



Trashmagination Podcast #121 – Tin Containers

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown. Today's episode is about the creative reuse of tin containers. Those are the cookie, biscuit, tea or candy containers. They make a satisfying thwuck sound when you remove the lid. It also means rectangular Altoid or mint containers. I'm not going to talk about tin cans, tin roofs, tin ceilings or metal can lids in this episode – that would be just too much to fit in one episode.

Today's episode has two parts. For the first half, I'll talk about artists who cut the tin containers into flat sheets and use them to make flat 2-D art, or sculpted 3-D art, or jewelry. The second half of today's episode is about how to use mint or Altoid containers. There is something called "altered tins" which is a popular craft project idea which we'll explore.

Now there is one other use of tin containers that I have talked about before, and that is to use small tins like the ones that hold dried mustard powder to make little creatures like robots or monsters. I have done two past episodes on robots and monsters made from recycled materials, so I'll link to those in the show notes.

Artists Who Cut Tin Containers to Make Art

So let's start by talking about artists who cut tin containers into flat sheets and then sculpt with them.

Kim Fox is one of my favorite creative reuse artists. She goes by the name Workerbird on her website and social media [<https://www.workerbird.com/>]. She recycles tins using a technique that she calls Patchwork Tin and looks a lot like quilts. She uses pieces of cut tin and tiny nails instead of fabric and thread. Many of her designs are traditional quilt block designs. In particular, I love her pieces that look like hexagon or English paper pieced quilts. She has also made log cabin designs, triangles and stars.

This year I have enjoyed her series of birds. And when I started writing my notes for this episode, I learned that she is just finishing a successfully funded Kickstarter campaign to make designs inspired by ice-fishing shacks [<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/kimfox/ice-fishing-shacks-last-gasp-of-winter>].

Kim uses only salvaged wood as the backdrop for her art. She never paints the tin, only cuts it. She gets most of her tins at estate sales. She says the best place to find tins at estate sales is to head down to the basement where people often keep a stash of tins. The tins usually have signs of wear which gives them a lovely texture.

In addition to making artwork from recycled tin, Kim paints murals, block prints towels and cards, and is an illustrator. She block-printed a series of postcards for Black Lives Matter that says Breonna Taylor or Elijah McClain and she encourages you to send the postcards to the Attorney Generals in those states to make your voice heard about their cases. She donates the proceeds to ColorofChange.org.

- <https://vimeo.com/182017689> - Profile of Kim Fox
- <https://www.workerbird.com/shop/breonna-taylor-postcards>
- <https://www.patreon.com/workerbird>

The next artist who sculpts with recycled tin is Barbara Franc, and she makes incredibly life-like animal sculptures from tin but really from whatever she finds on the ground. She shares wonderful process photos on social media, where she shows how she builds the armature for her animals and then slowly attaches all sorts of items to build up the muscles

and skin. She often uses pieces of tin as the skin of the animals. In particular, I love her recent red squirrel sculptures, but all her sculptures are truly extraordinary.

- <https://barbarafranc.co.uk/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/barbara.franc/>
- <https://youtu.be/WIKG9FMAGTw>

Another way that artists creatively reuse tin is to attach it to the surfaces of wooden furniture to give it a shiny or colorful texture. Rupert Blanchard covered a desk with cookie tin panels in 2019 [<https://www.instagram.com/p/B1vb4rBHNOV/>]. I liked how he chose to put the shiny metallic side up for the top surface of the desk, but then show the colorful sides of the tin for the front and drawers of the desk.

- https://youtu.be/2cAht_4v-Oo
- https://www.instagram.com/rupert_blanchard/
- <http://www.stylingandsalvage.com/>

Many artists make jewelry from tin – especially earrings cut into fun shapes that highlight what was on the tin. Two artists who I have followed who do this type of work are Devin McNutt from Saffron Creations [<https://www.instagram.com/saffroncreations/>] and Christine Terrell from Adaptive Reuser [<https://www.instagram.com/christineterrell/>]. One thing that is fun to see about this work is how they fussy cut out the shapes from the larger tin.

- <https://youtu.be/ISVwRbU35eI> - Time Lapse video by Saffron Creations
- <https://youtu.be/oDqtsbEGF4w> - Christine Terrell interview
- <https://adaptivereuser.com/>
- <https://www.saffron-creations.com/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/christineterrell/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/saffroncreations/>

The last artist I want to talk about today is Melissa Cameron. She made a piece about gun violence using recycled tin items. After the mass shooting on October 1, 2017 in Las Vegas where 59 people were killed, she researched how many people were killed in the United States by gun violence on January 1, 2017 and found that there were 62 fatal gun incidents that day. She then collected containers from those locations. They were not all tin – they were metal, plastic, fabric or paper. She then cut out the silhouettes of the gun that was used in that location. She took the gun shapes and attached them to necklaces, and then she took a photo where people wore the necklaces to illustrate the people who were shot that day. For this piece, she received the Elizabeth R. Raphael Founder's Prize, which is an art award for excellence in contemporary craft.

There is a video where you can learn about Melissa's process while making this work. In particular, she talks about how she thinks of the human body as a container, and these objects as containers.

- <https://www.facebook.com/SCCPgh/photos/pcb.10156636567404257/10156636554829257/?type=3&theater>
- <https://youtu.be/04qzKouZCO8>
- <https://www.instagram.com/melissacameronjeweller/>

Altoid Tin Projects

Next I want to talk about ways you can creatively reuse tin containers, and in particular, mint or Altoid containers. If you search for the term "altered tin" on Pinterest or Youtube, you will find thousands of resources [<https://youtu.be/kubo66zhNhk>]. Mostly people are making a small piece of art in whatever aesthetic style they love. Some people use the tins to hold small pieces of paper where they write prayers or gratitude notes. Sometimes they put small precious objects in the tins. They can be displayed closed or open. They are like tiny shadow box frames.

Larissa Holland from mmmcrafts designs popular embroidered felt patterns. She has a pattern to make a tiny mouse in a sleeping bag that lives in an Altoid tin. It's called the Wee Mouse Tin House

[\[https://www.etsy.com/listing/92689817/wee-mouse-tin-house-pdf-pattern\]](https://www.etsy.com/listing/92689817/wee-mouse-tin-house-pdf-pattern).

Another way people creatively reuse these tins is to make ornaments. Pillar Box Blue shared a great tutorial where she cut out images from her holiday cards that she particularly liked and then glued them inside the tins like a holiday or winter diorama [\[https://www.pillarboxblue.com/tin-can-ornament/\]](https://www.pillarboxblue.com/tin-can-ornament/). This is a great way to creatively reuse holiday cards as well, and you might know episode 66 of Trashmagination was about that.

I am a Scout merit badge counselor and there is a badge called Signs, Signals and Codes. On a Facebook group for merit badge counselors, I saw that people were using Altoid tins to make something called a "Night Sender Key" which is a kit that helps Scouts to learn and practice Morse Code [\[https://youtu.be/SJW_YLkuK0Q\]](https://youtu.be/SJW_YLkuK0Q).

Finally, there are lots of very practical ways to creatively reuse these tins such as making a sewing kit, a first aid kit or a box to hold your fishing flies [\[https://www.fix.com/blog/diy-fishing-storage-projects/\]](https://www.fix.com/blog/diy-fishing-storage-projects/). You can store your earphones in them to protect them in your bag. People also make homemade lip balm and put it in these tins

[\[http://bespangledjewelry.blogspot.com/2012/12/diy-lemon-butter-lip-skin-balm-in.html\]](http://bespangledjewelry.blogspot.com/2012/12/diy-lemon-butter-lip-skin-balm-in.html).

<https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/tin/>

Thank you!

Thank you for listening! This is a reminder that in my last episode, I launched my first online course which taught how to make woven rugs from recycled t-shirts using a new method that I created

[\[https://trashmagination.thinkific.com/courses/fluffy-rug-weaving\]](https://trashmagination.thinkific.com/courses/fluffy-rug-weaving). Thank you to everyone who signed up for the course! It's exciting to see people take the course who I have never met before. I'd love to meet you that way as well.

Until next time, may you see recycled tin containers as a source of art in your life!