



Trashmagination Podcast #118 – Hubcaps

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown. In today's episode, we'll talk about creative reuse of hubcaps. I'm not knowledgeable about cars. My son's first word was "car," and we spent many hours watching cars drive by, but I don't know one brand from the other. However, it is amazing to see how artists creatively reuse hubcaps!

Nowadays, many cars don't even have hubcaps, so just like neckties and paper maps, our world is populated with this huge collection of something that hardly anyone needs anymore, and it becomes an opportunity for us to make art.

Hubcaps were invented in 1680. For centuries, they were made from metal even when wheels were made from wood, but after 1970, they were mostly made from plastic. People collect hubcaps because they are restoring antique vehicles or just because they love the designs. Some hubcaps feature art deco designs and hubcaps even decorate the Chrysler building in New York.

Blooming Hub Caps

What inspired this episode was an email from Sharon Zigrossi [Zi-GROW-see] from Blooming Hub Caps [<https://bloominghubcaps.com/>]. Sharon found this podcast and wanted to let me know that she enjoyed listening. She also wondered – had I considered doing an episode on hubcaps? So let's learn about Sharon.

Sharon's interest in painting hubcaps started eleven years ago and it was related to her love of gardening. She is a Master Naturalist and a manager at a landscape company. She noticed that some gardeners decorated their gardens with flowers made from recycled hubcaps. So one day, she found a hubcap and it reminded her of the sunflowers in her garden. She decided to paint it. That was a lot of fun, so she kept going, and soon friends started asking for hubcap decorations. At first she would buy her hubcaps at a wrecking yard for \$5 each, but word got around that she wanted hubcaps, and people started giving them to her. Soon she had so many that she had to ask people to stop.

Most of Sharon's hubcaps are plastic, which makes them lightweight to display. She likes to add details especially to the centers of the hubcaps such as metal bottle caps, buttons and aluminum cans that she cuts into petal shapes. She also makes attachments from Nespresso cups which I talked about in my episode about creative reuse of coffee packaging. She even reuses the foil covers from the tops of the wine bottles. (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CIEBmuYjWJd/>) It took experimentation to figure out what adhesive worked best and now she keeps seeing the possibilities of new items she could attach to her hubcaps. She used to cover up the car brand insignia in the center of the hubcap, but she has found that some people are sentimental about car brands, so she is experimenting with leaving it visible. For example, one of her customers used to work in a car factory.

People are also sentimental about hubcaps sometimes because they came from their own car. Some ask her to paint their hubcap as a commission. One person saved the hubcap after a car accident. As Sharon said, when she finds a hubcap on the side of the road, it's usually broken in some way. She thinks of it as being an orphan from the rest of its hubcap family. So she likes to help transform that tragic life into a piece of art.

People display her hubcaps indoors and outdoors. She tells people to bring them inside if there is a forecast of a big wind storm because they are so lightweight. Many people display the hubcaps on a building or hanging from a shepherd's hook. They also attach to a chain link fence or trellis.

I asked Sharon if there are any types of hubcaps that make her most excited when someone donates them to her. She told me about a spinner, which is a hubcap with an extra piece attached which spins as the car drives. She has only received a few she likes how the wind will move whatever she attaches to a spinner.

Sharon has a friend who is an oncology nurse and she asked Sharon to facilitate a workshop at the cancer center for women who were doing breast cancer treatments. They called the event, "Drive Away Cancer." Sharon prepared the hubcaps by cleaning them and painting primer on them. She brought paints and attachments. She told the students that the nice thing about painting on a hubcap is that the canvas is already defined in many ways. You can look at the hubcap and see what it makes you want to paint based on its shape. She asked them to think about what element of the hubcap will be most prominent and how they might add items to the center of the hubcap. Later one of the participants told her that this workshop was one of the highlights of her cancer journey.

Sharon would like to offer hubcap painting workshops online. Most students want to buy hubcaps already prepared, which makes sense since most people don't have hubcaps easily accessible. If you are interested in learning how to paint hubcaps, be sure to reach out to Sharon at Blooming Hub Caps. Or you can also buy one of her own artworks on Etsy.

- <https://www.instagram.com/bloominghubcaps/>
- <https://youtu.be/IFrr0fzSYpk>
- <https://www.etsy.com/shop/bloominghubcaps>
- <https://www.facebook.com/BloomingHubCaps>

Sharon is not the only painter who has discovered the joys of a hubcap as a canvas. Here are other painters who each paint hubcaps in their own styles.

- Harriet Winograd recently started a series of hubcap portraits of famous women such as Kamala Harris, Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Greta Thunberg (<https://www.instagram.com/winogradart/>)
- Samm Wehman paints pet and animal portraits on many materials including hubcaps but also ceiling fan blades (<https://www.etsy.com/shop/SammWehmanArt>)
- Donna Gentile talks about the "sacred geometry" and facilitates art therapy workshops based on mandalas – of course the hubcap is just the perfect canvas for her! (<https://donnagentile.com/hubcap-art/>)
- Elin Hunter paints cosmic and spiritual images on hubcaps (<https://www.elinhunter.com/>)
- Mariah Reading picks up trash in national parks and then paints them so that they blend seamlessly into the landscape – and one of her pieces was on a hubcap (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bmy0pb7hkWI/>)

And then there is a painted hubcap project called the Landfill Art Project [<http://landfillart.org/about/>]. In 2009, an art gallery owner named Ken Marquis came up with the idea of asking artists around the world to paint on hubcaps. He bought a few collections of hubcaps which he supplied to the artists. In the end, there were 1,041 hubcaps painted. Ken made a book of the art and there was also a touring show of 200 hubcaps.

- <https://youtu.be/FbpQdddyNWk>

So clearly hubcaps can be a great canvas for painting, and if you tell your friends that you want hubcaps, it seems like maybe you could get those canvases for free. I did find a few examples where art teachers did a project with hubcaps with their students (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Akea2BG7Mds>). If you know an art teacher who does a hubcap art project, please let me know!

Ptolemy Elrington

Our next artist sculpts hubcaps together to make the most unbelievable animal sculptures. Ptolemy Elrington's website and social media is called Hub Cap Creatures, and they are so exquisite, so life-like, I really hope you will go it. It looks like the hubcaps fit together in perfect puzzle pieces, but meanwhile, that was all based on Ptolemy's vision. He says that he gets inspired to make specific animals by the designs of the hubcaps. He makes a lot of fish but also many other animals like birds, cats, horses and more.

To make his sculptures, Ptolemy looks at the hubcap to see what the shapes inspire him to make. He then manipulates the hubcap in many ways. Some are more flexible than other. He will cut and drill the hubcaps to make those perfect puzzle pieces. He attaches the pieces together with galvanized wire that he salvages from demolition sites. He makes little staple shapes from the wire to connect the pieces. In addition to working with plastic hubcaps, Ptolemy also does some metal sculptures with welding tools. For example, he made a dinosaur from bicycle frames.

Ptolemy started sculpting with hubcaps in 2001. He got the idea to use hubcaps because he used to live near a bend in the road that also a bump in the road. The hubcaps tended to fall off and collect there. Ptolemy had studied art in college and he remembered making a sculpture from recycled materials there. He said that was the most exciting thing he made at college. He has also travelled around the world and saw how in many places, creative reuse was a much bigger practice than in western countries. Today, his sculptures sell for thousands of Euros.

You might remember that last year I found a Turkish TV show about recycled art. Ptolemy was featured on that show and that's when I first learned about his work. I really recommend that show if you want to explore his work and learn about his approach (<https://youtu.be/51DxWWRBhyU>). You can see him in his studio and see how he manipulates the hubcaps, which is really fun to see. He talks about how his studio is his haven and I agree, it feels very comforting to be in there even though it is clearly not heated!

- <https://www.hubcapcreatures.com/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/hubcapcreatures/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/Hubcapcreatures>
- <https://youtu.be/2sFb-PgTwvk> - Euromaxx
- <https://youtu.be/SwIM6nslh28> - BBC
- <https://youtu.be/WqicA7ULsX0> - Cars Yeah podcast
- <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCy16yxhQVDZmGZ-ENVJhMFw>

Hubcap Guitars and Banjos

The last creative reuse example that I will share today is how talented builders make guitars and banjos from hubcaps. Here's how Steve Einhorn's slide guitar sounds - <https://youtu.be/Zgt9RYY7uOc>.

I also found a tutorial by Thomas Peterson from Refuse Reuse showing how he made his hubcap guitar - <https://youtu.be/MLmqQUwLMWg> in January 2020. Thomas makes guitars from so many random materials, as well as Star Wars and steampunk themed builds, so check out his Instagram if that sounds fun to you [https://www.instagram.com/refuse_reuse_/, https://www.instagram.com/p/B7_X_jqAAKa/].

Thank you!

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