



Trashmagination Podcast #82 – Books

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

Today we'll talk about the creative reuse of books. For many people, books are almost sacred items. The thought that you would cut up books to make art or you would recycle them is very upsetting to some people. But the fact remains that there are lots of books that no one wants to own anymore.

In the book *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo*, Marie encourages people to keep the books that spark joy, and give away the rest. If you want to deep-dive on how she suggests you could downsize your books, check out one of my favorite podcasts, Spark Joy episode 57 [<https://www.sparkjoyodcast.com/episode-57-konmari-books-category-building-a-library-of-joy>].

The most common type of book that people don't want any more are out-of-date reference books. These seem easier to give away than books with more sentimental subject matter, but even then people struggle to give them away. Most textbooks are out-of-date, and you know there is no one who wants these old books. And yet we remember being a student and scraping together our funds to buy these expensive books. When I was in university, I came up with a quirky way to avoid buying books. I would ask fellow students to borrow their books for one week, usually at the start of the semester. I would read all the books for the whole semester in one week, take extensive notes, and then give it back to my fellow students before most of them were likely to even crack the books open. This saved me LOTS of money.

Anyhow, today we'll tackle this challenge of unwanted books and in particular, we'll talk about ways to make them into arts and crafts for those books that no used book sale wants to see.

In past episodes, I mentioned creative reuse stores, which are secondhand stores that only focus on art and craft supplies. Many typical thrift stores or op shops won't take books. But if you have older books with fun covers, or books about photography or art topics, some creative reuse stores will take them. So if you haven't already become a regular at your local creative reuse store, maybe you could stop by and ask if they would like your unwanted books.

And before I get into making art and crafts from books, I should mention the Little Free Library movement [<https://littlefreelibrary.org/>]. This is a global movement where people build a wooden box, like a tiny house, and put it on their property or in an approved community space, and then people put their unwanted books inside. There are many in my town, and our family uses them often. I even found out about someone who made a library on her bicycle [<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bm8K3rslyEg/>]. Her name is Jane Green and she has written twenty novels, including seventeen New York Times bestsellers. She lives in Westport, Connecticut and rides her bicycle library on Compo Beach if anyone is looking for reading materials there.

Of course we don't want to fill the Little Free Libraries with out-of-date reference books, so here are ideas for arts and crafts to make with books. You can see many of these ideas on my Pinterest board, linked in the show notes [<https://www.pinterest.com/trashmagination/books/>].

Home Décor

The first idea for creative reuse of books is to make them part of your home décor. If you enjoy watching TV shows about redecorating, then you know hardcover books are a mainstay of many décor decisions. Books add a softness to a room. They can be like a cushion and add a pop of color on a fireplace mantle. Sometimes people arrange the covers by

color on bookshelves. I even saw a suggestion to use a group of old hardcover books as a way of storing kitchen knives [<https://www.instagram.com/p/Btg5RX8HkXY/>].

Journals or Sketchbooks

Another way to creatively reuse hard-sided book covers to make journals or sketchbooks. Artisans around the world make these, so hopefully you can find someone local. Often these companies offer workshops where you can learn how to make your own journals or sketchbooks from old hard-cover books.

- Attic Journals (Portland, Oregon, USA) - <https://atticjournals.com/>
- One More Story Notebooks (Denmark) - <https://www.instagram.com/onemorestorynotebooks/>
- Recover Journals (Nova Scotia, Canada) - <https://recoverjournals.ca/>

Sculptures

Next I'll share stories about artists who make the most unbelievable items from recycled books. There are many types of paper crafts in the world, and many paper-craft artists will at some point use pages from a book. But these artists are taking it to a level that is hard to believe.

Brian Dettmer - <https://briandettmer.com/>

Brian Dettmer makes book sculptures by arranging them together, gluing them into shapes and then cutting out images, words and shapes from the pages with an X-Acto knife. He gave a TED Talk in 2014 where he said, "I seal the edges of a book with a thick varnish so it's creating sort of a skin on the outside of the book so it becomes a solid material, but then the pages inside are still loose, and then I carve into the surface of the book, and I'm not moving or adding anything. I'm just carving around whatever I find interesting." He will search through books for specific pieces of text to isolate in the sculpture. He describes his work as a remix sort of how like a DJ remixes other people's work.

Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/briandettmerstudio/>

TED Talk - https://www.ted.com/talks/brian_dettmer_old_books_reborn_as_intricate_art#t-6129

Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfloXaMfDD0>

Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LX2vdxP5vc4>

Pittsburgh Paper Girl (Erin Gardner) - <https://www.instagram.com/pittsburghpapergirl/>

Another book sculpture artist is Erin Gardner, also known as the Pittsburgh Paper Girl [<https://www.etsy.com/shop/pittsburghpapergirl/>]. Erin sells her sculptures on Etsy. Most of them look like a book filled with folded origami flowers. Unlike Brian Dettmer who sculpts with an X-acto knife, Erin achieves most of her sculptural designs just by folding the pages in the book. She also adds folded flowers made with other paper.

If you are inspired by Brian's and Erin's book sculptures and would like to try it yourself, I'll link to a tutorial by Johwey Redington where she demonstrates basics of book sculpture techniques - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTw3l6wfPAM>.

Jeremy May - <http://littlefly.co.uk/>

The next book sculptor is Jeremy May. He makes jewelry from laminated paper from books. He'll take someone's favorite book and then sculpt it into a ring for example. He will cut a space in the book that is the exact size of the ring – like a giant jewelry box. He uses a scalpel to cut out the papers to make the rings. He started by making a ring for his wife for their first wedding anniversary, which is traditionally known as the paper anniversary.

Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/jeremymayjewels/>

Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMU7fCauK0I>

If you'd like to make a ring from paper, I'll link to a tutorial at the Online Jewelry Academy on how to make one - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHNUDrYx_FQ.

Lisa Nilsson - <http://www.medinart.eu/works/lisa-nilsson/>

The next book sculptor uses a technique called quilling to make her art. Quilling involves taking a thin strip of paper and rolling it very tightly. Then you pinch it into various shapes and glue it down. Quilling was first practiced by Renaissance nuns and monks. Lisa Nilsson made sculptures of human anatomical cross-sections using Japanese mulberry paper and the gilded edges of old books. It's called the "Tissue Series." Lisa described her work on this series in a TED Talk in 2012 [<https://www.tedmed.com/talks/show?id=7371>]. Some of her pieces are even life-sized.

Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjnBzuvhPWk>

Lucy Dorothy Nichols - <http://lucydorothy.com/>

The next book sculptor is Lucy Dorothy Nichols. She takes a book like a guide to birds and then puts them in a frame with many birds sculpted from paper. Or she'll take a book about weather and put many objects in the frame that relate to weather. I could see you taking any book that you love and putting it in a shadow box, then making art around it.

Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/lucydorothyart/>

Ekaterina Panikanova - https://www.instagram.com/ekaterina_panikanova/

Ekaterina Panikanova is a painter who uses books as her canvases. She lays out a series of books side-by-side, and then paints scenes that spread across the books. These are often with only black and gray paint. For example, she laid open a series of hand-written recipe books and then painted many cakes on them.

<https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2013/06/book-paintings-by-ekaterina-panikanova/>

Silvie Facon - <https://www.sylviefacon-creatrice.fr/>

Silvie Facon makes dresses from the spines of old books. The dresses are no 100 percent made from book spines. They incorporate lace for example. Another one of her designs was made from sheet music with a violin as part of the bodice.

<https://www.thinkinghumanity.com/2019/02/french-designer-uses-the-spines-of-books-to-create-extraordinary-dresses.html>

Chiharu Shiota - <https://www.chiharu-shiota.com/the-crossing>

Chiharu Shiota is an installation artist who have I mentioned in many podcast episodes before. She has also worked with books in her work. She made a piece called "The Crossing" which looked like a tornado of string and flying through it are many pages from books. Chiharu wrote about this sculpture that "Every single thread carries a vast amount of meaningful information, accumulating in a mass of awareness."

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BI8DRRIBpwS/>

Su Blackwell - <https://www.sublackwell.co.uk/>

Su Blackwell makes book sculptures by cutting images from old books and creating 3-D dioramas. They often have themes of fairy tales with haunting settings. There are books open on the table with trees growing out of their spines or butterflies flying up. Su says her sculptures express "the vulnerability of childhood, while also conveying a sense of childhood anxiety and wonder." She has also illustrated a book called *The Fairytale Princess: Seven Classic Stories from the Enchanted Forest* where the castles are clearly made from book pages.

Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/sublackwellstudio/>

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! Please let me know about ways that you creatively reuse books by contacting me at trashmagination@gmail.com. Until next time – may you see books as a source of art in your life!