



## Trashmagination Podcast #42 – Beach Trash Art

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

When I was growing up in Canada, there was a long-running TV show called *The Beachcombers* [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Beachcombers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Beachcombers)] about people who salvaged logs off the beach. A beachcomber is anyone who searches the beach for valuable items. Today we'll talk about people who look for beach trash to make art.

I was inspired to research this topic because the Sixth International Marine Debris Conference is taking place in San Diego this week, March 12-16, 2018 [<http://internationalmarinedebrisconference.org/>]. March is also the month when many North American students head to the beach for spring break.

Beach trash is unfortunately an unlimited source of art supplies. It is estimated there is 315 billion pounds of plastic in the oceans (PBS NewsHour). So put on some of Jack Johnson music and get inspired by stories of beach trash artists.

### Sculpture Artists who Work with Plastic Beach Trash

Last month in my shoe episode, I mentioned the sculptures of African animals made by Ocean Sole from flip flops. Many artists transform beach trash into giant sculptures. I saw an exhibit of 17 marine animals at the National Zoo in Washington DC two years ago made by Washed Ashore [<http://washedashore.org/>]. These pieces have travelled the world to many zoos and museums. Angela Haseltine Pozzi [Hazel-ton Pote-see] is the founder and lives in Oregon. It's fascinating how she builds a skeletal structure and tries a huge variety of plastic pieces in each spot.

Another artist who makes beach trash into marine animals is Cindy Pease Roe. Her whale sculptures are about 2 or 3 feet long. She teaches workshops called up-sculpting where people make whales from beach trash.

David Day sculpts marine creatures from beach trash that have moving parts like mouths that open or tails that flap when you push on a fin. I learned from this video that Australians call flip flops "thongs" which is fun because in North America that means something quite different!

The sculptures by Cindy Pease Roe, David Day and Washed Ashore are recognizable marine animals, but many beach art sculptures are abstract. Aurora Robson's pieces remind me of photographs of bacteria or viruses in an electron microscope [<http://www.aurorarobson.com/>]. They are colorful and swirly. She uses metal rivets to connect the pieces.

### Fiber Artists Who Incorporate Beach Trash

Next I'm going to share stories about fiber artists – which you know is my first love.

I love a quilt by Susan Lenz called Two Hours at the Beach [<http://artbysusanlenz.blogspot.com/2011/06/two-hours-at-beach.html>]. She sewed a whole bunch of beach trash on a quilt.

I found three weavers who each do very different things with beach trash.

1. Jo Atherton from Flotsam Weaving [<https://flotsamweaving.com/>] weaves tapestries from plastic beach trash. She makes prints from plastic trash by inking the items and pressing them to fabric. I love this workshop she does with school children where she gives them a fish shape and they weave in beach trash.

- Stephanie Lerner weaves fishing ropes into circular shapes [<https://slerner-beachart.com/Circular-fishrope-weavings>].
- Maria Ware weaves baskets from “ghost nets” [<http://contemporarybasketry.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/ghost-net-basketsmaria-ware.html>]. Those are fishing nets which have come loose and just float along in the ocean catching fish that will never be gathered up by fishermen. They are very deadly.

## Beach Trash Photographers

The first beach trash artists I encountered years ago were Judith and Richard Lang [<http://www.beachplastic.com/>]. They have been cleaning the same beach in California since 1999. Richard calls it “exercises in pattern recognition” which is a phrase I love. They were taking color-coordinated, flat-lay photos of objects long before Instagram made that popular. They became experts at knowing the age of plastic objects by looking up the designs.

Mandy Barker photographs marine debris suspended against a black background as if they are still floating in the ocean [<https://mandy-barker.com>]. In one photo, she shows objects with teeth marks from marine animals trying to eat them. In another, she puts 500 plastic objects found inside a dead albatross chick’s digestive tract. (Instagram - Feb 9, 2017)

## Beach Trash Artists who Focus on Lumber, Cigarettes and Sea Glass

Some artists focus on lumber or bits of boats that wash up on the beach. Two artists I admire who make items from beach lumber are Kirsty Elson in the UK [<https://www.instagram.com/kirstyelson/>] and Caroline Beghin-Kircher in the United States [[https://www.instagram.com/made\\_by\\_cbk/](https://www.instagram.com/made_by_cbk/)]. Kirsty makes little beach towns while Caroline makes mostly fish and other marine life. Both artists incorporate other materials such as rusty nails and other bits of metal they find on the beach. I’ll share a video in the show notes about Kirsty’s work that I love to watch.

Some beach trash artists make art from cigarettes. Shelly Marshall made a sea turtle from 1,200 cigarette butts [<http://www.onegreenplanet.org/news/sea-turtle-made-of-cigarettes/>]. Taylor Lane made a surfboard from 10,000 cigarette butts [<https://nypost.com/2017/10/24/man-makes-surfboard-out-of-10000-cigarette-butts/>]. I’ll embed a video in the show notes that shows how he did it.

Many artists work with sea glass. This is made when glass bottles break into pieces and the waves rub the pieces smooth. My mom used to teach sea glass jewelry workshops. I don’t think of sea glass as trash, because they are not ingested by marine life, but it is introduced by humans. Do you know what colors are the most difficult to find? They are orange, turquoise and red [<https://seaglassjewelrybyjane.com/colors/>].

There are many more artists who work with beach trash. I pinned lots of examples on a Pinterest board [<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/beach-trash/>].

## What can you do to address beach trash?

**No More Plastic Straws** - It is heartening that there is a new awareness around plastic straws. Some restaurants and cities are banning them [<http://money.cnn.com/2018/02/23/news/plastic-straws-bans-companies/index.html>] such as Seattle, Miami Beach and Malibu. An organization called Strawfree.org says 500 million straws are thrown out in the US every day. People are learning to forego using straws or they are carrying washable straws when they eat out. I have both metal and bamboo straws that both work great.

**Make Your Own Bucket and Shovel** - Sometimes my family forgets to bring a bucket and shovel. One option is to cut a plastic milk jug. You can cut the handle of the milk jug to make a little shovel, while using the base as a bucket.

**Join a Beach Clean-up** - You can clean up beach trash any day, but if you’d like to join a global event, there is an International Coastal Clean-up annually where you send in data. It’s an example of citizen science and an opportunity to get friends out to help clean up. This year, the International Coastal Clean-up is September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018 [<https://oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas/international-coastal-cleanup/>].

I want to give a shout-out to the many Instagrammers who I follow who do regular beach clean-ups. This includes Mattie Mae Larson from Upcycle Hawaii [<http://www.upcyclehi.com/>]. She doesn't make art from beach trash, but she uses recycled materials such as old wet suits, rubber inner tubes, aluminum cans and fused plastic bags.

**Enter a Beach Trash Art Contest** - In the US, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or NOAA hosts an annual contest [<https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/outreach/artcontest.html>]. There is a contest called Splash Trash that is open until May 1 [<https://www.splashtrash.org/>]. You can go to the website [splashtrash.org](https://www.splashtrash.org/) to vote for your favorite entries. If you have a beach trash art contest in your community, I would appreciate hearing about it at [trashmagination@gmail.com](mailto:trashmagination@gmail.com).

**Replace Plastic as Much as You Can** - Now I'm going to teach you a new word, which is nurdle or N-U-R-D-L-E. This is a common plastic beach trash also called "mermaid's tears," and they are the raw material from which plastic objects are made. A huge amount of nurdles are in the ocean because they get washed out to sea during the manufacturing and transportation process. They look like fish eggs so many marine wildlife eat them. As long as we keep buying plastic items, there will be nurdles. So anything we can do to replace plastic with non-plastic, let's do it.

Richard Lang said "The opposite of beauty is not ugly. The opposite of beauty is indifference." Now there is a phrase that describes my values to a T. I think there is a deep connection between beauty and intentionality.

If you have creatively reused beach trash or if you have a great beach trash story, please let me know at [trashmagination@gmail.com](mailto:trashmagination@gmail.com). Until next time – may you see beach trash as a source of art in your life.