



Trashmagination Podcast #19 – Creative Reuse in Nova Scotia

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

You might be able to tell from my accent that I'm from Canada, although I have lived in the United States for 20 years. I was born in Newfoundland and lived in New Brunswick, Ontario, British Columbia and Nova Scotia. My family and many friends still live in Nova Scotia and I visit every summer. Wherever I go, I'm always looking for creative reuse & I found lots of inspiration during my recent visit to Nova Scotia, which I'll share in today's podcast.

There is a small international spotlight on Nova Scotian folk artists right now because of the film *Maudie* which came out last year. It's about Maud Lewis, a folk artist who painted happy, colorful scenes on wooden shingles. Her home is so small that after she died, it was moved into the **Art Gallery of Nova Scotia**. The home's interior is only about five feet tall inside. Maud became famous after she was featured on national and international news shows. Her story is about a person who had nothing, but whose optimistic worldview shone through in her art. While Maud had her own style, her work has elements that you can see in the work of other Nova Scotian artists. I'll share my favorites.

Let's start with rug hooking, which is a great example of creative reuse because it is usually made from reused wool clothing and blankets. I have been rug hooking since I was in elementary school. People often think I mean latch hooking, which involves making a rug with tufts of yarn. But I'm talking about a type of rug making where you use a small hook and pull up bumps of wool through burlap or similar fabric. Rug hooking is really big in Nova Scotia. In previous visits to Nova Scotia, I visited the studio of **Deanne Fitzpatrick** (<https://hookingrugs.com/>), who is one of the best known rug hooking artists. Her rugs often show what life looks like in coastal towns. I have also visited the **Rug Hooking Museum of North America** in Nova Scotia (<http://www.hookedrugmuseumnovascotia.org/>).

Next I want to talk about creative reuse of wood. In Nova Scotia, there are many businesses focused on using driftwood, barnboard and random wood in folk art sculptures. The sculptures often show fishermen, boats and sea creatures like lobsters. Often the sculptures incorporate a sense of humor. For example, **Murray Gallant** is a wood carving artist who is well-known for his carvings of women wearing polka dot dresses and carrying shopping bags (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEIbZr6IqjY>).

I love it when creative reuse artists contribute to a revitalized local economy. My family lives in a town called Dartmouth and the downtown area is getting more fun every year. A new store just opened there called the **Trainyard General Store**. It features products by Nova Scotian artists, including some from recycled materials, including:

- Recover Journals (<http://recoverjournals.ca/>) - the artist removes covers from the hardcover books, then adds a coil binding and journal pages
- woven scrubby cloths woven from mesh vegetable bags
- braided rugs by Blue Cottage Rugs (<https://www.etsy.com/shop/bluecottagerugs>)

There I learned about the **Lunenburg Makery** (<https://www.lunenburgmakery.ca/>). It offers a service called “Altered” where you can bring clothing to be upcycled. They make craft kits – I particularly love the Atlantic Canada-themed kits such as the Atlantic mackerel and the piping plover. Last week, volunteers there sewed Boomerang Bags (<http://boomerangbags.org/>). This is an international movement of people who have made almost 100,000 bags from scrap fabric to encourage people not to use plastic bags.

Here’s a creative reuse project that I had never seen before involving the creative reuse of shoes. I saw **Kim Danio’s** shoe sculptures in the gift shop of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (<http://www.kimdaniostudio.com/>). When you look at her pieces, it can be challenging to figure out how she made them from a shoe, that’s how well disguised they are in the designs. I love how she makes sea gulls from high heels. She made a series of shoes that look like famous restaurants around Halifax. My favorite blog is the one where she lists types of shoes that she would love to have donated, and what types of things she makes from them (<http://www.kimdaniostudio.com/used-shoe-wish-list/>).

Another source of creative reuse inspiration when I go to Nova Scotia is my mom. Like me, she does creative reuse projects using many techniques, including painting, weaving, rug hooking and sewing. She knows exactly where to find materials for creative reuse projects at the many thrift stores all over Atlantic Canada. During this visit, she collaborated with my daughter on a creative reuse painting project. My mom had spiral-shaped pieces of wood. Some were salt-and-pepper shakers. Others were spindles from a bannister. My daughter drew faces and my mom painted the faces on the wood. They said they were painting angels. Creative reuse is a multi-generational activity in my family!

As you can see, there are many inspiring creative reuse artists and businesses in Nova Scotia. What is distinct about Nova Scotia’s creative reuse work? The key elements would be:

- the connection between creative reuse and folk art – with its optimistic, colorful aesthetic
- the quality of work particularly in the areas of rug hooking and whimsical wood carvings
- the sense of humor in many pieces

So here’s a checklist of activities inspired by this podcast:

- **Let me know about other creative reuse projects or artists from Nova Scotia** – trashmagination@gmail.com.
- **Go see the movie *Maudie*** and let me know what you think.
- **Plan a trip to Nova Scotia!**

I may have only lived in Nova Scotia for a short time but my annual visits continue to influence Trashmagination. I hope it inspires your work as well. Until next time – may you see trash as just another source of art in your life.

Additional Resources for this Podcast

- Trashmagination’s Pinterest Board of Nova Scotia Creative Reuse - <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/nova-scotian-creative-reuse-artists/>
- *Maudie* (film website) - <http://www.mongrelmedia.com/film/maudie.aspx>
- Rug Hooking Museum of North America - <http://www.hookedrugmuseumnovascotia.org/>
- Nova Scotia Folk Art Festival - <https://www.nsfolkartfestival.com/>
- A Twist of Iron – metal fire pits from old propane tanks - <http://www.atwistofiron.com/>
- Sea Glass Designs - <https://www.etsy.com/shop/SeaGlassDesigns>
- ReLove - contemporary furniture combining barnboard and other woods - <https://www.relovehalifax.com/>