



Trashmagination Podcast #16 – Stuffed Toys

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown.

Today we're talking about creative reuse of stuffed toys. Did you know that May 28 is World Play Day?

<http://itla-toylibraries.org/home/2016/05/10/world-play-day/>

Stuffed toys can be difficult to give away for sentimental reasons, but also because not many charities want used stuffed toys. People worry about cleanliness, and if their fur is bedraggled, children don't want them.

Stuffed toys fall into the recycling category of textiles, and only 15% of textiles are donated for reuse or recycling in the United States according to the Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association (SMART) -

http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2714&q=537718&deepNav_GID=1645. The average American family throws away 324 pounds of unwanted textiles per year¹ including stuffed toys.

Today we're going to talk about:

- 1) How to give a better gift than a conventional stuffed toy
- 2) If you are not a maker, I'll share creative places you can give away stuffed toys
- 3) Inspire you to move beyond giving them away with stories about creative reuse artists who have done incredible things with stuffed toys
- 4) How to take apart stuffed toys and make them into something new

How can you avoid stuffed toys? It's hard – often given as gifts. Most are made in less-than-ideal working conditions, and most fur is made from petroleum products. In most cases, your stuffed toy started as oil drilled from the ground.

If you really want to give a lovey, but don't want to make your own, seek out people who make stuffed toys from recycled textiles. One of my favorites is Cotton Monster, an artist in Baltimore, Maryland. <http://cottonmonster.com/>.

You can search Etsy for "eco-friendly toys" or "reclaimed or salvaged fabric toys." However, there is a disincentive in the United States and Europe for making toys from recycled materials. In the US, this law is called the **Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008** - requires all stuffed toys to be tested by a qualified lab for chemicals. While that sounds like a great idea, the problem is that if you make a toy from recycled materials, often each item is unique. If you had to get every item tested, it would make them cost-prohibitive.

I learned about this from Abby Glassenberg, a stuffed toy pattern designer:

- <http://whilshenaps.com/2013/11/safety-testing-for-handmade-toys.html>
- <http://whilshenaps.com/2013/07/making-softies-kid-safe-a-conversation-with-dawn-treacher.html>

¹ <https://www.savers.com/rethinkreuse>

Let's talk about places you could give away a used stuffed toy. Is it new or well-loved? For new toys:

- police and fire services – to give children when they arrive at the scene of a fire or crime
- homeless shelters
- pet shelters
- Stuffstr - <http://www.stuffstr.com/> - app where you post items for sale or donate items – shows places that will accept items – once you fill a cardboard box, Stuffstr notifies postal service to pick up the box, free shipping.

Ideas to engage your neighborhood in a fun stuffed toy recycling event:

- Neighborhood Toy Swap, “Free” bin at your community yard sale or Freecycle
- Community Charity Carnival - <https://sites.google.com/site/donateyourtoys/host-a-charity-carnival>
- Stuffed Animals for Emergencies - <http://www.stuffedanimalsforemergencies.org/>, a program where troops deliver toys, teach you how to organize stuffed animal drives
- Gleaning for the World - <https://gftw.org/current-projects/teddybearbrigade/> - teddy bear toss
- Textile Drive - Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association (SMART) - <http://www.smartasn.org/> - lists textile recycling vendors who can help you do a textile drive

If your stuffed toy is not in good shape, Terracycle Zero Waste Box - https://www.terracycle.com/en-US/zero_waste_boxes/stuffed-animals – three sizes, they break down the fibers for reuse. Also check for curbside textile recycling programs – not common.

But now let's have more fun and talk about artists who have made awesome things from stuffed toys. I got the idea to make this podcast while admiring the work of artists.

Chinami Mori (<https://www.instagram.com/1000wave/>) weaves on a loom. Her account went viral because she takes photos of her grandmother wearing her weavings. One day she was weaving a fuzzy yarn. I wanted to give that a try, but I didn't want to buy new fuzzy yarn. I remembered stuffed toys in storage. I took a toy low on the sentimentality scale, and took it apart with my seam ripper. The seam ripper is your friend! I got a pile of orange fur and a bag full of polyfill stuffing - bonanza of weaving and stuffing materials!

Sherri Lynn Wood is a quilter who likes experimenting with reclaimed fabrics. In 2016, she did a four-month artist residency at Recology, a company that manages recycling for the San Francisco area. They have hosted artists for residencies since 1990. (<https://www.recology.com/recology-san-francisco/artist-in-residence-program/>). Sherri made mostly quilts, but she also took three large stuffed toys, took apart their seams and flattened them, then made into something like a rug. They were a dog, elephant and bear. <http://www.sherrilynnwood.com/afterlife/>

Argentinian artist Agustina Woodgate took apart hundreds of toys and put them together into big rugs. Their design was often symmetrical, like a mandala. <http://agustinawoodgate.com/filter/Projects/Skin-Rugs>

Next is American Mike Kelley who made a lot of pieces with stuffed toys, including giant balls made from toys which he hung from the ceiling. One of his pieces made from stuffed toys sold to the Museum of Modern Art for \$4 Million.

- <http://autre.love/journal/2011/12/04/mike-kelly-at-art-basel-miami>
- <http://collection.whitney.org/object/7317>
- <https://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2013/03/15/moma-buys-stuffed-animal-artwork-for-more-than-4-million/>

Australian artist Geoffrey Ricardo makes prints from stuffed animals. He puts them through roller so they flatten out. He paints them and presses them down on to paper – a way to remember your lovey but not have to keep the actual toy.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDR20LuAXd4>
- <http://www.geoffreyricardo.com/>

Here's an artistic initiative called Second Life Toys in Japan. Its focus is organ donation awareness for children. They ask people to donate damaged toys and they make one toy whole by adding appendages to another toy. For example, an elephant might get a new trunk made from the leg of another animal or a whale might get a new fin made from the ear of another animal. People donate their toys to the campaign and the campaign connects the people whose toys came together to make a new toy. The campaign was hoping this would take a heavy topic and give it a more light-hearted way of broaching the conversation in the world. These toys are so cute – check out the video:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twRsHVOUByA>
- <http://www.secondlife.toys/en/>

Hopefully hearing about those artists inspires you to want to make things from stuffed toys! Project ideas on my Pinterest board - <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/stuffed-toys/>

- Puppet – take out stuffing and cut off legs
- Purse or backpack – take out stuffing, add straps - <http://www.cottonandcurls.com/2012/01/kids-animal-backpack/>
- Scarf – cut stuffie in half, put head on one end of a scarf and legs on the other - <http://www.agirlandagluegun.com/2010/11/for-stuffed-animal-lover-slash-cold.html>
- Pet bed – for a very large stuffie - <https://www.isavea2z.com/repurpose-old-stuffed-animals-craft-project/>
- Bookends – put heavy stuff inside the stuffie
- Puffy Chair - <http://www.marthastewart.com/856969/stuffed-animal-chair>
- Beanbag Chair – stuff inside a large fabric bag
- Comfort item for injuries – put a hot water bottle or cold pack inside
- Cat toy – fill with catnip

Halloween costumes or trash fashion ideas:

- Raining cats and dogs – attach to umbrella, wear raincoat
- Zookeeper
- Curious George and the Man in the Yellow Hat
- Medusa (stuffed snakes for hair)
- A dress or jacket made from stuffed toys
- Really big stuffed toy – make a monster costume

My son's Harry Potter club made a craft for the Book of Monsters. They bought the faux fur at a fabric store, but you could make from a recycled stuffed toy - <http://www.ikatbag.com/2017/02/harry-potter-party-monster-book-of.html>.

Finally, if you want to make a stuffed toy and you don't have much sewing experience, check out my Pinterest board about socks because there are a lot of simple patterns for toys from socks!

- <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/socks/>
- My podcast on creative reuse of socks - <http://trashmagination.com/creative-reuse-socks/>

So until next time – May you see your trash as just another source of special moments in your life.