



Trashmagination Podcast #28 – Art from Trash After Natural Disasters

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

One of the impacts of global climate change are more climate-related disasters such as hurricanes and tornadoes. This year has been a record-breaker with the huge impacts of Hurricane Harvey, Irma and Maria, among others. After these events hit the land, and people's homes are damaged or destroyed, often there are huge piles of trash lining the streets. Today's podcast is about artists who try their best to find inspiration in those piles of trash. Often this art is featured in fundraisers for those who are impacted.

I got the idea to make this podcast after hearing about an artist named Armando Heredia. He calls himself a reclamation artist. In 2016, he saw photos on Instagram of the "miles and miles of trash piled on the side of the road, waiting to be picked up and discarded." He travelled by bus from his home in Arizona to Louisiana, where he created artwork from flood debris. He donated 100 percent of the \$4,000 that he raised to flood victims in partnership with the Acacia Church Baton Rouge [<https://armandoheredia.wordpress.com/art-3/concrete-and-styrofoam/acacia-art/>]. This year, he went to Houston to make art with Texan themes [link to https://kuttlefish.com/shops/art_forage]. You can still purchase that art at his Kuttlefish shop. I will put a video up on my blog where he shows what it is like sorting through the trash piled on people's front yards. He talks about how he chooses materials – for example, he needs materials that are not porous to avoid contaminated water.

After reading about Armando, I became curious whether other artists have done similar work after other disasters, and I found a whole bunch! Many artists make art with disaster debris as a way of processing the event and fundraising for local charity efforts.

Hurricane Katrina Debris Artists

- Lori Gordon from Mississippi lost all her art supplies and a lot of her art. She made mixed media collages from hurricane debris. She and other artists started an artist cooperative called Gallery 220 where artists who had lost their homes or studios could collaborate [<https://www.voanews.com/a/artist-pieces-life-back-together-after-katrina--128585703/144533.html>].
- After Hurricane Katrina, Rontherin Ratliff was floating through the Ninth Ward on a raft, trying to gather up family valuables. He found many family photos, and made an art piece called "Things that Float" which looks like a tilted house filled with water-stained photos [<http://www.rontherin.com/thingsthatfloat.html>].

Hurricane Sandy Debris Artists

- Roddy Wildeman [<https://www.rodgywildeman.com>] was a wood mosaic artist before Hurricane Sandy. His work looks like giant starbursts. After the hurricane, he made commemorative pieces for people from the wood in their homes called "Composite Memory Fine Art."

- Sculptor Laura Petrovich-Cheney [<http://www.lauracheney.com>] also used wood scraps from Hurricane Sandy [<https://njmonthly.com/articles/jersey-living/creating-art-from-sandys-wreckage/>]. She calls her work “Salvaged Wood Quilts” because they look like traditional quilt designs made from wood.
- Two artists created a project called Drift Relief to fundraise after Hurricane Sandy [<http://www.driftrelief.org/>]. Allbritton Robbins and Hema Patel paint driftwood in bright colors. Each piece of wood has a plaque noting the town where the wood was found.
- Gregg Hinlicky made 28 collages from debris to raise money for the Hurricane Sandy New Jersey Relief Fund [<http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2014/02/10/stories-from-main-street-turning-sandy-debris-into-works-of-art/>].

Tornado Debris Artists

- After a tornado in Joplin, Missouri, killed more than 150 people, artists took debris and made pieces for a fundraiser that collected more than \$20,000 [<http://matthewdehaemers.com/installation/>].
- In Oklahoma, Sherry and Bud Burgess make decorative crosses from wood salvaged after storms at their Etsy shop Okie Buds Workshop [<https://www.etsy.com/shop/OkieBudsWorkshop>].

People Who Become Artists Because of a Natural Disaster

Some people find a new identity as an artist when they live through a natural disaster.

- Alabama artist Andy Cummings found his calling as a chain saw sculptor when he was volunteering after Hurricane Ivan in 2006. He sculpted a dolphin from a downed tree and it turned out so well that he kept going [<http://legacy.decaturdaily.com/decaturdaily/news/061021/festival.shtml>].
- Artist Troy Cox was helping neighbors pick up debris after a tornado in December 2016 in Rowlett, Texas [http://starlocalmedia.com/rowlettlakeshoretimes/something-to-remember-man-uses-tornado-debris-to-make-crafts/article_f726aa24-d006-11e5-b3da-f3a1016d57a5.html]. He started to make items and donate the funds to local relief projects. One popular item was a map of Texas made from debris wood and painted with the words “Bless this House.” He ended up making a company called Rowlett Rustic Creations.

So Thanks for Listening!

I enjoyed researching this topic and I put together a Pinterest board of the work by these artists at <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/art-from-natural-disaster-debris/>.

What I find most interesting about these stories: Even if these artists were making art before these natural disasters, the event caused them to change how they made art. It caused them to innovate and make a new items with the debris. In some cases, they now anticipate the next storm and get ready to gather materials.

I have one more story. It’s about Takashi Kobayashi, a Japanese treehouse designer. After the Japanese tsunami in 2011, he was worried about the children in the Sendai region. He made a magnificent treehouse dedicated to the children who survived the tsunami to bring them joy. He didn’t make the treehouse from debris, but I think this is a great example of how a natural disaster can cause an artist to bring even more meaning to the work. I’ll post a video about this treehouse at my blog – it looks like a beautiful and joyful place.

I would love to hear about any other artists who were inspired to use debris from disasters. Please drop me a note at trashmagination@gmail.com if you know any.

Until next time – may you see trash as just another source of art and recovery in your life.