving as part of the 2020 Ghost Net Landscape: Sea Stories exhibit of community-created puppet stories. First I'll share some context for the activity, and then the official prompt.

Ghost Net Landscape intersects with environmental and industry issues, but it is not an environmental or industry project. Most published thought about this material has focused on its damaging effects to the environment, or its economic potential when reclaimed. By contrast, Ghost Net Landscape creates an intentional public space for joyful discovery and exploration of the material itself. When participants co-create artwork in the Ghost Net Landscape, the goal is to dive in to wild creativity and positive transformation.

I work as artist-in-residence throughout each exhibit. I am present in the space creating my own artwork and leading groups in collaborative projects. Each exhibit is unique because each exhibit begins unfinished, open to the potential for new creativity and exploration that we create each day in the space, together. What can you do with this, that has never been done before? What can you do with it that brings you joy? That heals relationships with your community, your environment, your self?

*** ACTIVITY PROMPT ***With the sea dragon at the center of your thoughts, consider this...What does it look like in the world that you want? Be silly. Create new logic. Start thinking and taking notes, alone or with a partner or a team. Focus on creative, positive transformation. Share a single thought, or a whole paragraph.

Comment on this post or DM any time between now and Friday. On Saturday, our shared story will come to life. Tag a friend who might like to join in!

I’ll start us off with the first comment: Golden light shone through the forest of soft seagrass.
January 14, 2020

The ocean is the place where I go for sanctuary. Acceptance and honoring of my physical and emotional self. Joy, peace, connection. Rest. Balance. It is a place that I love.

We live on an ocean planet. In Hawai‘i, this is difficult to ignore. The changing weather is ruled by the ocean and there is no place we can look towards endless land. Globally, all lands share this unbreakable bond to the oceans that cover nearly three-quarters of our planet. But it can be easy to forget, when our physical senses are cut off from the sea. In each exhibit of Ghost Net Landscape, I do all I can to bring in the sights, sounds, smells, and textures of the coast.

Ghost Net Landscape grows, and is nourished, through that connection and that love. Within this, there is space for both joy and grief, creation and loss. The materials themselves acknowledge the damage done by humans to our environment, our communities, and ourselves. Visually, this exists alongside the material’s human history of strength, nourishment, and beauty. Ghost Net Landscape presents both, and then invites the work of rebuilding, reconnecting, and transforming this into a gift of joy. The objects that are created, and the communities that are formed, are an act of healing.
January 14, 2021 (continued)

My experience of the ocean is an experience of abundance, an infinity of time and distance in endless waves. Ghost Net Landscape offers an abundance of materials – the biggest pile I can logistically manage – for free. My goal at the end of each exhibit is to give away every bit of unused material that was brought in. Through giving this gift, my intention is to create a space of abundance, where generosity and community are natural and nourishing. It is a gift of space for exploring new ideas without judgement. Also known as PLAY! 😊

What does sanctuary look like to you? DM or comment on yesterday's sea dragon post to add your contributions to its shared story!
January 15, 2021
Today is the last day to DM or comment on Wednesday's sea dragon post to add your contributions to its shared story!

Today I’m sharing more details about the three Ghost Net Landscape exhibits I’ve held so far. Each exhibit’s intention is to create community by honoring participants’ unique skills and knowledge in creating new work with this material.

The most recent exhibit, “Sea Stories,” was held during the pandemic as a socially distributed community project in partnership with Portland Textile Month. Participants picked up material kits, created a puppet and story, and returned them to the exhibit space for filming. This interactive exhibit was set up to be accessible from public window space, outdoors, as well as online. Sea Stories was co-led with Shere Coleman @sherehastings and Shelby Silver @shelbysilver.ecologicalart. During my first exhibit in spring 2019, “Ocean Goddess,” I invited performance artists to collaborate with set builders and costume designers to create multiple live performances. I also invited dozens of visual artists to create unique objects with these materials throughout the show.

In October 2019, “All the Fish in the Sea” was held at the campus art gallery of Pacific University, an Oregon university with many students from Hawaiʻi. Over 300 students and community members created a massive school of fishes, each one completely unique, along with decorations for Dia de los Muertos and lots of functional work like hammocks, pet toys, and string bags.

Each exhibit is documented at www.GhostNetArt.com with lots more photos and videos!
January 16, 2021
Mahalo to everyone who contributed to Leafy the Sea Dragon’s fantastic new story! It’s live on IGTV now!

I’d like to share one more intention for Ghost Net Landscape. I create what I love. The intentions of Ghost Net Landscape can be applied to whatever YOU love. Build communities that honor and accept difference. Share stories and dream together. Play, and try new things without the weight of judgement. Focus on what you can do to create positive transformation, in a way that brings you joy, and in turn creates joy for others.

Ghost Net Landscape is a traveling project. My goal is to work with new coastal communities to share their unique perspectives on this global issue. Each new location has enriched the project with new understanding through gathering local materials, and considering the needs of each community. I’d love to hear your ideas about where the installation should travel next!

I’m also seeking grant funding to produce Sea Stories season 2 with more of the puppets and stories submitted during the October 2020 exhibit.

If you’d like to support the project’s overall mission, ghost net baskets and exhibition books are available at www.GhostNetArt.com/shop. You can explore more ways to partner at www.GhostNetArt.com/partner. And I’ll always post my latest process and inspiration at @ejmillerfineart. Mahalo nui loa! Thank you so much for joining me this week and mahalo to Five Oaks Museum and the DISplace curators and artist collaborators for creating this space.