



Trashmagination Podcast #83 – Egg Shells and Cartons

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

Today we'll talk about the creative reuse of egg shells and cartons. My family puts egg shells in the compost and we give our egg cartons to a local farmer who reuses them. We also sometimes rip up our egg cartons and throw them in the composter if it's getting too wet in there. If you want to keep it simple, those are great options. But today I'll share a bunch of other ways to creatively reuse egg shells and cartons.

Egg Shells Creative Reuse

Let's start with ideas unrelated to making art. In the kitchen, you can grind up egg shells to scrub pots. You can also use egg shells to clean a glass bottle that you can't reach inside. You crunch up the egg shells, add soapy water and swirl it around to scour the inside of the bottle.

You can make sidewalk chalk from ground-up egg shells mixed with flour [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r07-m70t34A>]. You mix it into a thick clay, roll it into logs, and then wrap it in a towel or dry it in a silicone mold.

You can grow baby plants in egg shells [<https://www.hellowonderful.co/post/diy-eggshell-planters/>]. You can also put crunched up egg shells in your garden to discourage slugs and snails from eating your plants.

So now let's talk about ways people make art and craft from egg shells. It's popular in many cultures. When I was growing up, we painted egg shells using techniques inspired by Ukrainian culture with wax and dye. The most difficult part was remembering that the places where I put the wax would NOT take the dye. It's like my brain had to work backwards.

Egg painting is part of Persian culture during Nowruz [No Ruz]. Each family member paints an egg and puts it in a bowl. In Mexico during Carnéval, people fill decorated egg shells called cascarónes with confetti. In Hungary, there is a type of egg decorating called egg shoeing, which involves painting tiny horse shoes on eggs. In Australia, there is a type of egg decorating called kalti paarti done on emu eggs [<https://australianmuseum.net.au/learn/cultures/atsi-collection/cultural-objects/kalti-paarti-introduction/>].

Another way to creatively reuse egg shells is to glue them to the surfaces of paintings and containers. I just returned from my 30-year college reunion and there was a fundraising auction. One of the items in the auction was a painting by Mirjam which was a vase of tulips where the vase was a mosaic made from quail egg shells! Egg shells can take a very boring container like a plastic maple syrup bottle and make them look fancy [<http://www.michelemadame.com/2012/02/plastic-jug-to-mosaic-vase.html>].

Some people creatively reuse egg shells by painting them and hanging them in a mobile. You can paint only the outside or inside of the eggs. You can add glitter [<http://www.sweetpaulmag.com/crafts/egg-mobile>]. I'll link to an inspiring example by Sweet Paul magazine. They also show how to transform egg shells into geodes by growing crystals inside them with a basic science experiment [<http://www.sweetpaulmag.com/crafts/diy-crystal-geode-eggs>].

Artists Who Work with Egg Shells

Now I'll share stories about artists who creatively reuse egg shells. I talked about Ruby Silvius in the episode about the creative reuse of teabags. She also paints the insides of egg shells with beautiful designs and images. You can see examples on her Instagram feed and also she has a book coming out this year called *Reclaimed Canvas: Reimagining the Familiar* [<https://www.rubysilvius.com/book>].

Ruby's egg shell painting - <https://www.instagram.com/p/BcXD5aqHuzx/>

Elisa Sheehan paints the inside of egg shells with abstract paintings and arranges them in shadow box frames [<https://elisasheehan.com/>, <https://www.instagram.com/elisasheehanart/>]. She uses gold paint which is meant to evoke the practice of kintsugi or the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold, which I talked about in my episode on creative reuse of dishes.

Elisa's egg paintings - <https://www.instagram.com/p/BxzKDFaghn9/>

The image of the egg is sometimes associated with the role of women. Carole P. Kunstadt's work involves deconstructing books to make art [<http://carolekunstadt.com/>], which was the topic of the previous Trashmagination podcast episode. In addition to books, Carole also works with egg shells. She lined the inside of a cracked-open ostrich egg with cut-out words from a book published in 1855 called *Woman in the Nineteenth Century and Kindred Papers Relating to the Sphere, Condition and Duties of Woman* by Margaret Fuller, which was considered the first major feminist work in the United States [<https://www.tsgny.org/galleryfall2017/>].

OVUM II - <https://www.instagram.com/p/BuwXoY3FyMn/>

Egg Cartons Creative Reuse

Next I'm going to talk about the creative reuse of egg cartons. I am often asked how I store the materials that I use for creative reuse. The key to being a creative reuse artist is to specialize in a type of material that you find inspiring. So for example, I specialize in colorful plastic bags, plastic milk jugs, wool blankets and clothing and juice pouches.

Many artists specialize in egg cartons. Egg cartons are made from either cardboard or polystyrene. The cardboard type are easier to use in most crafts, but it's fantastic to use up the polystyrene type since those usually cannot be recycled in most places.

Egg cartons are a fantastic craft material. They can be cut into little cup shapes and formed into flowers, particularly roses. Two cups can be connected to make a sphere. The lids of egg cartons are long rectangles which are sturdy but also easy to cut. The cardboard egg cartons take paint well – both watercolor and tempura. They can be shaped into masks and crowns for costumes. Egg cartons can be a great base for paper mache or papier mache.

There are so many wonderful crafts that you can make from egg cartons, I encourage you to visit my Trashmagination Pinterest board for more ideas than I can mention here - <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/egg-cartons-egg-shells/>.

A popular egg carton creative reuse craft is to make a flower wreath. People paint these in pastels for spring, orange and black for Halloween, or many colors all year round. My favorite is a wreath of poppies for Remembrance Day or Armistice Day. Another popular egg carton craft is to paint the egg cups and hang them down from strings so they look like a curtain of flowers. Some people put holiday string lights in each cup.

Egg cartons are fantastic for making little figures of animals and people. Tracey Radford of Jumble Tree designed a lizard with a segmented body from egg cartons that has a lot of character [<https://patchworkparent.blogspot.com/2019/05/mr-croc-egg-carton-crocodile.html>].

Michele Pacey from the blog Michele Made Me designed nativity and fairy tale scenes with egg carton characters.

- Prince / Princess / Knight - <http://www.michelemademe.com/product/egg-carton-folk-ornaments-tutorial>
- Nativity Scene - <http://www.michelemademe.com/product/egg-carton-nativity-scene-tutorial>
- Flower Wreath - <http://www.michelemademe.com/2015/02/ahhh-egg-carton-wreath.html>
- Flower Gift Bow - <http://www.michelemademe.com/2012/12/egg-carton-flower-bow-tutorial.html>
- Angel Ornament - <http://www.michelemademe.com/2012/12/egg-carton-angels-for-ornament-exchange.html>

Mary Alice Baldwin from Brainy Beginnings designed a totem pole stacked with colorful animals, a fish that moves in the breeze and rings you can wear on your finger.

- Totem Pole - <https://www.brainybeginningsnetwork.com/egg-carton-totem-pole> - Brainy Beginnings - Mary Alice Baldwin
- Dancing Fish - <https://www.brainybeginningsnetwork.com/dancing-fish>
- Rings - <https://www.brainybeginningsnetwork.com/post/2019/02/10/egg-carton-rings>

The crafts on the Bulgarian craft blog Krokotak tend to be more imaginative, challenging and beautiful than most crafts from recycled materials. They offer a great activity to make self-portraits with egg cartons and they even show how you can color egg shells with onion skins.

- Mushrooms - <http://krokotak.com/2013/03/egg-carton-mushrooms/>
- Flower Wreath - <http://krokotak.com/2016/03/egg-carton-flower-wreaths/>
- Portraits - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ymBWFDo-7w>
- Onion Skin Egg Shells - <http://krokotak.com/2013/05/marbled-eggs-with-onion-skin-pieces/>

One of the most popular episodes of Trashmagination was about making dollhouse furniture from recycled materials, and many of these designs incorporate egg cartons. For inspiration, I recommend a blog by a mom hosting a birthday party where they decorated egg carton doll furniture [<http://mycupoverflows-johnson.blogspot.com/2011/09/kit-kittredge-american-girl.html>]. To prepare for the party, this mom made all the doll furniture. She made chairs, beds, toilets, kitchen sinks, couches, lamps and more. The guests painted them at the party.

Another fun way to creatively reuse egg cartons is to dress up as an ear of corn for Halloween. You paint egg cartons yellow and attach it to your belly, then wear green clothing and add some straw on your head as the corn silk.

Artists Who Work with Egg Cartons

Next I'll talk about artists who specialize in making work from recycled egg cartons.

You know I'm a huge fan of trash fashion and the best trash fashion show in the world takes place each year in Ireland. It's Junk Kouture. In 2018, there was an incredible dress made from 3,500 egg cartons [<https://www.instagram.com/shesnoeggbutshessomeyolk/>]. For the skirt, the students connected egg carton cups with cotton thread. For the headpiece, the egg cartons were shaped into roses. This dress won The Bank of Ireland Glamour Prize. The artists were Ellen Kearney and Katie Shortall.

The students who made that dress said they were inspired by our next egg carton artist, Enno de Kroon from Holland. He invented a painting style that he calls Eggcubism [https://www.eggcubism.nl/nl_NL/]. He paints objects and portraits on cardboard egg trays – like the type that might hold 3 dozen eggs and it is shaped like a square. It makes his paintings seem more three-dimensional. Sometimes he layers one egg tray on top of the other to add depth to the painting or he cuts shapes out of the trays to add shadow and layers to the paintings. Most paintings are flat, but Enno's paintings jump out at you. When you move around his paintings, they change as you change your perspective.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSjT7SWecvQ>
<https://www.instagram.com/ennodekroon/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bt3eO-VlpKC/>

Egg cartons could be a great way for art teachers to explore pointillism or also the concept of pixels. If you paint each cup a specific color, you get that dimensionality while also learning how dots of color can form a total image.

Moving from paint to sculpture, Sana Hashemi Nasl mashes cardboard egg cartons into a clay and then sculpts with it [<https://www.instagram.com/sanaartstudio/>]. Sana lives in Portugal. She collects egg cartons from restaurants. She used to work with clay, but she notes that she prefers working with egg cartons because they don't have to be fired and the final product is lightweight and not fragile.

In terms of furniture made from egg cartons, Inna Alesina fit egg cartons one-inside-the-other and then rolled them in circles to make benches [<http://alesinadesign.com/archives/egg-crate/>]. She dyed the egg cartons various colors to give the furniture a pattern. Inna now teaches design at Stevenson University in Maryland, and co-wrote the book Exploring Materials: Creative Designs for Everyday Objects.

Can Egg Cartons Be Recycled as Sound-Proofing?

I want to address one more topic related to egg cartons and that is the question of whether egg cartons can be recycled as sound-proofing. As someone who drums, I was curious and some websites recommend it.

The reason why you might think they could help with sound-proofing is because they have a similar shape as some soundproof acoustic panels [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCfWer8EQn8>]. The egg carton shape can reduce echo, but many things do that such as bookshelves or wall-hangings. The difference between cardboard egg cartons and acoustic panels is what is inside those shapes, which is a specific type of foam.

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! Please let me know about ways that you creatively reuse egg shells and cartons by contacting me at trashmagination@gmail.com. Also, Trashmagination has not had a new review on Apple Podcasts since November 2018. It would mean so much if you would leave a review! I know you are listening because I see the downloads, but please share what you think with potential listeners!

Until next time – may you see egg shells and cartons as a source of art in your life!