



## **Trashmagination Podcast #120 – New Fluffy Rug Class**

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown. This is the 120<sup>th</sup> episode of Trashmagination and I have an exciting announcement! Today I am launching the first Trashmagination online course! This has been my dream, to create a virtual creative reuse design school. And here I am with the first course!

I am so excited to share this course with you, my podcast listeners! So in today's episode, I'm sharing the story of how it took five years to get to this point. Maybe it will inspire you to reach your dream as well. I'll also tell you about how I made my first online course, and what's in the course.

### **Why I Made the Trashmagination Podcast**

Before 2016, Trashmagination was my personal blog where I shared photos of my creative reuse art. But in the fall of 2016, I decided to make a podcast. My number one goal for starting the Trashmagination podcast was to explore my artistic voice and figure out how I might make creative reuse art that was unique in the world. But it's hard to be unique when you don't know what is already out there.

Through these five years making this podcast, I learned important things about my own art practice. I learned that I was spending more time collecting materials and preparing to make art than I spent actually making art. I learned that I will prioritize just about everything else in my life before making art. I tend to respond to other people's demands for my time more than my own artistic vision. And even though I started this podcast to explore every possible type of creative reuse art, that approach meant I was seeing the potential in everything, and thus not focusing on anything.

### **Learning to Focus / Decluttering**

2019 was a turning point. I met one of my favorite creative reuse artists Sayaka Ganz. I talk about this meeting in episode 85. Sayaka focuses on plastic kitchenware to make her extraordinary animal sculptures. Sayaka had an exhibit locally so we went out to lunch. I learned so much from our discussion, but one of the most important things I learned was that I needed to focus and let go of some materials I had been collecting.

I had been decluttering mostly my non-art supply items before that but now I tried very hard to give away the items that I had been collecting to make into art. For each collection, I set an ultimatum, which was, "You either make the item right now or you give this collection away." In many cases, I was ready to give it away. It's not easy to give away your art supplies especially when most people consider them to be trash, and the idea of putting them in landfill breaks your heart. Some collections went to a creative reuse center. In other cases, I found artists or teachers who use that material. Some I made into the art that I wanted to make, such as my 2020 snowmen ornaments made from plastic bottles or the weighted blanket from my blue jeans collection. I have been so pleased that I used or found homes for most collections other than landfill. This project is ongoing, but I have made progress.

In November 2020, I saw a tutorial for how to cut t-shirt yarn [<https://youtu.be/vmj7aDMyMo0>]. I had watched similar tutorials before but they never made sense to me. I learned how to make a ball of t-shirt yarn in under 10 minutes. With this new information, I decided it was time to address my t-shirt collection. I had about six large plastic totes filled with new and secondhand t-shirts. My dream had been to weave rainbow t-shirt rugs. This would use up many colors.

## **Invention of the Fluffy Rug**

The first t-shirt rugs I wove were the traditional type of weaving where you put a warp on your loom and then weave a weft back and forth. I made two rugs this way, but they look like many rugs you might see at Ikea or a similar store except they are made from t-shirts. I really loved weaving them, but when I posted them on social media, only my dear friends liked them. I did a podcast episode about how to weave t-shirts into rugs, but it was not downloaded very much.

So how did I move from these traditionally woven rugs to invent my fluffy rug method?

First, I observed that when I cut the t-shirts into a ball of t-shirt yarn, it created a lot of waste. The entire top of the t-shirt from the arm pits up was not used in the ball of yarn. I call this section the yoke and the sleeves. As I cut up t-shirt after t-shirt, I created a stack of yokes and sleeves. I felt compelled to think of a way to use those creatively. I started to cut those sections of t-shirts into strips that ranged from one to three feet long. When I had those stacked up, I thought – these look like the yarn I used to make latch hook rugs when I was a kid. Maybe I should go buy the mesh that you use for latch hooking, and start making latch hook rugs to use up these strips? But it was the pandemic, and I was trying not to go to stores. I had been in the mindset for all of 2020 to not buy things, but to use them up. Also, I was sure the t-shirt yarn would be too thick to use in the traditional latch hooking tool.

Then I thought – why do I need to buy that hard, crunchy mesh? I can weave mesh. Mesh is just a warp and a weft, but with spaces in between – and if I make it from t-shirt yarn, that will help me achieve my goal of using up my t-shirts.

But how am I going to keep the spaces between the warp and the weft so I can then attach the strips of t-shirt? And that's when I thought about combining the two processes of weaving the mesh and tying on the fluffy strips all at one time – or rather sequentially. I weave a line, then tie on one line of strips, and so on.

The first fluffy rug I made was from that white t-shirts which I had in such giant quantities. Weaving this rug helped me to see how many t-shirts I needed without worrying about running out of a specific color. One rug used 60 XXL t-shirts! This would definitely help me go through my t-shirt stash!

When I posted photos of my white fluffy rug on social media, the post went crazy! Within 24 hours, the posts had 30,000 views! My typical Trashmagination posts get about 100 views. The next day I posted more and those also went viral. This had never happened to me in all my years doing Trashmagination. Also, many people who commented asked if I had made an online course to teach this method, while others asked to buy the rug.

One person commented that they wanted to make a fluffy rug for their dog. Apparently there is something called a snuffle mat where you hide treats inside a thick fluffy rug like this.

Why did I call them fluffy rugs? Long before I knew people would like them, I knew I loved them because as I would weave, I would running my hands through the fluffy strips and say, “oh my goodness they are so fluffy!” I called the t-shirt strips used in these rugs fluffies! There are similar looking rugs that have names like shag rug or proddy rug. They just are not using this method.

I searched for hours to see if I could find any artists who use this method, and I still have not found any. The closest I found was a group in Finland called Ragmate. This organization hires women who are Syrian refugees to tie fabric on to a soft mesh. They do not weave the mesh like I do, and they do not use a square knot. They do not recycle t-shirts, but use fabric that is factory waste. However their final rugs do look similar to my fluffy rugs. I believe that my fluffy rug techniques are unique because they combine disassembling t-shirts with this combination of weaving and tying. Whatever the case, I encourage you to purchase rugs from Ragmate if you are interested in buying a final product and not making your own because it has a wonderful mission.

## **What's In the Course?**

So it was February 2021 and I had a new technique to share with the world. But I still felt stuck. Fate stepped in and Sharon Zigrossi emailed me on the same day that my fluffy rug posts went viral. I thought she was emailing about the

post, but she was not. Sharon makes art from hub caps, and she wanted to let me know she really liked my podcast. Had I ever considered doing an episode on hub caps? So we set up a time to talk over Zoom, and during that chat, she mentioned she wanted to make an online course. I had looked into this maybe two years ago, so my info was old. A lot has changed in the industry related to online teaching due to the pandemic with many art teachers and others moving their classes online. Sharon had researched more recently and she was thinking about using a system called Thinkific. That day I checked out Thinkific and I could tell it was a fun tool to use compared the ones I had researched before. Perhaps most importantly, you could build your first three courses for free. So I started building my course.

One reason why I had hesitated to make a course in the past was finding a space in my home where I could film that didn't look cluttered, and where my family would not disturb me in the middle of taping. A few years ago, I made Trashmagination videos a few years ago with those lights but it was so much work setting everything up and taking everything down every day, I had just put the lights away in the closet. So I now had the space, I knew how to use the lights, and it was time to just do it.

So I'm going to describe how the course looks as of today. I know that I am going to keep adding to this course, so keep that mind if you are listening to this podcast far into the future.

The course has four chapters.

1. how this method is different and why it is important to creatively reuse t-shirts
2. what materials you will need such as the loom and the t-shirts - It shows how to prepare the t-shirts.
3. how to design your rug
4. how to weave the rug

There are currently 17 videos in the course adding up to 125 minutes or 2 hours of lessons. I was amazed to realize I had that much info to share! I also include fun quizzes in the course and resource links.

## **What People Are Saying About the Course**

Once the course was done, I reached out to a group of very supportive Trashmagination fans and asked them to test the course. They have been sending me suggestions all week. Thank you to Karen, Marna, Sharon, Eileen, Louisa and my mom Gloria. Here is some of their feedback:

- "You have a wonderful presence and I love your enthusiasm and care with the step-by-step instruction."
- "I feel like I definitely have all the information I would need to make a fluffy rug! Your information is very thorough and easy to understand."
- "I worried 2 hours might be too long but not so. You were articulate and thorough and your passion was unmistakable."

And here's some feedback that meant a lot to me – "Your space looked great and the scene you set up is one where I would like to spend time." Again – hooray for decluttering!

I want to mention my Friday night drawing group. I met these ladies at a taiko conference last summer. We are from all across the United States, all different ages and backgrounds. We started drawing together last June and we are still drawing together. Talking with them about Trashmagination has been critical in making this course happen.

So you know I started this whole process as a way of getting these t-shirts out of my plastic totes. I did make a lot of progress using up that t-shirt collection. But now that I'm deep diving into making fluffy rugs, I needed more t-shirts. And amazingly, one of the people who saw my initial post about the white fluffy rug, she had boxes of new t-shirts from a special event, but that event is now over and the t-shirts were unwanted. So she offered to ship them to me. My first reaction was, "oh no, not more t-shirts!" But then I realized this is it! This is my calling. This is what I am meant to do right now. Kaolin is my t-shirt angel. So thank you Kaolin for shipping me these gorgeous t-shirts. I am so grateful that she was so supportive of my t-shirt creative reuse journey.

The last people I want to thank is my husband Bob and my parents. As I was weaving these rugs, every night he would walk to my loom to see my progress and he gave me so much encouragement. He built my loom in the first place, long before we had any idea that Trashmagination would go in this direction. I want to thank my parents for taking me to Finland when I was teenager and taking me to that weaving center where I first fell in love with weaving.

So maybe you have a dream, and maybe it's amorphous. My recommendation is to just keep putting it out there in whatever way you can. Make anything. Tell people you care about this. Most of the people I mentioned, I did not know them when Trashmagination started. They came because I put out information about my very foggy dream. And people just kept sending me information – whatever they saw that might help – they sent it to me. And I chased down everything they sent to see if that was the right path. It might seem like this journey proceeded in a linear way, but it was not like that. It felt like swirling around most of the time. But I want you to believe that you can make one prototype, one podcast episode, one blog, and just have faith this will evolve.

So now I invite you, my podcast listeners, to check out my fluffy rug course. You can sign up and see the first five videos for free. These videos teach what materials you need and where to get them for maybe free. You can see if I am teaching at a level that makes you feel comfortable. And if you watch those videos and are pumped to make your own rug, then starting today, the course will cost \$20 for the first 50 students. I'm starting with that low price because I want to say thank you to my podcast listeners for your loyalty. I also would appreciate your feedback to make the course even better. You will keep access to the course even when the price goes up. I really look forward to making fluffy rugs with you. The link to the course is in the show notes - <https://trashmagination.thinkific.com/courses/fluffy-rug-weaving>.

## **Thank you!**

Thank you for listening! Please come check out my fluffy rug course! Join the t-shirt creative reuse movement and also support me in my dream. Until next time, may you see t-shirts and fluffy rugs as a source of art in your life!