



Craft lab manual: upcycling textiles



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Introduction

Overview

Upcycling textiles workshop using discarded plastics gives participants the chance to explore decorating and finishing textiles, focusing on combining fabric with different waste materials such as plastic, cellophane, and similar.

Audience, setup and adaptability

The workshop is designed for a small group of up to eight participants, allowing for individual attention and support throughout the process. It is aimed at the adult audience, with content suited to their skills and interests, ensuring an engaging and rewarding experience for everyone. A room with chairs, tables and electrical connection is required at the venue. The duration of the workshop is approximately 2 hours.

Workshop author

The technique described below can easily be replicated in different environments, such as in school settings but also cultural hubs and venues offering creative workshops for various types of audiences. The workshop is developed by a Ukrainian award-winning artist Vasylyna Buryanyk who combines her own techniques with those of other artists and artisans.

Artistic background

Vasylyna Buryanyk graduated in 2004 from the College of Arts Adalbert Erdely in Uzhhorod at the Department of Design and in 2010 at the National Academy of Arts in Lviv at the Department of Art Textiles. In her artistic practice and research, she deals with environmental and social issues in Ukraine and the rest of the world. In doing so, she uses transparent polyester fabrics that she shapes into changing kinetic installations. At the center of her experiments is textile, and by using the “softening” properties of this material, she talks about the open wounds on the body of reality. Working with mixed fibers, she refers to the relationship between human and nature, and through the meditative process of creating installations, she opens space and time for thinking about current world problems.

Vasylyna mostly uses transparent polyester fabrics made from oil, therefore highlighting ecological issues and roots of war, which in turn exacerbates the destruction and contamination of nature as well as human lives. Creation and research in the textile workshops are therefore, not only the opportunity to learn new creative techniques, but also to reflect on important topics, such as environmental preservation, impact of plastic pollution and sustainability practices.



Learning objectives

Participants of the workshop are being introduced to a novel approach of artistically appropriating and upcycling plastic waste. In this sense, it is not only a practice which can be easily continued independently at home and shared with family and friends, but it is also a political project for reflecting about plastic waste and the impact it has on the environment. The objective is to highlight this state of affairs and impact participants' perspective while offering ways to make positive individual actions.

Required materials

- Fabric – it is best to use blank pieces of the same fabric for all participants. It is also possible to use old clothes or other fabrics that the participant wants to give a new life to, however in the initial workshop of learning the technique it is better to prevent having many different types of materials. For variety, the fabric can also be individually dyed beforehand or assembled from several different pieces stitched together.
- A variety of plastic drinking straws (if available) or similar type of plastic tubes
- Baking paper (good quality)
- Iron (multiple if possible)
- Containers with cold water (simple cooking pots can be used)
- Embroidery hoops (one for each participant)
- Threads in multiple colors
- Needles
- Plastic bottles
- Lighter
- Scissors
- Small containers
- Optionally transparent film, pieces of paper and pens

Preparation for the workshop

- According to the number of participants, prepare and iron pieces of fabric approximately 20 x 20 cm in size
- Cut plastic drinking straws / or tubes into small pieces (0.1mm), put them in containers by color and place them on the table
- Cut pieces of baking paper to a size that will cover the fabric
- Prepare some examples of plastic decorative pieces that can be used during the workshop
- Prepare some exemplary works and inspirations for designs, for example images of flowers, inspiring artworks and compositions, small descriptive texts etc.
- Think about the mood you want to create: prepare appropriate music if needed or political and/or societal topics to discuss in regard to plastic waste, recycling and upcycling

Repurpose clean, empty plastic bottles or containers to create decorative pieces. Use scissors to cut the items into small, variously shaped pieces. For added visual appeal, consider incorporating plastic bottles in a variety of colors (use for example shampoo or detergent bottles).



Using a lighter, carefully melt the edges of each piece along the contours to smooth sharp edges and make the pieces visually appealing. This will also allow you to bend them into interesting shapes.



Heat the needle for about 20 seconds, then use it to punch several holes into the prepared plastic pieces, creating spaces for sewing them later.



Make several sample pieces that the participants will be able to use in the workshop. Put them in small containers and place them on the table. As further explained below, during the workshop you can encourage the participants to create more of these on their own.



Finally, if you wish to make the workshop even more collaborative, you can ask participants to collect some of the waste material themselves prior to the workshop and bring it with them to use on their own or share with other participants.





Implementing the workshop in 5 simple steps



Step 1

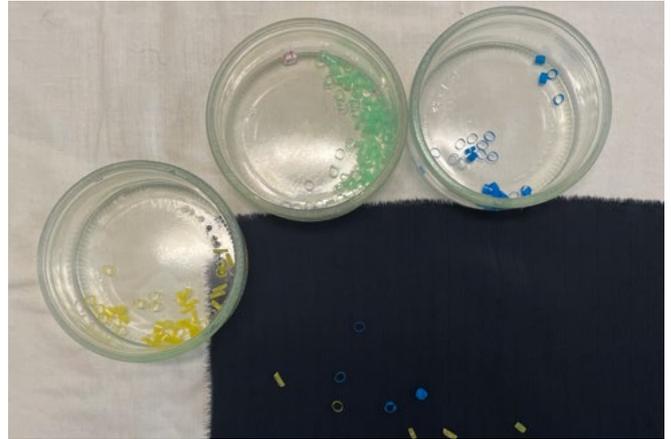
In the introduction, start by providing an overview of what's to come and introduce the learning objectives. Describe the material available and explain the technique in short.

This is also a good moment to ask participants some questions regarding upcycling to understand their previous experiences and specific interests. You can also address any topics such as environmental issues in your own city or neighbourhood for example.

Step 2

It's time for action! Each participant places their cut plastic pieces onto a piece of fabric. They can choose the colors and create either a specific design, such as a flower, or a more abstract arrangement. It's possible to experiment, use one's own materials, write on pieces of papers enclosed within transparent film. You can also encourage participants to first make a sketch with pen and paper before proceeding with placing the plastics on the fabric. Iterate on the process.

Provide help if any participant has issues finding an appropriate design idea. Supply reference material, stimulate their minds.



Step 3

Once the design is complete, cover it with baking paper and carefully iron over it, applying firm pressure. Make sure to have several irons available so that the work can happen in parallel without much waiting, as every individual has its own pace.



Step 4

After ironing, immediately place the pot with cold water on the baking paper and press it for about one minute. This step helps the plastic pieces hold to the fabric without sticking to the baking paper. Slowly remove the baking paper and check if the plastic pieces have stuck to the fabric. If not, replace the baking paper and continue ironing until the pieces are securely attached.

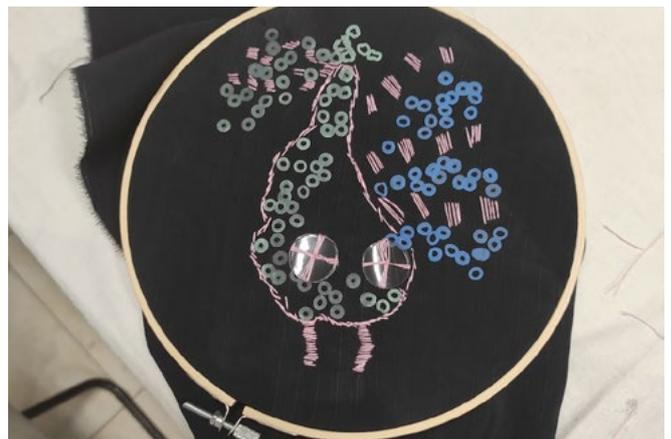


Step 5

Once all plastic pieces are fused to the fabric, it's time to place the fabric into an embroidery hoop.

Participants can now sew on top of their applied and fused plastics and further decorate using the pre-prepared plastic pieces from bottles. They can also create their own pieces using scissors and lighter (as explained above).

Using threads in different colours to embroider patterns can enhance the overall design. Provide help and explain the embroidering / sewing process to participants. Encourage knowledge sharing, it's a great moment for participants to help each other.



Further materials that can be used in this stage are pearls or beads, however, do not overwhelm the participants with too many possibilities and keep the focus on the plastics, but also give alternatives and allow room for experimentation. Knowing different options can help them in future, if they wish to continue using this technique on their own.

Final considerations

Keep in mind, the fabrics vary, so the results may differ. Some fabrics may allow the plastic pieces to stick better, while others may not. The same applies to baking paper - its quality can differ, and one side may work better than the other. It is recommended to test the specific fabric and baking paper combination before starting the workshop.

Also remember, when placing the fabric into the embroidery hoop, ensure it is taut. This will make the embroidery process easier and more accurate.

Resources & tips

For inspiration you can visit and/or contact Vasylyna Buryanyk's **Instagram:** https://www.instagram.com/vasylyna_buryanyk/ or **Facebook** https://www.facebook.com/vasylyna.buryanyk_profile.

Several introductions and manuals of similar techniques are available online, for example how to fuse several plastic pieces into one, which could then be decorated or used as additional material for the above described process:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytSjLBSxpNY>

Another step-to-step guide on how to turn plastic bottles into fabric as well as how to prepare plastic pieces for further, you may find useful:

<https://eupegypt.com/blog/how-to-turn-plastic-bottles-into-fabric-at-home/>

Ideas and best-practices are everywhere. On social media such as TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest, in books but also just outside - materials as well as patterns to be recreated are everywhere around you. Observe, test and experiment with materials, colours and textures.

Impressions from participants

At the conclusion of the above described upcycling textiles workshop organized by platform Culture Hub Croatia in the creative hub PROSTOR in Split, the participants expressed a profound transformation in their perspectives toward waste materials. Many shared that the experience challenged their preconceived notions about what constitutes usable materials. One participant reflected, "I never thought of plastic as something beautiful. This experience has changed the way I see everyday materials." The joy of creativity was evident as attendees spoke of their eagerness to make something unique. One individual noted, "I loved working with materials I usually just throw away. Now, I can see the potential in them."

Additionally, the workshop fostered a heightened awareness of environmental issues among participants. Several remarked on how the hands-on activities reshaped their understanding of sustainability, with one attendee stating, "This has opened my eyes to how much waste we produce, and I want to reduce that by being creative."

Looking to the future, many participants expressed a strong desire to continue practicing the techniques learned during the workshop. Ideas for home experimentation spontaneously emerged, with one participant sharing, "I plan to start collecting plastic waste at home and experiment with making art for my living room." Others suggested organizing community events to promote the upcycling technique

further. One of the participants, who is actually an art therapist, said “I am planning to apply this technique into my art therapy workshops not only to teach more people about upcycling but also to use it for self-reflection purposes.” Others were excited about applying their newfound skills to sustainable fashion, expressing aspirations such as, “I’d love to make bags or accessories from upcycled plastics to wear and promote sustainability.”

The feedback received from participants not only underscores the workshop’s success but also highlights the potential for ongoing engagement with upcycling practices. These reflections serve as a testament to the creative possibilities lying within waste materials and the positive changes that can arise from such innovative endeavors.



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