



Trashmagination Podcast #86 – Bras

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

Today we're going to talk about the creative reuse of bras. October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. I'll share ideas on where you can donate gently-used or new bras, what you can make from bras that are not in good shape, and I'll share stories about artists who make artwork from bras.

Where to Donate Gently-Used or New Bras

So step one in reducing the amount of bras that need to be creatively reused is to take care of them by washing them in bra bags and hanging them to dry.

Now it can be challenging to find a bra that fits well, and there have been many times that I bought a bra that fit well, but after I wore it a few times, I realized it was not for me. The good news is that there are many organizations who will take gently-used bras. I will list a bunch of organizations in the show notes. I was surprised to find two organizations headquartered near to where I live. The first is I Support the Girls [<https://isupportthegirls.org/>] located in Maryland. In addition to collecting gently-used bras, they also collect menstrual supplies for girls and women who are homeless. In Virginia, there is an organization called BRAWS or Bringing Resources to Aid Women in Shelters - <http://www.braws.org/>. Some organizations specialize in post-surgery breast cancer supplies and accessories.

- Breast Oasis – only collect during the month of October - <http://www.breast oasis.org/site/page.php?id=275>
- Bra Recyclers - <https://brarecycling.com/> - they take bras and Post Surgery Breast Cancer Supplies and Accessories (Mastectomy Bras, Prostheses, Camisoles, Sleeves, etc)
- Bra for a Cause - <http://donateyourbra.com/>
- Bra Recycling Agency - <http://brarecyclingagency.com/>
- Free the Girls - <https://freethegirls.org/bras>
- Women Giving Back - <https://womengivingback.org/>
- Smalls for All in the UK - <http://www.smallsforall.org/donate/>
- Uplift Bras in Australia, New Zealand and Asia - <http://www.upliftbras.org/>

Another option you can try is something I did last month. I am a member of my local Buy Nothing group, which is a Facebook Group. You post photos of items you don't need and people in my community take them. Bras can look rather unimpressive when they are just laying on a table, so I photographed my bras on my mannequin which I use for designing my trash fashion items. I am pleased to say that I found new owners for 10 bras.

Now let's talk about things you can do with bras that are not in good enough shape to donate. Some places have textile recycling programs and you could give that a try, but I have heard many of these programs are overloaded. So here are some other ideas for what to make with bras that are not great to wear anymore.

Items to Make with Bras

Next we'll talk about things you can make with bras. The first idea is for a bra that has a foam shape, which is to fold it in half and make it into a purse. It sounds like it would look like a bra folded in half, but people add decorations and it looks

like a purse [http://www.sewing.org/html/bra_purse.html]. If you search on the hashtag #brapurse on Instagram, you can see lots of great examples.

Here's a creative reuse idea for people who keep rats as pets. A friend told me that her rats really like hammocks made from upcycled bras.

Now these ideas for specifically for the clasps on the back of the bra. A few wildlife rehabilitation places have been requesting that people send the bra clasps. They use these clasps to help turtles that have been hit by a car. They glue the clasps on the broken parts of the shell and then wire the shell parts together. This helps the turtle to heal. I will link to two organizations who have requested these clasps but you can check with your local wildlife rehabilitation centers.

- Wildthunder Wildlife & Animal Rehabilitation & Sanctuary in Independence, Iowa - <https://www.facebook.com/wildthunderwars/>
- Carolina Wildlife Rescue - <https://www.wbtv.com/2019/06/28/charlotte-area-animal-rescue-group-wants-your-old-bra-help-save-injured-turtles/>

Another way to creatively reuse the section of the bra with the clasps is to make a bra extender. This is a little rectangle of fabric with clasps embedded that allows you to increase the band size [<http://www.notblueatall.com/archives/diy-bra-extender/>].

What to Make with Bra Insert Pads

Another part of the bra that you can creatively reuse are the removable foam pads. Some bras or other clothing have these pads. There was a lot of discussion about these pads on a Facebook Group that I follow called Journey to Zero Waste. Some of the creative reuse recommendations were to:

- convert them into knee pads by adding a pocket on the inside of a pair of workpants.
- protect your floors by using them as furniture movers – You would put the foam pads under the feet of a heavy piece of furniture which allows you to slide the item without scratching the floor.
- make a sleep mask
- stitch them around the edges of hangers to keep clothes from sliding off
- use them as base for a fascinator – so a fascinator is more common in the United Kingdom, but it's like a small flowery hat that you wear to a wedding. I read quite a few posts where people use the foam bra inserts as the base for their fascinators.
- give them to a seamstress or dress maker

Reusing Bras in Halloween Costumes

Now it is October and so I want to take a moment to talk about creatively reusing bras as components of Halloween costumes. I just talked about those foam inserts which are usually shaped like a raindrop. These can be a great base for a pair of animal ears if you attach them to a headband.

You can also creatively reuse a lacy bra to help with your Halloween makeup. If you put the lace on your skin and then apply your makeup over top of the bra, it can make a lacy pattern on your skin. This can be handy if you want to dress up as a mermaid, a dragon or any animal that has speckles on its skin [<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=695661254140559>].

I was born in Newfoundland and there is a tradition there similar to Halloween called mummering. This involves dressing up with a whole bunch of layers of clothing and then going home to home. The homeowner then tries to guess who is who. A classic component of mummering costumes is to wear a bra on the outside of all the other clothing.

Artists Who Creatively Reuse Bras

Next I'm going to talk about artists who incorporate bras into their artwork. There are a lot of bras decorated and painted in creative ways for breast cancer research fundraising events.

The first artwork that I saw made from bras was at the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. There was a giant ball made by attaching thousands of bras to each other and then rolled into a ball. This was called the BraBall and it was organized by Emily Duffy [<http://www.braball.com/>]. The BraBall was made from more than 18,000 bras and was rolled at many events from 2001-2003. It has been at the American Visionary Art Museum since 2005.

Mariah Reading paints landscapes on many recycled objects, including a bra insert [<https://www.instagram.com/p/BaAVQf9nOCh/>]. Her Instagram account is really fun because she holds up the landscape painting on the object in the exact spot that she is painting, which makes a cool effect.

Emily Dvorin is a basket designer who weaves baskets from many materials [<https://www.emilydvorin.com/>]. Last month, she made one from purple bra straps called "On Her Mind." I messaged her to ask about the piece. She got the straps at the SCRAP creative reuse store in San Francisco. -
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2614120575278090&set=pcb.2614122928611188>

Making Bras from Creatively Reuse Materials

Some artists do not creatively reuse bras, but they creatively reuse other materials to make bras. The first is Ruby Silvious. I talked about Ruby back in my episode about creative reuse of teabags. She makes bras from recycled paper packaging and she calls it Oribrami [<http://www.rubysilvious.com/salvaged/oribrami>].

Veronika Richterova is an artist who I really admire who sculpts many incredible items from plastic bottles. She made a bra made from soda bottles that is really fun to check out [<http://www.veronikarichterova.com/en/my-works/pet-art-sculptures/variou>s/].

Knitting Breast Prosthetics

The last bra-related creative reuse idea that I'll mention is an organization called Knitted Knockers [<https://www.knittedknockers.org/>]. This organization connects knitters and crocheters with breast cancer survivors. They give out free patterns for how to knit or crochet prosthetics. You could knit a breast prosthetic from leftover yarn from a previous project although you need to check their list of approved yarns which are proven to work well. The knitted knockers are provided free to survivors.

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! If you find this podcast helpful, it would be great if you could leave a review wherever you listen to podcasts. Here's a review from Frau Schneee in Australia. She wrote, "I only just discovered this podcast and I'm already hooked. So many great ideas for making treasures from trash! Carla obviously loves what she does and has fun presenting all those creative possibilities. The only downside is that I'll now start hoarding even more craft supplies for all those projects I'll make in the future (I need a second parallel crafting life)." So please be sure to write a review of Trashmagination and help other people find creative reuse inspiration.

Until next time – may you see bras as a source of art in your life!