



Trashmagination Podcast #26 – Maker Faires

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

Today's podcast is about Maker Faires. These are like show-and-tell events that take place all over the world where people who make things share their creations. Most of them are free events except the really huge ones like the World Maker Faire in New York, which my family attended three years ago. To see a list of Maker Faires near you, check out makerfaire.com and you will likely be surprised by how many there are in the world!

This weekend, Trashmagination had a booth at KIDfest hosted by the Kid Museum in Silver Spring, Maryland. It was not officially a Maker Faire but it felt like one. This was the third time that I was a presenter at an event like this.

It's a lot of work to prepare and then it's a very intense day, so one might ask – why would I do this? I don't get paid to offer an activity and I don't sell anything. I had two motivations for this event:

- 1) To let more people know about this podcast
- 2) To hear what people say when they interact with the items I am inventing

I wanted to attend because I believe that Trashmagination could be helpful to more people, and I'm trying to find the sweet spot of things I love to do and things people love to see. I have so many ideas, and I need customer data to focus.

To prepare for this event, I made a new display with three large panels. I sorted my projects by type of trash:

- Plastic caps
- Plastic bottles
- Plastic bags
- Milk jugs
- Neckties
- Flexible food packaging
- T-shirts

The best part was seeing what people walked up to touch and what questions they asked. The most popular items were my plastic bag trash fashion dress, which I displayed on a mannequin so it looked really great, and my plastic bag woven mats. Luckily those are some of my favorite items to make as well, so that is really helpful in that focusing goal.

My Big Mistake at the Event

I made a mistake in how I prepared for the event. My displays were awesome, and when I had time to talk with people, I got great data. But I had also prepared an activity to make a little plastic cap creature called Capulet. People LOVED Capulet. Since the activity was free, I had a never-ending crowd waiting to make the craft.

For four hours, I was run off my feet coaching children how to make Capulet. It's great that they liked the craft (it is very cute) but it didn't give me data on my other items. It was only when I ran out of materials to make Capulet that I could take a breath and talk with people.

Children lined up to make Capulet whether their parents were interested in Trashmagination's overall mission or not. I had supplies for 350 Capulets – so imagine teaching 350 children, most under the age of 8, how to do a non-intuitive craft in less than four hours. It was the most over-stimulating thing you can imagine!

I need to thank three people – a volunteer named Eileen, my husband and my daughter. Eileen looked like she was about 12-13 years old. She was an event volunteer who generously offered to help me. I asked her to prep materials. She volunteered with me for two hours, and then my husband and daughter came and they worked so hard for two more hours! If they had not arrived, I would have just told the people – I'm sorry, you have to wait while I prep – but we already had a problem with kids squishing up to the table and against each other so that would have been worse if I didn't have their help. Either that or I needed a full-time crowd control volunteer.

Also, I just want to make a plug to parents out there – I'm sure none of my podcast listeners would do this – but about 30 percent of the parents were staring at their phones while their kids made the craft. Many times I had to say, "Who is with this child?" because I would have a very small child who clearly needed help and there was no parent tuning in to the moment.

In contrast, one of the sweetest moments happened after all the Capulet people were gone, and a dad with two daughters looked at every single thing on my display with so much excitement and wonder – my heart was just melting. Often when people first encounter my work, they look a little shell-shocked – like they can't process it – and I will reach out with friendly questions to help them engage. But this family did not need my help. They were just so imaginative and excited. I would have done the whole event just to listen to their conversation. I took a photo of them so I can remember how they sounded.

What Did I Learn

Don't Offer an Activity – For future large-scale events, I would not offer an activity. This goes against my grain because I want people to make things, not just look at them passively. But my designs are awesome partially because they are non-intuitive and most people require coaching to make them. It is not energizing to coach en masse. It also feels like a fleeting interaction and I'm not convinced it makes the impact on the participants that I would like.

Find Events for Adults - The event reminded me that I keep designing things that appeal to kids, but I'm not energized working with kids under 10 years old. I need to attend events for adults or teens only. I told my husband – from now on, remind me to only sign up for events with the right target audience!

Deep Dive with Weaving Plastic Bags – These were the most popular items. I think it could be a strong focus area for the future. I was not deep diving with them because I didn't think people would want to learn how to do it, and it takes way too much time to make for the final products to be financially viable to sell. But you never know – people were attracted to it and it's definitely not an activity for young children.

So Thanks for Listening!

I will post a bunch of photos from the event up on my blog so you can see how the display looked and the first 10 kids who came to my table before I got overwhelmed and stopped taking photos.

Please drop me a note at trashmagination@gmail.com! As I mentioned, I'm trying to figure out where to focus my energy when it comes to Trashmagination, so if you have thoughts on that, I'd love to hear it! I want to work with adults & most of my work takes too much time to sell at a craft sale – although I'm experimenting.

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