



Trashmagination Podcast #102 – Creative Reuse and Justice

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown. Today's episode is about creative reuse and justice. I was working on other topics for this week's episode, but struggling because my mind was on recent events. And while it might not seem that making art from trash is related to these events, I feel a connection between creative reuse and the global yearning for justice. I view creative reuse as a mindfulness practice and justice is all about tuning in to what is true in your heart, as well as what is impacting real people in the world. Today I'll share why I think creative reuse can be part of a personal practice living and working for justice.

I grew up in eastern Canada which is historically an area that is economically challenged. I grew up seeing people creatively reuse everything as a way to survive and thrive. People hooked rugs and made folk sculptures from trash. I was lucky to grow up in a place where people made art from trash. It taught me values such as:

- 1) **Mindfulness** - When we throw objects away, we know in our hearts that there is a disconnect between our actions and living in the best way. When we mindlessly throw items away every day, we are training our hearts to turn off. When we learn how to avoid making trash and how to creatively reuse trash, we turn our hearts back on to what we know is right. Working for justice is about turning our hearts on.
- 2) **Avoiding Stereotypes** - Creative reuse is about retraining our brains to think twice and not assume something has no value. Too often as a mental shorthand, we classify objects as trash. Creative reuse asks us to re-evaluate those classifications. Were we taught those classifications premised on something that doesn't work anymore if we want to live in a healthy community on a healthy planet?
- 3) **Art as Healing Communicating** - It's a privilege to have enough time, energy and tools to make art. It is courageous to see artists who make art to unite people. It is heartening to see artists communicate through their art who might struggle to connect otherwise. Art brings people into conversation. Art can take painful things and help us to process. Art can highlight injustices.
- 4) **Accessible** - Creative reuse is about making art accessible to everyone. It is mostly possible to get the trash materials at no or low cost. When we make art from trash, it allows more people to participate even without a budget for supplies, while also helping divert items from landfill.

Even though I grew up in a place where many people struggled economically, I am privileged by just about every measure. I continue to self-educate about the weight carried by people of color due to unjust systems. While I don't have a big platform, I love to share work by people of color. One of the coolest things about creative reuse art is that it is popular globally, so there are creative reuse artists everywhere. On Trashmagination, there have been many stories of creative reuse artists who are people of color such as Junior Fritz Jacquet who sculpts expressive faces from toilet paper tubes or Maya Freelon Asante who makes splatter paintings from tissue paper that bleeds color when it's wet.

Creative reuse is one way to live mindfully and work for justice in the world. One area that I find particularly exciting is the idea of creating jobs for people through creative reuse. While those podcast episodes are not very popular compared to the ones about how to creatively reuse toilet paper rolls, that is the area I am the most interested in

researching. As I said in the previous episode, it is my dream to create a business that employs people to do creative reuse while building stronger communities.

In that episode, I mentioned that my greatest obstacle to moving forward was that I felt alone. I have a loving family and many sweet friends, but I felt I needed someone who was just as passionate as me about creative reuse. After that episode, I received an email from a listener of this podcast. This was someone who I had never met. And I cannot express to you how much this meant to me. First, she told me that my podcast has sustained her when she was working on her own creative reuse projects. She also needed an accountability partner. In our first conversation, she gave me so many ideas, it has unleashed so much energy in me.

It is hard to predict how much energy you can give someone if you believe in them. Even people who you think have it all together, and seem perfectly self-sufficient, it can be so powerful if we sincerely express their impact on us. You might unleash an energy in them that will benefit the whole community. I believe that the energy it takes to tell someone how they help you is small compared to the energy it can create in their life. We all need a boost to do our good work. Let's make sure no one feels alone in their work for justice.

I also received an email from two artists in New Zealand who were putting together creative reuse activities for families during social distancing. When it's not social distancing time, they run something called "sheds" which are like maker spaces where you store tools and teach everyone how to use them. It is so unusual that I hear from people about the podcast and I am so glad that Trashmagination is useful to them. Thank goodness there are people all over the world who care about creative reuse!

To end this week's podcast, I want to express gratitude for the many artists on social media who continue to post their work and their process, especially now. When I wake up and look at their art, it helps me wake up to my heart. In particular, I look forward to daily posts from Yurika Chiba who talks about her daily art practice that takes many forms such as drawing, singing, drumming, drawing with chalk outside and teaching. And to Arounna Khounnoraj whose curiosity in all art forms is a joy to follow. I am not nearly so prolific in sharing my art practice so I'm grateful when artists keep sharing even when things are not fully formed.

Thank you for listening! As always, you know I'm on the lookout from creative reuse artists to feature in upcoming episodes, so let me know if you have encountered new creative reuse artists on your journeys of self-education. Also, I already mentioned how much it energized me to hear from these listeners, and to see that Trashmagination was helping them. So I would love to hear from you at trashmagination@gmail.com. Let me know how Trashmagination has helped you and you could unleash a whole new round of creative reuse research and projects!

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