



Trashmagination Podcast #46 – Prescription Packaging & Medical Supplies

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

Happy Earth Day everyone! I hope you have a fun activity planned for this weekend!

Today I'm talking about creative reuse of prescription packaging and medical supplies. But first, let's talk about proper disposal of medications because next week includes a big day in addition to Earth Day. On April 28 in the US, it is national prescription takeback day [https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback/]. I will link to a website showing drop-off locations.

Now let's chat about prescription packaging, including plastic prescription bottles, blister packs and diabetes supplies. We'll talk about:

- where you can send empty prescription packaging other than landfill
- artists who have worked with this type of packaging and
- projects you can do at home with prescription packaging.

Where to Send Empty Prescription Packaging

In the US, many medications are dispensed in orange plastic bottles. These are a type 5 plastic, which is not accepted in many municipal recycling programs. There is a program called Gimme 5 hosted by the Preserve toothbrush company [<https://www.preserveproducts.com/recycle/programs/gimme-5-program-171>]. I'll link to the website where you can find places to bring type 5 plastics or you can mail type 5 plastic to Preserve if there is not a location near you.

One charity which collects empty prescription bottles is the Matthew 25: Ministries [<http://m25m.org/pillbottles/>]. They take bottles to places where medications are dispensed in scraps of paper or other packaging. Their goal is to improve health care by dispensing medications in a safer way. You mail empty, clean bottles to them in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Regarding supplies for diabetics, many supplies are not currently recyclable. However, Omnipod user can participate in a program called Eco-Pod where you can mail in insulin pump components [<https://omnipod.diabetesexpress.ca/pages/the-eco-pod-program>]. Also, a program called Insulin for Life takes supplies that are not expired [<http://ifl-usa.org/what-we-need/>].

A lot of medications come in blister packs – a packaging that is a combination of plastic and aluminum foil. When we mix two material types, it makes it very difficult to recycle. Some companies have mail-back programs for blister packs, such as Bausch & Lomb for their contact lenses packaging [<http://www.bausch.com/our-company/one-by-one-recycling>].

Artists Who Creatively Reuse Prescription Packaging and Medical Supplies

I must tell you about a mural by an ICU nurse in Toronto named Tilda Shalof [SHAH-loff] [<https://www.thestar.com/life/2017/04/04/toronto-general-hospital-nurses-plastic-collection-transformed-into-mural.html>]. She made it from the little bits and bobs of plastic that she used from all sorts of medical supplies. She was an ICU nurse for almost 30 years and then worked with a friend to make this huge mural which is four by nine feet. It now hangs at the Toronto General Hospital. Last year when the story came out, at least 20 people sent me the link. It

was made from more than 10,000 items suspended in a clear resin. I love her quote in the Toronto Star which was “For nurses, I think it shows that all the little things that we do every day add up to big things for each person we treat.”

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BVYGxeojxPG/?tagged=tildashalof>

In my previous podcast episode, I mentioned I am making an online course about trash fashion. My favorite trash fashion show in the world is in Ireland, and in 2016, one of the winning outfits was made from diabetes supplies. A student named Ciara Carew designed a dress called “You’re Not My Type” inspired by her brother Conor who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at age 6 [<https://www.healthline.com/diabetesmine/recycled-diabetes-supplies-dress#1>]. The headpiece was made from pump inserts, insulin pens and caps. The top and skirt were made from 3,500 test strips. Her shoes were decorated with insulin pen caps and lancets. This outfit received the most votes and won the people’s choice from more than a thousand entries.

Here’s more trash fashion inspiration - Johanna Törnqvist made necklaces from blister packs that look like they are made from silver metal [<http://www.johannatornqvist.com/>]. I want to experiment with that.

Jean Shin made a piece called “Chemical Balance” from stacks of orange prescription bottles lit up from inside [http://www.jeanshin.com/chemical_balance2009_SAAM.htm]. There are some on the floor and some hanging from the ceiling. Jean has an exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art from March to July this year. They are all creative reuse pieces using sweaters, military uniforms and the soles of shoes.

Gilbert Legrand takes everyday objects and makes them into cartoons. He took pill capsule packaging and tore it off so the capsules looked like two eyes [http://gilbert-legrand.com/mini_choses.html]. He attached them to paper and drew on bodies. It sounds simple but Gilbert makes simple things look genius.

Ways You Can Creatively Reuse Prescription Packaging and Medical Supplies

Check out a Pinterest board I made with project ideas [<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/prescription-packaging-medical-supplies/>]. We’ll start with practical use of this packaging, as a way to organize your life:

1. **Hide a spare key in your yard** –Put a key in a prescription bottle and glue a rock to the lid. Bury the bottle in your yard. Another version featured a hose nozzle or a draining grate on the lid.
2. **Protect your earphones** – Carefully roll them up and put them inside a prescription bottle.
3. **Make a tiny first-aid kit or sewing kit** – For a first-aid kit, put band-aids, gauze, antiseptic wipes and tweezers. For a sewing kit, put folding scissors, sewing needles and thread. For a fun upgrade idea, make a pin cushion under the lid! Some people put magnets on the bottom so the bottles would stick to a fridge or a metal board.
4. **Organize buttons, beads, hairbands, etc.** – Organize your sewing basket or your junk drawer.
5. **Keep track of parts** – When you get an appliance or Ikea furniture, there are always little parts leftover. So you can label the outside of the prescription bottle and put all the parts inside there.
6. **Store your doggy poop bags** – This is a small container you can hang from your dog’s leash.
7. **Store your toothbrushes** – I saw five or six prescription bottles attached to the inside of a cupboard, one for each family member, with their names on the containers.

Next let’s talk about crafty ideas.

1. **Drawing prompts** - To work on your drawing skills, take inspiration from Gilbert Legrand and use pill capsule cases as a drawing prompt. He just sticks a piece of the packaging on paper and draws whatever comes to mind.
2. **Halloween potion bottles**– With a glue gun, you write words on the bottles like “Eye of Newt” or “Toad Stool.” Then you paint the bottle with black chalkboard paint, followed by a layer of gold paint. The gold paint is put on with a sponge so it creates a texture like old dusty bottles.
3. **Pumpkin ornaments** - Since prescription bottles are already orange, you can make them into pumpkin ornaments by painting the caps green and filling them with candies. Add facial features with a black sharpie.

One crafter made all sorts of Halloween characters from prescription bottles, including a mummy, ghost, pumpkin, bat and vampire [<http://www.thisheartofmineblog.com/2011/10/03/little-halloween-monsters/>].

4. **Snowman ornament** – You paint the bottle white & the lid black for the cap. You can even add a tiny scarf.
5. **Dollhouse miniature items** – In episode 34, I talked about people who make elaborate items for dollhouses from recycled materials [<https://trashmagination.com/dollhouse-furniture-from-recycled-materials/>]. Some of these items were made from blister packs, such tiny muffin tins from a six-pack blister packet [<http://mimundodeminiatura.blogspot.nl/2013/12/molde-para-magdalenas.html>]. Sometimes they made handles or knobs on their doll furniture from blister pack bumps. Another crafter made tiny pretend glass bowls for her dollhouse from larger blister packs.
6. **Cat toy** – In episode 38, I talked about making pet accessories from recycled materials [<https://trashmagination.com/pet-accessories-from-recycled-materials/>]. You can make a cat toy by putting noisy items in a prescription bottle and then put that inside a covering like a sock.
7. **Googly Eyes** – I love this idea! A crafter made googly eyes from the clear bumps on blister packs [<http://arteminhas-marta.blogspot.pt/2012/04/como-nao-pensei-nisto-antes.html>]. She carefully pulled away the aluminum behind the bump but did not tear it off. I think the little googly part was black bead.
8. **Dalek crafts** – For Doctor Who fans, could you make a Dalek ornament incorporating blister pack bumps? I clearly need to spend some time testing that idea.

I hope you got lots of inspiration to creatively reuse prescription packaging and medical supplies. When we are sick, sometimes we don't feel very creative. Just looking at that packaging can remind us about our sickness. But if we creatively reuse these supplies, we are celebrating the fact that such medicines exist and hopefully make us feel better. Gifts made from this packaging might be a great way to celebrate milestones on our journey to health. Or they can celebrate every-day courage, like the dress designed by Ciara Carew from her brother's diabetes supplies.

The nurse who made the mural out of medical supplies, Tilda Shalof, said that when she looks at those materials, she remembers all the people who she helped, which is a lovely way to celebrate people through creative reuse.

Be sure to share this podcast with anyone you know in the medical profession. Wouldn't it be awesome if there were more nurses like Tilda who gathered all these plastic bits which never touch a patient, but they could bring those items to a creative reuse center to be made into art? Think of all the colorful bits of plastic in medical centers around the world – and only Tilda thought to make this. Be that one person.

Also, following up from my last podcast episode, I'm looking for anyone who would love to host a trash fashion show. I put together a course outline that would teach you how to do that, and I would love for your feedback as I develop course materials. Congrats to Mary Brody for winning the overall prize in Junk Kouture 2018 last night with her design called "Moo" made from 300 recycled milk cartons!

And don't forget to bring your un-used prescriptions for proper disposal on April 28!

Until next time – may you see prescription packaging and medical supplies as a source of art in your life!