

| THE CACHE |

A COAT OF MANY COLORS ARTIST WORKS WITH SEA OTTER

Christy Ruby is a Tlingit Ketchikan-based artist who makes a living harvesting marine mammals like seals and sea otters and using their furs to craft functional clothing and wearable art. Despite the challenges that accompany working in a highly regulated industry, Ruby has maintained a sense of humor and *joie de vivre*. She'll casually quip about curveballs that could decimate her business and chuckle when recounting maelstroms during harvest trips. She works closely with two men who are part of the team at Tubari, Ltd., a fur dressing and dyeing shop in New Jersey, and recently gifted them teddy bear look-alikes made with colored sea otter fur.

Ruby has been working with marine



mammal fur for 12 years. She makes hats, scarves, mittens, and more, but colored sea otter might be her signature creation. She says she is the first person in the United States to successfully create and sell colored sea otter products. It started when she saw pieces at a runway show made with multiple colors of mink. She experimented with combining other animal furs with sea otter, but it was never quite right. When she

Left: Christy Ruby with swatches of colored sea otter.

connected with Tubari, they offered to help her dye sea otter. After a trial, Ruby and the Tubari team honed the technique. She has since made several jackets with colored sea otter and is making a full-length coat designed like a totem. She made a capelet with black, red, and turquoise sea otter that won the Innovator Award at the 2017 Cherokee Art Market.

Ruby considers herself a modern artist, but says she is curious how her Tlingit ancestors processed their furs to create clothes. "There's not a whole lot of information on how they made stuff, how they survived," she said. Even after a decade of working with furs Ruby says she's still learning. She continues to fine tune her craft, and says she's had many mentors along the way that have helped her hone her knowledge. "Now it's time for me to start sharing," she said.