



Trashmagination Podcast #94 – Tissue Paper

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown. Today's episode is about creative reuse of tissue paper. I was inspired to research this topic by a woman in my community named Gena VanValkenburgh. I met Gena through our Buy Nothing Group. I was working to downsize my craft supplies, including my giant collection of tissue paper. She took some to make crafts with her granddaughters. A few months later, she came to pick up a different item, and she wanted to show me something she had made. She had dyed the tissue paper with wonderful flourishes of ink. I asked if I could share photos of her beautiful art through my podcast and she said of course! So that's why we are talking about creative reuse of tissue paper today.

The goal of this podcast is to share reuse ideas for materials that are difficult to recycle through conventional municipal recycling programs. And that is the case with tissue paper. Many people think they can put it in their paper recycling bins, but that is not true for most paper recycling programs. Tissue paper is made with short fibers, which means they are not great to recycle. Most municipal recycling programs, including my own, ask that you do not put tissue paper in your recycling bin.

So in today's episode, I'll share ideas craft projects that you can make with tissue paper. You can see photos and videos of these crafts on the Trashmagination Pinterest board - <https://www.pinterest.com/trashmagination/tissue-paper/>. If you don't like making crafts, you could donate your tissue paper to your local creative reuse store. I have mentioned these before – they are secondhand stores for craft supplies. I also gave my tissue paper collection to my neighbors through my Buy Nothing group, as I mentioned earlier. I will also share stories about artists who creatively reuse tissue paper to make inspiring masterpieces.

Craft Projects with Tissue Paper

The most popular craft projects from tissue paper are flowers and pompoms. Since they are so fluffy and colorful, and tissue paper is inexpensive, they can add happiness to just about any celebration. I will link to tutorials in the show notes, but to summarize the technique, you stack a bunch of pieces of tissue paper, fold them like an accordion, tie them in the middle and then fluff them out.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeitYvy7TGY>
- Martha Stewart pompoms and luminarias - <https://www.marthastewart.com/265163/pom-poms-and-luminarias-how-to>, crepe paper flowers - <https://www.marthastewart.com/893987/how-make-crepe-paper-flowers> and <https://www.marthastewartweddings.com/309749/tissue-paper-flower-favors-template-and-how>
- Rust and Sunshine flowers - <http://www.rustandsunshine.com/2012/05/tissue-paper-flowers.html>
- Hanging Flower Garland - <https://www.jampaper.com/blog/tissue-paper-flower-garland/>
- Two Twenty One – Pompoms - <https://www.twotwentyone.net/how-to-make-tissue-paper-pom-poms/>
- Honeycomb PomPoms - <https://mrprintables.com/blog/how-to-make-honeycomb-pom-poms/>

One artist who takes tissue paper flowers to a new level of awesome is Lia Griffith. She makes so many kinds of flowers such as poppies, hydrangeas, dahlias, hibiscus and tulips [<https://liagriffith.com/craft/all-paper-flowers/tissue-paper-flowers/>]. She also teaches how to fold tissue paper origami stars. She posts wonderful instructive videos.

- Tissue Paper Poppies - <https://liagriffith.com/tissue-paper-poppies/> or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsmVD_aNbol,

- Hydrangeas - <https://liagriffith.com/tissue-paper-hydrangeas/>,
- Feathers - <https://liagriffith.com/painted-tissue-paper-feathers/>,
- Tissue Paper Origami Star - <https://youtu.be/IsXwZ2rFQZE>

The next craft ideas relate to the fact that a lot of tissue paper contains colorful dyes, and if you put water on the tissue paper, some colorful dye will leak out. Some people call this “bleeding” tissue paper and it’s a fun way to achieve an effect that looks like watercolor without paints. I will link to inspiring examples of how people used this tissue paper.

- Cindy Rosier wanted to make a page in her journal that looked like it was underwater, and she achieved this effect by using blue tissue paper scraps and water [<https://www.cindyderosier.com/2013/08/kidding-around-make-splash.html>].
- Another fun idea is to draw something with white crayon first and then use the bleeding tissue paper [<https://www.swww.com/blog/tissue-paper-painting-bleeding-color-art-activity/>].
- On a snow day, you can make art with bleeding tissue paper by putting it outside and letting the snow make the patterns for you [<https://www.firefliesandmudpies.com/snowy-day-tissue-paper-art/>].
- Crafts by Amanda - <https://craftsbyamanda.com/bleeding-tissue-paper-birds-canvas/>

The next craft ideas are suncatchers or faux stain glass designs. A popular craft with kids is to take clear contact paper which is sticky on one side, and then frame it with a shape like a circle or a butterfly. The kids stick bits of tissue paper on the sticky side of the contact paper to make a suncatcher. This is a great craft for any season because you can cut out the shape based on the upcoming special event like a heart for Valentine’s Day or pumpkin for Halloween. Another easy craft that involves gluing bits of tissue paper is to stick tissue paper shapes on a glass bottle by painting over the tissue paper with Modge Podge or watered down craft glue.

- Découpage or “faux stained glass” on glass containers - <https://craftsbyamanda.com/geometrical-decoupage-craft-spring-vases/> OR <https://momspark.net/faux-stained-glass-recycled-jars/>
- Suncatchers - <https://craftsbyamanda.com/easter-egg-sun-catcher/>
- Cindy DeRosier –heart suncatchers - <https://www.cindyderosier.com/2012/02/tissue-paper-hearts.html>

There are two Mexican traditions that involve decorating with tissue paper. One is Papel Picado or a garland with shapes cut from tissue paper with intricate designs. It’s like cutting out snowflakes from tissue paper. You fold the tissue paper to get a repeating or symmetrical design [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qUKxDEOpsQ>]. Another fun tissue paper craft from Mexico is called Cascarones. This is a tradition where you fill eggshells with confetti and break them open on other people! To make a cascarone, you blow out the egg white and yolk from an egg, fill it with confetti and then cover up the holes with tissue paper. I do not encourage you to use glitter made from plastic because it’s bad for the environment. If you can make glitter or confetti from hole-punched leaves or tissue paper, that’s better.

- <https://www.dreamalittlebigger.com/post/cascarones-confetti-filled-eggs-for-easter.html>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJfK2BjhWCI>

In Japan on Boy’s Day in May, people make Japanese flying carp crafts called koinobori. I love a version designed by Squirrelly Minds from recycled tissue paper and toilet paper tubes [<http://squirrellyminds.com/2013/05/03/koinobori-japanese-flying-carp-diy/>].

For many years, I did a monthly art class at my children’s elementary school. One time we were doing a lesson on Paul Klee [Klay]. We looked at his piece called Castle and Sun which shows many colorful shapes piled on top of each other. I had saved many plastic containers – the type that hold packets of lemonade crystals. They are translucent plastic. I gave the students markers and showed them how they could draw an imaginary world like Paul Klee’s art on the container. Then we put a sheet of tissue paper inside the container, along with a battery-powered tea light. These pieces turned out really well and were displayed at our local art gallery.

I will link to a lesson plan idea for making 3-D curvy sculptures with reeds and tissue paper. This is for high school sculpture students - <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Abstract-Reed-and-Tissue-Paper-Lantern-Sculpture-Light-Art-for-Middle-or-High-3360871> - Whitney Panetta - <https://www.instagram.com/look.btwn.the.lines/>

Artists Who Work with Tissue Paper

Next I'll talk about artists who incorporate tissue paper in their work. These artists live all over the world! If you see a sculpture made from translucent paper, it might be tissue paper, but it might also be a stronger paper like Japanese or mulberry paper.

Maya Freelon Asante is an artist from Baltimore, Maryland, not far from where I live. She uses tissue paper to make big splatter paintings, using that bleeding tissue paper concept. She also builds big sculptures from tissue paper. In 2018, she built a HUGE sculpture at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC. It was in the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building. This sculpture was hanging from the ceiling in a room that is at least three stories high. The sculpture looked like these long rectangles of crumpled and dyed tissue paper – maybe 30 giant long rectangles that were at least two stories long. In an interview with Smithsonian Magazine, Maya talks about how she first got the idea to work with tissue paper when she was at her grandmother's basement, where she found a package of water-damaged tissue paper. Three weeks after she found that tissue paper, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. She started thinking about how water can change and impact things. I will link to videos of Maya's pieces so you can check them out in the show notes. Also, as I was researching her work, I learned that her father Phil Freelon was the architect who designed the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture. Her mother Nnenna Freelon is a famous singer with six Grammy nominations.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9955Zsl3hL4>
- <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/maya-freelons-immersive-and-interactive-sculptures-bring-tissue-paper-life-180969427/>
- <https://www.mayafreelon.com/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/mayafreelon/>
- <https://vimeo.com/67599614>

Frédéric Guibrunet and Sophie Mouton-Perrat make sculptures that light up. Their most famous works are called Mademoiselle lamps which look like a person wearing a skirt. The skirt is full-length from waist to feet and poofs out in the shape of a sphere. Inside the skirt is a light. The skirt portion is sculpted and electrified by Frédéric. Sophie sculpts the upper body portion from tissue paper and other recycled papers. That portion is not lit up. These sculptures come in many sizes, from a bedside lamp to something almost life-sized. They call themselves Papier à Êtres or Paper for Beings. They call their work “poésies sculptées” or “sculpted poems” or “un rêve de papier et de lumière” – “a dream of paper and light.” They have made their lighted sculptures for ballets and operas, as well as private collectors.

- <https://mymodernmet.com/papier-a-etres-lamps/>
- <https://www.papieraetres.com/creations/sculptures-lumineuses/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsSxWzHb0oI>
- <https://www.instagram.com/papieraetres/>

Patricia Chemin is from France and I was intrigued to see that she translates tissue paper to “papier de soie” or “silk paper” – which describes how tissue paper feels but of course tissue paper is not actually made from silk. Each of her sculptures looks like a little bowl or cocoon with a small round window. She adds tiny crochet or stitching to that open part. She uses tissue paper and other types of paper like old books. She writes on her website that she explores “the frail balance of an object in space.”

- <https://patriciachemin.ultra-book.com/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/patricia.chemin/>

If you have ever read books to a toddler, you probably read the book called The Very Hungry Caterpillar. It was written and illustrated by the artist Eric Carle, who uses a lot of tissue paper in his work. I will share a video showing his process which involves painting paper with lots of textures and then ripping it into shapes to make his illustrations. He also rips tissue paper. He got the idea for writing The Very Hungry Caterpillar when he folded a piece of tissue paper accordion style and punched holes in it.

- <http://www.eric-carle.com/q-makepic.html>
- Video of process - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wXWLaVX8Mw>

The next two artists build structures from tissue paper that hang from the ceiling and make colorful shapes that look like upside-down mountains. Marcelo Jácome (JAH-ko-may) is from Brazil and Gabby O'Connor is from New Zealand. I found their work similar in that they both make giant installations from triangular piece of tissue paper. They both hang their art from the ceiling and it swoops across the gallery space.

Marcelo's work gets its skeleton from bamboo sticks. He calls these pieces "Planos-Pippas" or "kite-planes" in Portuguese. They are very colorful. I saw them described as a thousand parrots suddenly taking off at the same time.

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/B05zOaHpjwd/>,
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MaMAaQaSpl>
- https://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/marcelo_jacome_paper.htm

Gabby has made multiple pieces from tissue paper including "What Lies Beneath." It is made blue tissue paper held together with staples. Her work is inspired by Antarctic ice. Light shines through the blue tissue paper and makes you feel like you are underwater looking up at the ice. She has worked with scientists in the Antarctic to learn more about how climate change is impacting the ice and she portrays these impacts in her art.

- <http://gabbyoconnor.squarespace.com/about>
- <https://www.instagram.com/studioantarctica/>
- <https://vimeo.com/26859386>
- <https://mymodernmet.com/gabby-oconnor-what-lies-beneath-iceberg-sculptures/>

Our last artist today is Polly Verity who blogs as Polyscene. She is an origami artist who works with many types of paper. She makes very complicated tessellations. She also has worked with tissue paper. In 2010, she collaborated with her brother Tom Verity to sculpt internal organs from tissue paper [<https://www.instagram.com/p/B54vymUpZcQ/>]. She also builds wire sculptures and covers them with mostly white tissue paper. She has developed a proprietary technique for these sculptures. Polly has more than 21,000 followers on Instagram.

- <https://polyscene.com/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/polyscene/>

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! Please let me know if you have made art or other items from upcycled tissue paper at trashmagination@gmail.com. Until next time – may you see upcycled tissue paper as a source of art in your life!