

The Etsy Blog

Featured Seller: Vaya Bags



Story by [vayabags](#)

Published on June 15, 2012 in [Shop](#)

Photo by [Vaya Bags](#)

Tell us a bit about yourself.

[Vaya Bags](#) is a small, woman-owned and operated company. We're located in Queens, NY, where we handmake messenger bags, backpacks and accessories out of recycled bicycle tubes, scrap sailboat awnings and old banners.

I'm Tianna Meilinger, and I founded the company in 2005. For the first five years, it was just me, but today Vaya Bags is a three woman operation: myself, Grace and Angie. Grace helps me do all the sewing and construction of the bags. Angie takes care of everything office related – shipping, answering emails, updating social media, our website, and our Etsy shop. All three of us take turns traveling around to craft fairs and expos where we sell our bags and meet our customers.

Apart from creating things, what do you do?

I play bass and sing in an indie/punk band called Fellow Project. When I'm not in the shop or on tour with the band, I love biking, gardening, and foraging for wild edibles.

What would be the title of your memoir?

Get Your Hands Dirty! Ever since I was little, I loved playing in the mud or with the creepy crawlers at the beach. Even today, I love gardening or rummaging through other people's trash to see what treasures I can find. Some of my fondest memories have been when I've thrown out all inhibitions and just gotten my hands dirty.



Darren Nanos

Where does your inspiration come from?

A lot of my inspiration comes from my love and appreciation of nature. I was an environmental science major in college, so the natural environment has always been something that interests me. I get inspiration from the colors of nature, and a lot of the materials we use are recycled to try to minimize the impact on our environment. I also try to create products that will inspire people to go outside more!

What does handmade mean to you?

Something that is handmade is a one-of-a-kind piece that a person truly puts their heart, sweat, & passion into creating. Since handmade items aren't mass produced, each is a little different and unique which gives them a lot of character, which is something that I appreciate.

Who has been most influential in your craft?

I've been heavily influenced by my parents. They have been making a living for the past 40 years by handmaking leather clothing out of scraps found in a dumpster. They were one of the first creative recyclers and taught me that I can create a piece of art out of something

that someone else would just throw out.



Darren Nanos

When did you know you were an artist/maker?

I started making things from a very early age. One summer when I was 11, my parents got rid of our televisions, so to occupy my time, I made a fringed bikini out of leather scraps.

How would you describe your creative process?

My creative process is a lot of trial and error. I usually make a bag designed to fit my daily needs, and then alter and improve it in order to accommodate a wide range of people. As far as the aesthetics go, I usually come to the shop in the morning and mix and match colors together to see if something strikes me. I use a lot of diagonal stripes because I love the way it breaks up the lines of the bags.

If you could peek inside the studio of any artist, designer or craftsman (dead or alive), who would it be?

[Nikola Tesla](#). Tesla has come up a lot in conversation with my band mates. He seems like an interesting and unusual fella and it would be cool to take a look at the workings of a mad scientist!



Darren Nanos

What handmade possession do you most cherish?

A friend of mine gave my husband and I a handmade wedding card, where he drew pretty accurate caricatures of us. You can tell he put a lot of thought and detail into making it because each time you look at the card you see another detail about our personalities that you didn't notice before. For example, I am wearing my favorite t-shirt and my husband has a horse racing newspaper. That is definitely a special handmade item that I will always cherish.

How do you get out of your creative ruts?

Sometimes if I'm in a rut and can't decide what colors to choose for a bag, I will put colors together that I normally would never choose. I'm usually pleasantly surprised by the outcome. Sometimes the coolest color combinations are the ones that I would never think would look good.

Where would you like to be in ten years?

In ten years, I would like for Vaya Bags to be an example of a local, handmade, all women-owned and operated business that is thriving while helping the environment and the community. I'd like to help prove that you don't have to sacrifice your values and squash the people around you to make it in business.

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