



## Trashmagination Podcast #37 – Monster Art from Recycled Materials

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

This episode is for anyone who has ever wanted to make a monster from recycled materials. I'm sure that is a big crowd! But seriously – even if you don't make art on a regular basis – this is a fun topic for parents, teachers or someone who wants to try a new artistic adventure.

This week, I facilitated a workshop on making monsters from recycled materials at a high school. The workshop coincided with reading the book *Frankenstein*. My goal for the workshop was to acquaint the students with many recycled materials. In other creative reuse workshops, I observed that students think of recycled sculptures as plastic bottles connected by duct tape. I wanted to show them that there are more interesting materials and methods. I generally want to avoid using glue and tape so that it is easy later to disassemble the sculptures for recycling – so that's a big theme I want to communicate.

I started the workshop with a presentation of examples. Many artists build monsters from recycled materials. Maybe there is a natural synergy between monsters and recycled materials. Monsters can appear disjointed – a combination of bits and pieces, body parts are in unexpected places.

Here are some of the artists who I featured in the presentation:

- Lexy Ho-Tai [<https://www.lexymakesthings.com/>] makes monster costumes that are worn in performances and parades. She calls them the Kookers and they are from Kookerville. They are very colorful costumes. She often wraps fibers around long tubes which wrap around the body. She crochets plastic as well.
- Callum Donovan Grujicich (Grew-ich) [<https://www.callumart.com/>] is 12 years old and his sculptures incorporate metal and other trash objects he finds. He uses a wire armature and clay to make the bodies and he hand-sews all the clothes. I saw an inspiring video about him on CBC Arts which I'll embed in the show notes.
- Sandy Mastroni [<http://smastroni.blogspot.com/>] makes dolls with really big heads and zippers for mouths. Her work caught my attention because last week I did a podcast on what to do with broken zippers.
- Florencia Salibián [<http://tiendauniversos.blogspot.com/>] makes monster sculptures from plastic bottles which she called Guardadores Monstruosos or Monster Guardians. They look like a two-liter bottle which has a mouth cut out and then the whole thing is covered with papier-mache and painted in bright colors.
- Jennifer Strunge is Cotton Monster [<http://cottonmonster.com/>] and she sews her monsters from clothing she gets at thrift stores. She has sea monsters, space monsters and even just eye-balls.
- Hiroshi Fuji [<https://inhabitat.com/hiroshi-fuji-makes-a-dazzling-art-installation-in-tokyo-using-50000-recycled-toys/>] makes dinosaur-like monsters from thousands of tiny plastic objects – I would guess mostly toys?
- Hillary Goodwin [<https://entropyalwayswinsblog.com/>] has a family tradition where she makes a monster from a recycled stuffed animal or recycled clothing for her kids each birthday and Christmas [[https://www.instagram.com/p/BdAmD\\_qF6UW/?taken-by=entropyalwayswins](https://www.instagram.com/p/BdAmD_qF6UW/?taken-by=entropyalwayswins)].

As I showed the examples, I asked the students to look for patterns. How did the artists communicate that these were monsters?

- What body parts were exaggerated or misplaced?
- What textures made the monsters feel like monsters?
- Where did each monster fall on the spectrum between creepy to fanciful?
- What materials did the artists recycle and how did they manipulate them?

Next I offered five stations. Each station taught a creative reuse skill. The stations were:

1. Take-apart – stuffed toys & electronics
2. Plastic caps – drilling, making spines, sewing on a button
3. Braiding and weaving plastic bags
4. Ironing plastic bags with parchment paper
5. Cutting plastic milk jugs

By far, the most popular stations were the take-apart table and the plastic bag fusing. They wanted the materials inside the boom box – especially the wires and the motor. The plastic bag fusing activity is the most “open-ended” meaning that they could design the pattern to fuse. The other stations had one way to do the activity.

If I were to run this workshop again, here are some areas which I would improve:

- I would think of more activities with a design component and not just a specific skill such as using a power drill or weaving.
- I would protect the table at the take-apart station with cardboard. The table got a scratch and that could have easily been avoided.
- For the milk jug activity – this was not a popular activity but I could improve that station by offering examples of how I use milk jugs. For example, I could make monster scales or a monster head-dress.
- A key point of the plastic cap activity was to show how they could make a much more dynamic monster if it had a rope spine that went up through the materials, rather than taping from the outside. Perhaps that would be better communicated if we put together actual monster components with a spine rather than tiny caps.
- Given how much the students loved the wires from the boom box, I bet the students would enjoy a station where they manipulate wires – maybe an armature?

If I think about the big picture vision for this workshop, I went with a stations approach because it was my understanding that the students had already started their design processes. I wanted the workshop to be useful to any student, no matter their design direction – but also to expand their understanding of how to use recycled materials.

Another approach could be to build an actual monster together. For example, we could all build a monster from a two-liter bottle, inspired by Florencia Salibián’s Guardians. The advantage of that model is that students might learn more from each other. In this model, they were all going on their own journeys but their journeys were so unrelated, it was not really a conversation between students.

I put together a Pinterest board with my favorite monsters made from recycled materials [<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/recycled-monsters/>]. Some are not actually monsters but more animals or people. However, they all give inspiration for how to assemble materials to make a figure. I would love to hear about any monster art that you made from recycled materials at [trashmagination@gmail.com](mailto:trashmagination@gmail.com).

Please consider leaving a review of this podcast so more folks can get a regular input of creative reuse inspiration.

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