



Trashmagination Podcast #32 – Recycled Art Contests

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

Today we'll talk about recycled art contests. In the United States, these contests are most commonly held in April for Earth Day or November for America Recycles Day. I'm talking about it now because maybe it will inspire you to host one in April, and this gives you enough time to get that on your list of goals for 2018!

I recently attended a contest hosted by the Maryland Department of the Environment called Rethink Recycling. It occurs each November to coincide with America Recycles Day. This year there were 61 entries from 21 high schools.

The sculptures were judged on three qualities – Creativity, Workmanship and Use of Materials. There was also a People's Choice category where every guest could vote for their two favorite sculptures. One of my votes did win the People's Choice award! This year's Grand Prize winner made a piece called "Marry Me?" It was made with a mannequin, plastic forks and spoons, broken jewelry and paint.

Here's a fun observation - a third of the sculptures were animals. There was a fox, panda, crab, blue heron, dolphin, anglerfish, koi, cranes, dog, turtles, caterpillar, squirrel, lion, horse, cow, wolf, gecko and jellyfish.

I enjoyed talking with the students about how they got inspired. For example, I was looking at a squirrel made from mostly gears and other parts from watches. The artist gathered many broken watches and worked hard to break them open. It would be a fascinating resource if someone could gather the creative reuse knowledge from all those artists. It could be a great inspiration for other students and artists.

Here's a story about a student named David Clement. David is from Jemicy Upper School in Baltimore. Each year since 2004, students from the school participate in the Kinetic Sculpture Race, an annual event in Baltimore which involves human-powered works of art that must travel on land and by water [<http://www.kineticbaltimore.com/>]. My family saw the race a few years ago, and it was truly an original event. The school has a class called Kinetic Sculpture Race Industrial Design where David learned how to do welding. Interestingly, the Kinetic Sculpture Race also started in 2001, the same year as the first Rethink Recycling high school sculpture contest. David's sculpture was two bicycles that are hard to describe except they had extra cross-bars and their pedals were in unexpected places. He said he could even ride these bicycles – I missed his demonstration but he said he showed how it worked at the start of the event.

As I viewed the sculptures, I began to ponder how the rules could influence what gets made. For example, I noticed some sculptures incorporated materials that I don't think were trash before they went into the sculpture. Those materials were disposable cutlery, straws, q-tips and trash bags. I wish there was a way to ensure the materials were trash first. I also wish the judges gave extra points to sculptures which incorporated items which do not currently have a means for being recycled easily. I'm thinking about trash with mixed materials like juice pouches. Some of my favorite sculptures used paper and cardboard, but these materials are readily recycled and somewhat easy to manipulate.

Congrats to the Maryland Department of the Environment to have hosted this contest for 16 years! I will make a list of events from around the world that are held annually. If your school or community organization hosts a recycled art contest, please message me via Instagram or Facebook, or email trashmagination@gmail.com.

If you don't have a recycled art contest in your town, you could participate in a virtual contest. Blick Art Supplies held a creative reuse contest in April this year [<https://www.dickblick.com/landing/recycledart>]. I see they have a Mixed Media contest for students which can include recycled materials. Entries are due in April 2018 [<https://www.dickblick.com/mixedmediacontest/>].

Now I want to talk about why I think recycled art contests are important. While I was viewing the contest entries and getting inspired, outside someone was breaking into my car. They smashed windows and pulled apart my passenger side door. When I came out of the contest, I saw them run away. I was so sad. I wondered if I shouldn't have come. But then I thought, we need to keep building a world where people make art from recycled materials. We need people to see how they can create beauty out of nothing. Maybe I can build a business where I can employ people to make items from trash so they will have more options and live more creatively.

The very next day, Trashmagination had a table at a craft sale. I went from that sad moment of having my car smashed to the very happy moment of having people buy items I made from trash. I had just designed new prototypes and they were the first items to sell! Let me tell you about the prototypes. I was trying to take the mats that I weave from plastic bags and make them into other items because I found people don't really want the mats. In one case, I made a storage container. I took the wood from clementine boxes and drilled holes around the edges. I sewed the mat around the wood. That description might be hard to follow but you can see a photo on my blog. It made a rectangular box with a cover. A very supportive guy named Chris bought it. Not only did he buy it, but he drew me a sketch of how to make the prototype even better.

Another prototype I made was a purse. I sewed a handle onto one of my woven plastic bag mats made from a taekwondo belt. My friend Jenn had given me about 20 belts that her children earned over the years. They are very soft and sturdy. That prototype sold too!

Finally, a family bought one of my TrashAnatomy sharks. This was my first shark anatomy model to sell. They purchased it for a family member who loves sharks. I also had someone ask if I would make more TrashAnatomy models and my answer would be yes if people reach out and tell me they like it!

I attended two craft sales this month. At the first one, I made only \$21 and I only sold shark ornaments. At the second one, I made almost \$200 and I got a whole bunch of feedback from customers. I learned so much in such a short time.

So I think it is important to host recycled art contests. We need to keep showing the world that there is a way to make beautiful and useful items from trash. We need to let artists know that we appreciate how they are evolving their vision. And on that front, this is the one-year anniversary of this podcast. I made 32 episodes this year. I started this podcast last December right before my birthday because I wanted to get ideas out of my head and into the world. I wanted to get better at talking about my vision for making items from trash. I enjoy making the podcast and have a list of more than 50 items I want to talk about in 2018. It's my birthday in a few days, and it would be a great present if you would leave a review! It's a free gift!

Also, if you host a podcast about artists, community builders or entrepreneurs, I would love to be a guest on your podcast. One of my goals for Trashmagination is to reach out to other podcasters and share more stories!

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

Maryland Contest Links:

- <http://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Marylander/outreach/Pages/RethinkRecycling.aspx>
- Photo album [<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mdenvironment/sets/72157689066606921>]
- <http://news.maryland.gov/mde/2017/11/30/first-lady-yumi-hogan-joins-environment-secretary-ben-grumbles-for-16th-annual-rethink-recycling-sculpture-contest/>
- Contest rules - <http://www.mde.state.md.us/programs/LAND/Documents/ARD%20RulesGuideline%20%2717.pdf>