



Trashmagination Podcast #117 – Envelopes, Newspapers, Magazines & Junk Mail

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown. In today's episode, we'll talk about creative reuse of paper and specifically envelopes, newspapers, magazines and junk mail. I have done a lot of episodes about creatively reusing paper in its many forms, and if you like that topic, check out these past episodes:

- maps (episode 7)
- greeting and holiday cards (episode 66)
- books (episode 82)
- egg cartons (episode 83)
- tissue paper (episode 94)
- and my most popular episode of all time – cardboard tubes (episode 97)

Making Recycled Paper from Envelopes

So let's start by talking about what you need if you want to make homemade recycled paper. My favorite material to creatively reuse when I am making paper is colorful envelopes. They are already dyed many colors and the quality of paper is usually thick with strong fibers. They don't have a lot of writing on them so you can cut out the parts with the addresses. I remove the flap with the glue. I save any color of envelopes except white or gray. If you don't receive many colorful envelopes, you can collect any paper that doesn't have a glossy sheen, doesn't have much writing on it, and comes in fun colors. You can also ask your friends to save colorful envelopes. I also have used file folders although they are harder to rip up. The easiest envelopes to gather are manila envelopes that come in a mustard yellow color. If you are just starting out with paper making and want to practice, or if you are teaching a lot of students, you can use those.

Another artist who loves to creatively reuse envelopes is Christine Tischio who goes by the name TurnstyleART on social media. She makes collages where the entire thing is made from repurposed security envelopes [https://www.turnstyleart.com/about]. Those are the envelopes with the patterns inside so you cannot see what is inside them. I don't know if you have ever looked inside a security envelope, but those patterns are beautiful. Christine often takes famous cartoon characters like the Simpsons, and she then makes them from these security envelopes.

- <https://www.instagram.com/turnstyleart>, <https://vimeo.com/351691465>

So back to making paper. The first time I made paper was for an event called the Family Nature Summits where I was teaching kids how to make paper. Here's what I gathered for that class other than envelopes:

- A blender to turn envelopes into pulp
- A medium-sized rectangular plastic container to hold the pulp,
- A frame such as a photo frame that you line with a screen or fabric
- A presser to squeeze the excess water out of the paper
- Thin cloths or other pieces of fabric

To make the frames, I bought a roll of window screen at the hardware store. I cut the screen a bit larger than each frame. I stretched the screen and stapled it to the frame with a staple gun.

To make my presser, I got two pieces of half inch plywood that were 12 by 24 inches. The size would depend on the size of paper you plan to make. I drilled holes in the four corners of the plywood so the holes lined up across the two pieces. I then put bolts in the holes.

The idea was that each student would dip their frame into the watery pulp and try to get a nice even layer of pulp on their screen. They then put a thin cloth on the pulp and flip it over so it comes off the frame. Then we would layer the new papers one on top of each other on top of the first piece of plywood with the cloths in between. Once we had all the paper in the presser, I would put the second piece of plywood on top, and tighten the bolts to press down on the paper and squeeze out the water.

My first paper-making students were preschoolers, so I made 10 small frames that were about 3 by 5 inches. These are inexpensive frames that you can get at Ikea. This was a good size for them to maneuver with their small hands, but it doesn't make a very useful piece of paper unless you are making miniature books. For adults, you likely want to make your frame at least 5x7 or 8x10. The dimensions of the paper do not shrink much when it dries.

Before my students came to class, I made the pulp from the envelopes. I would rip up envelopes into shreds. You can use scissors or a paper cutter but you will be damaging the fibers. It's better if the paper rips along the fibers and doesn't cut any in half. So I made most of the pulp before the students came, but I also had them rip up some envelopes so they could see the process and understand where the pulp came from. You don't actually need too much pulp to make a small project. That's because you are going to water down the pulp and it will spread out.

Once you have ripped up your paper into shreds, you put small quantities in your blender with water. I would start with something like $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of shreds and $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of water. Depending on your blender, it should blend into something like slush. If your blender gets stuck, you need to add more water. You will need to play around with shreds, water and your blender to get the pulp you need.

After you make your pulp, you put 5-6 cups of water into your rectangular container. Then you add the pulp handful by handful into the water. You are watering down the pulp. It will take practice to get the pulp to the right consistency, but it's quite watery in order for the pulp to lie flat on the frames.

At that point, you could add threads or tiny bits of fabric to the pulp. This will make your paper potentially stronger, but it also can make the paper bumpier. You can also cut out shapes from paper to add to the pulp. For example, I saw on the Instagram account @runlenarun that she was making paper for Valentine's, and she used a heart-shaped hole punch to punch out a bunch of tiny hearts. She added those to her pulp and then they were embedded in her paper [<https://www.instagram.com/p/CKKkqboHMRq/>]. She calls this type of paper "love letters." That Instagram account is a great one for paper making inspiration [<https://www.instagram.com/runlenarun/>].

When you are done making paper, you will have this container with some watery pulp leftover. Definitely do not pour that down the sink or you can clog your plumbing. A better idea is to squeeze out as much of the water as you can from the pulp until it's a little ball of pulp. You can let that dry out and you can re-constitute it into pulp in the future for another project by adding water to it.

Clothing Made from Paper

Another thing that artists make from paper is clothing. So you know that I love talking about trash fashion and in previous episodes, I talked about contests where people design clothing from recycled materials. There are actually contests that specialize in clothing made from paper. Two that I follow are the Paper Fashion Show which takes place in Denver Colorado, and Paper on Skin which takes place in Tasmania, Australia. Both of these shows require designers to use mostly paper in their clothing designs. And when I look at the designs in these contests, most of the designs are probably not made from recycled paper. But the designs can inspire those of us who prefer to use recycled materials.

Once you have made paper from pulp, you see that it could be a very useful material to make clothing. It can be dried in just about any shape. It's easy to fasten it to other pieces of paper. And it's not expensive to get materials.

The Paper on Skin show is hosted in a town called Burnie which is place where they make paper as one of the main industries. So it's cool to see how the town builds on its industrial history to encourage art making.

- <http://paperfashionshow.com/> - April 29, 2021 – Denver, Colorado – hosted by The One Club For Creativity Denver – 15th annual – has raised \$62,000 for Downtown Aurora Visual Arts (<https://www.davarts.org/>)
- Paper on skin - Tasmania, Australia - <https://youtu.be/nBj1UuZWt9A> - Burnie - industrial papermaking city – clothing from at least 80% paper - <https://burnieartscouncil.com/paper-on-skin/about-the-competition>

Another way to creatively reuse paper for clothing design is by folding it. When I was first learning about trash fashion, I went to a trash fashion show at a town about 30 minutes from my home. I was so impressed by the designs that were shown on stage. After the show, I approached two high school students who had a particularly impressive dress to ask how they did it. They were so kind to give me a little sample of their materials, which was a magazine page folded many times back and forth with just a little fold peaking through each time. They then taped it across the top so this fragile magazine page was now quite a strong material. Plus it had a cool effect of having the image folded to the point where it was not recognizable. Many of the designs that you see at wearable art contests involve folding and are even inspired by complex origami. In the show notes, I will share a photo of that dress and the sample they gave me so many years ago and which I still keep as inspiration.

Sculptors Who Roll Paper

Next let's talk about sculptors who make art from creatively reused paper such as envelopes, newspapers, magazines and junk mail. You can get inspiration to make your own sculptures by watching them work. I'm going to organize their stories by the techniques they use to sculpt with paper.

These first artists all roll paper into tubes and then sculpt with it, similar to how you might sculpt long tubes of clay.

Chie Hitotsuyama [Hi-Toe-Tsu-Ya-Ma] rolls wet newspaper and sculpts very realistic animal sculptures. The newspaper rolls look a bit like yarn when she places them on her sculptures. She takes the sections of the paper that have colorful ink to add color to the sculptures as well. Chie says that she likes to sculpt animals that have unusual shapes like monkeys or which seem like they should be too big to move such as a rhinoceros. There are many videos of Chie sculpting so I hope you check them out in the show notes. It is amazing to see how much newspaper goes into one sculpture. I mentioned earlier that the Paper on Skin contest originates in a town where they make paper. Chie also grew up in a town where they make paper called Fuji City in Japan. Her grandfather had a kumihimo factory. Kumihimo is a Japanese art of braiding which usually involves threads, but Chie's grandfather did it with paper. Her art studio is now in the location where her grandfather's factory used to be. Clearly her grandfather's work making paper strings was a direct influence on her art.

- <http://hitotsuyamastudio.com/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXLbPmW5KSs>
- <https://youtu.be/NA2xPnReRHk>
- <https://www.facebook.com/Hitotsuyama.studio>

Jaynie Crimmins rolls paper from junk mail to security envelopes to magazines [<https://www.jayniecrimmins.com/>]. She then arranges those tiny rolls into very elaborate sculptures that I guess I would describe as mandalas, although some are also spheres or even random three-dimensional shapes. Mostly these little tubes look like beads and her art looks like complex beadwork at a glance [<https://www.instagram.com/jgcrimmins/>].

Eileen Payne also makes art from paper tubes. She makes bowls from magazine pages [<https://www.carolinacajuncreations.com/>]. First she takes magazine pages and rolls them into tubes. She plans the color scheme of her bowls by laying the paper tubes beside each other. Next she joins the tubes together like a long rope. As she rolls the paper rope around itself to form the center and then sides of the bowl, she glues it down. Once the bowl is rolled, she paints it with five layers of glue to make it strong and shiny. She also enjoys giving each bowl a fun name based on the color scheme and the papers that were used to make it.

- <https://www.facebook.com/CarolinaCajunCreations>, <https://www.instagram.com/carolinacajuncreations/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10156665752184283>

This method of rolling up magazine pages and then using them in art is a very accessible and fun thing to do. If you check out my Pinterest board on magazines, you'll see lots of fun project ideas using this technique. But mostly it involves arranging the colorful tubes in an order that you like and gluing them in patterns that you like [<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/magazines/>]. Some people make letters of the alphabet or feathers.

There is a classic creative reuse craft that reuses magazines is to make beads [<https://youtu.be/jMG40809rws>]. You cut the pages into very long triangles, and then roll them around a tiny dowel from the wide part of the triangle up to the point. You glue the whole thing and let it dry, then slip it off the dowel. The results can be actually quite spectacular if you roll very evenly and choose nice colors of magazine pages.

Sculptors who Stack Paper

So now let's shift gears away from artists who roll up paper into tubes and talk about artists who like to stack papers into enormous piles and sculpt them.

Miler Lagos (Me-ler) takes thousands of newspapers and stacks them up very high. He puts screws inside those stacks to keep them from falling. Then he sculpts the outer edges of those stacks so they look like a tree. The heat from his sculpting tool faintly burns the paper so the outer edge looks like tree bark, but if you lift up the layers, it's still newspaper inside.

- <https://www.instagram.com/lagosmiler/>
- https://youtu.be/Y_aFnPZI7A, <https://vimeo.com/103955845>
- https://youtu.be/kqOx_zgVbSw (in Spanish), https://youtu.be/j6Oke_zF1Ek (in Spanish)
- https://www.saatchigallery.com/artist/miler_lagos

David Mach has made installations with huge stacks of newspapers and other papers – like big waves in the ocean – and then he incorporates giant objects in those waves such as cars, trucks, boats and pianos. He doesn't glue down the newspapers as he works because he likes to keep moving them around as he is working. So somehow they are stable enough to bear the weight of these giant objects. In one installation called Rock and Roll, there was 20,000 newspapers.

- <https://youtu.be/2CxehEg6G8c> - Rock and Roll installation
- <https://youtu.be/hLC15Tp-fso> - Incoming installation
- <https://davidmach.com/>, <https://www.instagram.com/davidmachra/>

Sculptors who Do Papier-mâché

Another way that artists creatively reuse paper is using the technique of papier-mâché, which involves glueing strips of paper into a shape with a paste. Many artists use this technique because it makes a very light finished sculpture which is easy to transport and it can be relatively strong. One artist I admire who uses papier-mâché is Abigail Brown. She makes very large masks and sculptures of animals with her distinctive style of illustrating animals [<https://www.abigail-brown.co.uk/papermacheanimalheads>, <https://www.abigail-brown.co.uk/paper-mache-sculpture>]. She makes her sculptures from recycled newspaper and then paints them.

- <https://www.instagram.com/abigailbrownart/>, <https://www.abigail-brown.co.uk/about>

Collage Artists

The last technique that I'll describe is creatively reusing paper in collages, and obviously this is an extremely popular type of art. But I'll just mention a collage artists who I think have found an interesting niche.

Heidi Mraz lives close to me and she's been a huge fan of classic and rare cars ever since she was 7 years old [<https://heidimraz.com/>]. She takes car magazines, car manuals and car schematics to make incredible collages of those cars. Her car collages are much appreciated by other car enthusiasts and she is often commissioned to make the art for car events. She loves to incorporate details in the collage that tell the story of that car. On her website it says that she has creatively reused more than 3,500 car magazines in her work so far.

- <https://www.instagram.com/p/BkKpbZ2gamq/>
- <https://youtu.be/q3uaUGadQvM>
- <https://youtu.be/SfJJ1smgZPc> - podcast interview with Heidi – Cars Yeah

Manuela Granziol-Fornera makes sculptures with many kinds of paper, but the sculpture I want to talk about today was made with magazines. In 2018, Manuela built a structure out of cardboard of a young girl curled up with her head tucked in her knees. She then covered the entire sculpture with square cut-outs from beauty magazines [<https://youtu.be/KUe9oWsNkwQ>]. There is a video in the show notes where you can see Manuela working with a team to build this sculpture. First, she made a smaller scale model that sat on a table, and then they built this larger version.

Manuela made another sculpture called Drowning Point which is like clothing made from magazine pages. She has also knitted photographs. She made a sculpture out of her PhD thesis called "125,451 Words." It is a cube 15 centimeters square with all the words cut up and re-arranged, but in this perfect square. I bet many people have imagined doing something similar with their thesis once they are done!

- https://www.instagram.com/art_manuelagranziol/, <https://manuelagranziol.com/>

I'll finish by talking about Aurora Robson who I have mentioned in many episodes for her creative reuse of plastics. While Aurora primarily works with plastic, she also makes collages with junk mail [<https://www.aurorarobson.com/junk-mail-collage>]. Similar to her plastic pieces which are swooping, fluid sculptures, her collages are abstract pieces filled with curves. Just like with plastics, she transforms trash materials into something beautiful through artful cutting and arranging. She says she likes working with junk mail in her collages because they often contain language that is meant to convince you to do something. That's a fun type of language to incorporate into art. I saw this video where she said one of the reasons she likes working with trash is because "you can't make trash any worse than it is, so any artistry you put into it is an improvement." I love that mindset and my super fandom for her work only grows!

- <https://www.aurorarobson.com/>, <https://www.instagram.com/aurorarobson/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/B2Ej2LUFcpV/>
- <https://www.adobe.com/max/2020/engage-fun-stuff/junk-mail-collage.html> - watch Aurora makes her junk mail collages

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! I made a Pinterest board about creative reuse of paper [<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/paper/>] and a separate board for creative reuse of magazines [<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/magazines/>]. Let me know if you have ever creatively reused paper in unusual ways at trashmagination@gmail.com. Until next time, may you see recycled paper as a source of art in your life!