



Trashmagination Podcast #36 – Broken Zippers

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

Today we'll talk about broken zippers. I got the idea because we had a sleeping bag with an unreliable zipper. It would zip nicely but then randomly open up. I didn't see any broken teeth so I decided to remove the zipper and sew the bag open like a blanket. My son loves sleeping in sleeping bags so he wanted it for his bed. I was left with a very long zipper that could not be put into another project, so I researched what to do with broken zippers.

First here are some fun facts about zippers. The zipper was invented in the 1890s by American Whitcomb L. Judson. He called it chain-lock fastener. It wasn't called the zipper until many years later. He originally invented the chain-lock fastener to make it faster to put on tall boots. His invention did not become financially successful in his lifetime, but other inventors improved the design. Within 25 years, the zipper became a common part of life.

Fixing a Zipper

The first thing to do with a broken zipper is of course to try and fix it. I will embed a video called "How to Fix Every Zipper Issue." It explains how to lubricate a stuck zipper, how to realign zipper teeth with pliers and how to replace the slider.

But if none of that works, many people will toss the item if they don't have the sewing skills or time to replace the zipper. I hope that by listening to this episode, you might be inspired to salvage the zipper to use in fun art projects. Get acquainted with your seam ripper! Maybe the item will work fine when you cut out the zipper, like my son's sleeping bag. Maybe you can replace the zipper with Velcro? If you would like to find a new use for a broken zipper, here are the stories of some zipper artists who will make you rejoice when you get a broken zipper!

How Artists Use Broken Zippers

Many artists incorporate zippers into their art. A lot of this art is functional or craft pieces such as jewelry or pencil cases. Other people incorporate zippers into their fine art pieces. To see many great examples, check out the Pinterest board I made about zippers <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/zippers/>.

Zippers tend to be either metallic gold and silver or plastic. They come in many sizes – from tiny teeth on a zipper for a pair of pants to gigantic teeth for a sleeping bag or winter coat. Each type of zipper gives a very different look to the art.

The first zipper artist I found was **Odile Gova** [https://www.flickr.com/photos/woolly_fabulous/]. Her pieces mostly use zippers with shiny metal teeth. She makes leaves, flowers, spirals, hearts, abstract shapes, animals and birds. Odile's technique is to use zippers wrapped around the wool felt. The metal teeth look like shiny seed beads. If I wanted to have seed beads around the edge of an art piece, this would be a great idea because I could likely sew on the zipper faster than individual seed beads.

Aleksandra Janik [https://www.instagram.com/galeria_zamka/] makes ornate pieces that incorporate both zippers *and* seed beads, along with lace scraps, ceramics and many other materials. Aleksandra was already an expert in lace or tatting. She noticed that the zippers were a great base for lacy forms.

Janet Petrell [<http://www.zipperworks.com/>] strings the zippers back and forth or in spirals to make colorful images. They look like tiny mosaic tiles. For example, over the holidays she made reindeer and a snowman. Janet specifies on her website that she uses broken zippers in her work. She started when she was in 4-H Club, and her mom Donna Jean loved the idea so much that *she* started to make her own zipper art. She made many pieces for twenty years. When she passed, Janet inherited her giant zipper collection, so she now makes the zipper art. I particularly love a piece by Janet's mom called *Lupines*, which is one of my favorite flowers.

Susan Moore [<https://www.facebook.com/pg/Habercraftey/>] makes bridal bouquets from zipper flowers. She customizes them to the color palette of the wedding. Her roses are really cool with many layers of zippered petals folding in on each other.

Kate Cusack [<http://www.katecusack.com/zipper-jewelry/zipper-necklaces.html>] makes sculptural asymmetrical necklaces from zippers. She has also made headdresses and costumes for window display, performance and installation.

Hirotoishi Ito [<https://www.demilked.com/surreal-stone-sculptures-hirotoishi-ito/>] makes sculptures that look like rocks with zippers on them. It looks like the zipper is opening up and you can see inside the rock. Items inside the rock include smaller pebbles, seashells, coins, acorns and even what looks like the inside of a mouth with teeth. I like how the zipper is the way he reveals a surprise in the work. I have no idea how he does this!

Elizabeth Morisette [<http://elmorisette.blogspot.com/>] sews zippers round and round each other to make basket-like shapes. She makes lots of these basket-like shapes from many materials such as pencil stubs and metal bottle caps. Another artist who coils zippers to make shapes is **Susie Colquitt**. Her pieces look coral reef.

Making My Own Zipper Art

After looking at all this zipper art, I looked more carefully at my own zipper collection. I only had one broken zipper. All my other zippers were new or in good shape removed from broken items. Most were plastic with tiny teeth.

The first item I made was a dragonfly. I followed the instructions from a video by a company that makes something called "zipper tape" which is like a strip of ribbon with the zipper teeth on it, but no pull tab. They put the dragonfly together with a glue gun. My dragonfly is somewhat different from their suggestions. I sewed my dragonfly components with needle and thread because I think items made with glue tend to break. I wool shapes in the wings to help the zipper hold its shape better. And I used a broken zipper rather than new zipper tape.

The next project I would like to make is a bracelet [<http://www.craftandfun.com/2013/06/riciclo-creativo-cerniere-lampo.html>]. I like a design where you snip the zipper quite close to the teeth, then wrap cotton thread between the teeth. I would add something called a "junction ring" and a carabiner to the ends to hook it closed.

I would also like to make a bow tie. I like the designs which put the pull tab right in the center.

I would love to hear what you made with broken zippers. You can reach me at trashmagination@gmail.com.

Please consider leaving a review of this podcast so more folks can get a regular input of creative reuse inspiration.

Until next time – may you see trash as a source of art in your life.