



Trashmagination Podcast #40 – Shoes

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

Today we're talking about shoes. But first, I want to celebrate - this is the 40th episode of the Trashmagination podcast – hurray! When I started a year ago, I wondered if I would love making a podcast. I'm happy to say it's definitely a source of creative energy. It gave me a reason to deep-dive on topics that I had only skimmed before. The most popular episodes have been:

- 1) Creative Reuse of Trophies from January 2017 - <http://trashmagination.com/new-uses-for-old-trophies/>
- 2) Trash Fashion from April 2017 - <http://trashmagination.com/trash-fashion/>
- 3) Mattresses and Bed Springs from March 2017 – <http://trashmagination.com/mattress-and-box-spring-recycling/>

Hopefully today's episode is just as useful to you. I have come to realize that my goal for this podcast is to be your creative reuse pep talk! So here's your pep talk about the creative reuse of shoes.

In 2013, I read an article by Wen Lee from Center for the New American Dream about shoes [<https://newdream.org/blog/stuffcheck-shoes>]. Wen noted that the average American man owned 12 pairs of shoes and the average American woman owned 27 pairs. She didn't think of herself as a "shoe person" but when she did an audit, she found she owned 15 pairs of shoes.

Inspired by her example, I did a shoe audit. I expected to find I had even more than the national average. It's not because I love shoes, but because I tend to hold on to shoes thinking I can wear them when I'm doing muddy yard work or other tasks where I don't want to wear nicer shoes. Guess what? I own 33 pairs of shoes.

My first task will be to photograph the nice pairs that I don't wear and post them on my local community sharing board called Buy Nothing Reston [<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1550679245149207/>]. My mother-in-law said she had some fancy pairs that she was able to bring to a consignment shop and that's a great idea.

For the pairs in rough shape, there is a box at My Organic Market for both nice and worn-out shoes [<https://momsorganicmarket.com/recycle-center/>]. They mail them to a program called Planet Aid [<http://www.planetaid.org/>]. The nice shoes are shipped overseas to be sold in support of sustainable development programs. The worn-out shoes are reprocessed into pillow stuffing, carpet padding, wiping cloths, and other products.

Planet Aid is not the only program that takes worn-out shoes. Others include:

- MORE Foundation group [<http://www.morefoundationgroup.org/>] – Their website says that they plant trees and train farmers using the profits from gently used running shoes. I see that I can bring my running shoes to my local YMCA.
- Soles 4 Souls [<https://soles4souls.org/>] – They have drop-off locations with the local Got Junk provider.
- My local running stores – Potomac River Running and Pacers – collect used running shoes for charities.

When I first researched creative reuse of shoes 15 years ago, there were no drop-off locations for used worn-out shoes. The only option was the Reuse-a-Shoe program by Nike. Nike grinds worn out running shoes to make play surfaces called Nike Grind [<https://www.nikegrind.com/>]. Not every Nike store takes used shoes, but there is a website where you can find one that does [https://www.nike.com/us/en_us/retail/?features=Reuse-A-Shoe+Collection+Bin].

Note that Crocs are not made from plastic and you should not put them in your recycling bin. The manufacturer does not offer a recycling program. You can donate Crocs to the same shoe recycling programs I just mentioned.

Flip flops are a particularly big problem for our oceans. They are such a popular type of footwear because they are cheap, but they are made from PVC which is the most non-recyclable plastic. Many contain phthalates to soften the plastic which are toxic. Burning this type of plastic causes health problems for the people who live nearby. Some companies make flip flops from 100 percent rubber and this is considered to be a better option.

DIY Projects from Recycled Shoes

I looked for projects to make from old shoes. The most common ideas on Pinterest involve flower pots or birdhouses from old shoes and boots. It's not a project I would likely do just because I don't tend to decorate with that aesthetic, although the flower in the Croc might be fun. To keep the soil from falling out through the holes in the Croc, you can line it with the mesh from produce bags. I saw a few projects that involved making shoes from recycled materials – especially slippers from blue jeans. If you'd rather buy slippers made from blue jeans, I found an Etsy store where you can buy them called INTOA design [<https://www.etsy.com/shop/INTOAdesign>].

For old flip flops, I saw projects where cut up the foamy flip flop to make rubber stamps [<https://www.allfreeholidaycrafts.com/Summer-Ideas/Quick-Turn-Broken-Flip-flops-into-DIY-Stamps>].

There are tutorials if your shoes are nice but not what you want right now. You can paint canvas shoes with fabric paint or add bling (i.e. broken jewelry) to high heels. For inspiration, check out the hashtag #shoeart on Instagram.

I saw a projects for middle school and high school art classes where students decorate a pair of canvas shoes in the style of a famous artist [<https://www.dickblick.com/lessonplans/artists-canvas-shoes/>].

Artists Who Creatively Reuse Shoes

My absolute favorite shoe-recycling artist is **Kim Danio** from Nova Scotia, Canada [<http://www.kimdaniostudio.com/>]. Kim sculpts shoes and boots into famous buildings, pets, animals, pastries etc. She makes the most hilarious birds from high heels where the heels form the beak. I first saw her work in the gift shop of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and I have been eagerly following her on Instagram ever since [https://www.instagram.com/kim_danio_studio/]!

A few years ago, I saw the work of Kenyan artists at **Ocean Sole** at the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival. They gather flip flops from beaches, glue them together and sculpt them into beautiful animals. I'll share a video of their process.

While Kim Danio and Ocean Sole transform shoes into art every day, there are many artists who incorporate recycled shoes in impactful art installations. Here are some powerful examples:

- A few episodes ago, I mentioned artist **Chiharu Shiota** who used recycled luggage in her art installations. She also incorporates shoes. Her piece called "Over the Continents" featured almost 400 pairs of shoes tied with red yarn, and the yarn travelled in straight lines to a single point [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/27/chiharu-shiota_n_5722818.html]. She asked shoe donors to write notes explaining the shoes' importance. She got the idea when she returned to Japan after living abroad for a long time. At first it was comforting but then she realized she didn't fit in. It felt like putting on old shoes.
- In 2011, **Tyree Guyton** [Tie-REE GUY-ten] installed a piece called "Street Folk" in Detroit with 10,000 shoes [<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1374701/Artist-Tyree-Guyton-fills-city-block-discarded-shoes-highlight-plight-homeless.html>]. He placed them over a city block to bring attention to the plight of the homeless population.

- In Seoul, Korea last year, **Hwang Ji-hae** installed a piece called “Shoe Tree” with 30,000 shoes [http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20170523000850]. It was to celebrate the opening of a new park called Seoulo 7017 which creatively reuses a road and closes it off for pedestrians. It reminds me of the High Line in New York, which is a park made by creatively reusing a rail line.
- **Elna Chauvet** created an installation called “Zapatos Rojo” showing red women’s shoes. The installation had the theme of gender violence and femicide. It started with 33 pairs of shoes but grew over time. It appeared in various cities around the world.
- **Sakir Gökcebag** [SHAKuh GO-tubag] is a photographer and sculptor who arranges many every day materials into eye-catching geometric shapes. His piece called Guests II involves many pairs of shoes lined up along a wall but the toes are cut off and spread out across the floor [http://sakirgokcebag.com/Installations.aspx?d=36Shoe+Installations&f=01.jpg].
- **Noemi Lakmaier** made a piece called “Experiment in Happiness” which is a giant ball covered in about 400 pairs of yellow shoes. The artist lies on the floor with her feet inside one pair of the shoes. She describes the piece as somewhere between “comical and menacing” [http://www.noemilakmaier.co.uk/html/experiment.html].
- The last Trashmagination podcast episode was about creative reuse of fruit stickers, and artist **Noah Scalin** does impressive sculptures with stickers – but he also makes them with thrifted clothing and shoes. I loved his portrait of Martin Luther King last month from shoes [https://www.instagram.com/p/Bd-SeAQjuoF/?taken-by=noahscalin].

You can see videos about many of these installations in my show notes.

Buying Shoes with the Least Environmental Impact

This podcast is about creative reuse and doesn’t focus on purchasing advice. I will include in the show notes a great video by Ethical Consumer that outlines what to keep in mind when purchasing shoes. If we buy shoes that are better and more ethically made, it’s likely we’ll have fewer shoes to creatively reuse – and that would be great.

If you have creatively reused shoes in an unusual way, please let me know at trashmagination@gmail.com.

So I hope you will celebrate the 40th episode by leaving a review. If you like getting a creative reuse pep talk a few times per month, it is really important to show your support. It doesn’t even require money. It just involves writing a few words. Maybe you feel shy –you are not sure what to write or you don’t like writing. Don’t worry – it can be something very simple and I will still greatly appreciate it. Just share which episode inspired you the most! Your review shows “social proof” or evidence that people like this content. I’m spending hours making this content because I want lift your spirits - so please lift mine with a few words of encouragement.

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