



## Trashmagination Podcast #79 – Rope

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

Today we're going to talk about the creative reuse of rope, and even if you don't have big piles of rope taking up space in your home, I encourage you to keep listening. We'll talk about a type of rope that you probably do encounter often, which is shopping bag handles. These are little bits of rope usually about 10 inches long that are attached to paper shopping bags. And we'll talk about a type of rope that you might encounter when you visit the beach, which is rope from fishing gear. These ideas apply to other types of rope, so hopefully you are inspired to upcycle whatever you have. And maybe it could be a fun family project when you visit the beach on vacation.

### Shopping Bag Handle Upcycling

Let's start with shopping bag handles. Every Monday, it is recycling and trash day on my street, and people put out their paper recycling in paper shopping bags. Some bags have handles made with two pieces of rope. The problem is that rope is not paper, and when they leave the rope handles on the paper bag, they are introducing contamination into the recycling. We all know that when there is contamination in recycling, it often gets put in landfill because it's too difficult for the recycling infrastructure to separate out the contamination. So all that effort of separating our recycling goes to waste. I walk up my street, removing these handles from the shopping bags. They are perfectly great for holding the paper recycling without the handles.

I used the handles in many creative reuse projects. The first project was when I made cap-erpillars. Cap-erpillars are a craft I like to do at educational events. I drill a hole in plastic caps using my drill press and then invite kids to make caterpillars or "cap-erpillars" by threading the caps on to rope. For smaller children who might be more challenged with this project, I put a little bit of tape on one end of the rope so it comes to a blunt point, which makes it easier for them to thread on the caps. I hot glue eyes on some caps to be the "head" of the cap-erpillars. This is a great craft because:

- it costs almost nothing for you to prepare in large quantities,
- it reuses a type of plastic that is often not accepted by recycling programs,
- it helps kids develop their fine motor skills, and
- it requires almost no teaching so you can have 20 kids standing at your table working on the craft.

It's fun to see how some kids will put more design thinking into their cap-erpillars. Most kids grab whatever cap and string it on, but some kids alternate colors, or make a rainbow, or make sure the cap sizes increase and decrease in a precise way. While this craft is ideally for kids probably ages 3-6, it can work for older kids if you have enough repeating caps and then you can challenge them with these design ideas. For this idea and all the others in today's episode, check out my Pinterest board that I'll link in the show notes - <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/rope/>.

The next way that I creative reuse rope shopping bag handles is to make "woggles" which are little circular devices that are part of the Scout uniform to hold on the kerchief. I make woggles by tying a Turk's Head knot which is a bit complicated, but there are step-by-step videos to help [<https://www.animatedknots.com/turks-head-knot>]. The woggles sold in the Scout shop in the United States are made from metal. They are slippery and my son kept losing his woggle. But he has not lost a single woggle I made from rope shopping bag handles because they grip the kerchief much better.

Using this same technique, I have seen some artists make a ring – like a jewelry ring that you wear on your finger [[https://www.instagram.com/p/BxCMU\\_WhpYL/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BxCMU_WhpYL/)].

The next way I creatively reused rope shopping bag handles was to make medals – like Olympic medals - for a workshop. I made gold and silver medals by attaching metal lids on to rope shopping bag handles. I printed the name of the event on a sticker and stuck it on the metal lid. This was a fun way to celebrate at the end of the workshop.

In terms of other ways to creatively reuse rope shopping bag handles, there is currently a big trend for rope-based crafts such as macramé and basket making. Most tutorials will involve using new rope, but there is nothing stopping you from using upcycled rope.

- Rope basket - <http://www.onehundreddollarsamonth.com/how-to-make-a-rope-basket/>
- Round ornament - <https://mypoppet.com.au/makes/scrap-fabric-twine-recycled-christmas-ornaments/>
- Rope coasters [<https://www.tastemade.com/shows/hod/hod-296-knotted-rope-coasters>]
- Braided door mat [<https://www.marthastewart.com/269741/braided-doormat>]

Another trend is to make decorative wall hangings from complicated knots. The artist Windy Chien [<https://www.instagram.com/windychien/>] set herself a challenge in 2016 to tie a new kind of knot each day, or 365 different types of knots. She called her project The Year of Knots [<http://www.windychien.com/yearofknots>]. She then made collections of these knots for display. The first example was commissioned by Facebook and displayed at their offices in Menlo Park, California. Windy did not use upcycled ropes in her project, but you certainly could! By tying the knots in various colors and displaying them in a gradient across a wall, you can make a very cool piece of art. Last December, Windy did a post showing what she does with her leftover rope ends, which is to tie them into colorful flowers using something called a star knot [<https://www.instagram.com/p/BrK5xZVgyEC/>].

## Fishing Gear Creative Reuse

Hopefully you are now inspired to creatively reuse rope shopping bag handles. Now let's turn our attention to a much larger challenge, which is the impact of fishing gear. Each year, it is estimated that 640,000 tons of abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear gets dumped in the ocean<sup>1</sup> which makes up almost half of the plastic pollution in the oceans. This gear is called “ghost gear” because it floats around in the ocean continuing to catch and kill sea life. It takes hundreds of years to degrade, killing the whole time.

If you don't live near the ocean, you might not have access to rope from fishing gear. But if you ever take a beach vacation, you are likely to find it on the shore. So let me tell you about how people are trying to reduce the amount of fishing nets and rope entering the oceans, and then I'll tell you about artists who creatively reuse it. Hopefully it will give you ideas for what you could make from this rope.

Lots of people are trying to address this issue of ghost gear or discarded fishing gear. Divers organize huge underwater cleanups. Fishermen gather tons of gear at fishing docks. In Nova Scotia, where most of my family lives, there is a program called Ship-to-Shore which works with fishermen who pledge not to throw gear overboard [<https://clean.ns.ca/programs/waste/ship-to-shore/>].

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1118919811629390>

Most rope used in fishing gear is made from plastic and needs to be replaced every three to five years. Most of the fishing gear that is too weak for fishing goes into the ocean or landfill. But when the fishermen gathered the rope in recycling bins on the docks, they noticed that lots of people came to get it for other uses than fishing. It might not be strong enough for fishing, but it is still great for other projects.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/taking-an-innovative-approach-to-fishing-gear-local-projects-in-nova-scotia-take-up-the-challenge--860882290.html>

In Europe, many organizations are part of something called the Ghost Gear Initiative [<https://www.ghostgear.org/>]. Their goal is to collect the nets and transport them to be reprocessed into nylon yarn. They are processed by a company called Aquafil in Slovenia. According to Aquafil, one ton of nylon nets can create 26,000 socks<sup>2</sup>. The nylon yarn can be used to make swimwear, underwear, carpets and more. One company that uses this yarn is Swedish Stockings [<https://en.swedishstockings.com/>]. They make panty hose or nylons<sup>3</sup>.

The company adidas makes running shoes and sportswear from recycled fishing nets with the brand name Parley [<https://www.adidas.com/us/parley>]. In 2019, adidas will produce 11 million pairs of shoes containing upcycled marine plastic waste. They no longer offer plastic bags in their stores and banned single-use plastics from their offices.

Another company that makes shoes from recycled fishing nets is called Verdura Shoes except their products actually look like fishing nets [<https://verdura.myshopify.com/>]. They are not grinding up the fishing nets and re-forming them into new types of plastic. These shoes look like fishing nets shaped into shoes – so check them out in the show notes.

A few episodes ago, I talked about creative reuse of skateboards. One of the companies I mentioned was Bureo from Chile, and they make their skateboards from recycled fishing nets. They also work with other designers to make items from recycled fishing nets such as chairs.

<https://www.facebook.com/ajplusenglish/videos/736291123179064/>

<https://www.facebook.com/humanscale/videos/10160195599875052/>

## Artists who Work with Recycled Fishing Gear Rope

Next I'm going to talk about artists who incorporate recycled fishing gear rope into their work. Many of their pieces require a lifetime of artistic experience, but some might inspire you to make something yourself.

There is a group of artists who live on an island north of Australia called Darnley Island. There are not many economic opportunities on Darnley Island and unfortunately, there is a lot of fishing gear washing up on the beaches. A group of artists started a group called Erub (EH-roob) Arts [<https://www.instagram.com/erubarts/>]. They travel the world teaching people how to sculpt with fishing ropes to make ocean wildlife like sea turtles. I'll share a video in the show notes that shows how they do it. The technique looks like needle sculpting felt. One of my favorite sculptures is by Lynnette Griffiths. It's a huge fishing net covered with 1005 sardines all sculpted from upcycled fishing nets.

<https://youtu.be/Fsb8ISWNlog>

[https://youtu.be/\\_2YNYXRmP1M](https://youtu.be/_2YNYXRmP1M)

The next artist to check out is Caroline Bond, known as Kittie Kipper on Instagram. She also makes wildlife sculptures, baskets and bags from ghost nets and rope [<https://www.instagram.com/kittiekipper/>]. She made a little prawn or shrimp from red fishing rope that has so much character - you just have to see it [<https://www.instagram.com/p/BphZ9RnHCpc/>]. She gave a TED talk on marine plastic [[https://youtu.be/apqRK\\_nndu0](https://youtu.be/apqRK_nndu0)].

If you've listened to past Trashmagination episodes, you know I am a big fan of trash fashion. The next two artists made dresses from ghost nets. The first is Linda Thomas [<https://www.instagram.com/p/Btdcfczngih/>]. Linda makes lots of upcycled dress designs which you would wear to a fancy party, but she also made an incredible ghost net dress. Her dress is made from mostly aqua-colored fishing nets. The bodice is made from crocheted colorful bits of fishing rope.

Mattie Larson from Upcycle Hawaii also designed a trash fashion dress from ghost nets [[https://www.instagram.com/p/BgyR6l3j\\_3s/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BgyR6l3j_3s/)]. She designed it for the annual trash fashion show called Kona Brewfest

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.recyclingtoday.com/article/abandoned-fishing-nets-recycled-into-nylon/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/zero-waste-countdown-podcast/e/56198455>

<https://www.instagram.com/konabrewfest/>]. Mattie makes lots of cool items from upcycled fishing rope and nets. She melts the rope into flat sheets to make night lights [[https://www.instagram.com/p/Byb\\_SeZlkb5/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Byb_SeZlkb5/)], bookmarks, earrings [<https://www.instagram.com/p/Btm0bREgqbt/>], cutlery holders, key rings and bags. You can support her beach clean-ups and creative reuse genius at Upcycle Hawaii [[www.upcyclehi.com](http://www.upcyclehi.com)]. We have been following each other on Instagram for a long time and she is always so supportive of my posts – so I’m happy to talk about her today!

Gin Stone sculpts with fishing rope which she hand dyes [<http://www.ginstoneart.com/>]. She makes flat pieces that are kind of like quilts or mosaics and she makes animal sculptures with lengths of rope as the fur. Some animals are realistic while others are mythical. She calls her animal sculptures “Humane Taxidermy.” She also attaches the rope to old buoys or driftwood. Gin gets her material from the Cape Cod Commercial Fisherman’s Alliance in Chatham, Massachusetts.

The next two artists are from New Brunswick, Canada, where I lived during elementary school. Landi Luff and Nicky Linzey make wreaths from colorful fishing rope scraps. I would love to make one some day. It looks like a series of fluffy tassels in a circle. You wrap a short length of rope very tightly with thinner colorful rope and then fluff out the end so it looks like a tassel. This works well with the synthetic ropes used in fishing gear because it holds its form, unlike a tassel made from a softer rope. Check out their designs in the show notes.

- Landi Luff - <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bruyo6HnePu/>
- Nicky Linzey - <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bs50CpzH8Bo/>

If you have a nice long piece of rope to upcycle, you could make a door mat. Many companies make door mats from recycled fishing ropes. These mats tend to be woven in the shape of a rectangle or tied in a big flat knot called a nautical rope rug or ocean plait mat. These can be made with fishing ropes but also they can also be made from climbing ropes for a softer mat. I’ll share a video tutorial that recommends starting with about 45 feet of half inch line.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qwkf1h70tIE>

## **Thank you!**

Thank you for listening! Please let me know about anything you have made from upcycled rope at [trashmagination@gmail.com](mailto:trashmagination@gmail.com). Until next time – may you see upcycled rope as a source of art in your life!