

ART REVIEW

Two Australian Artists Mail a Plane to San Francisco

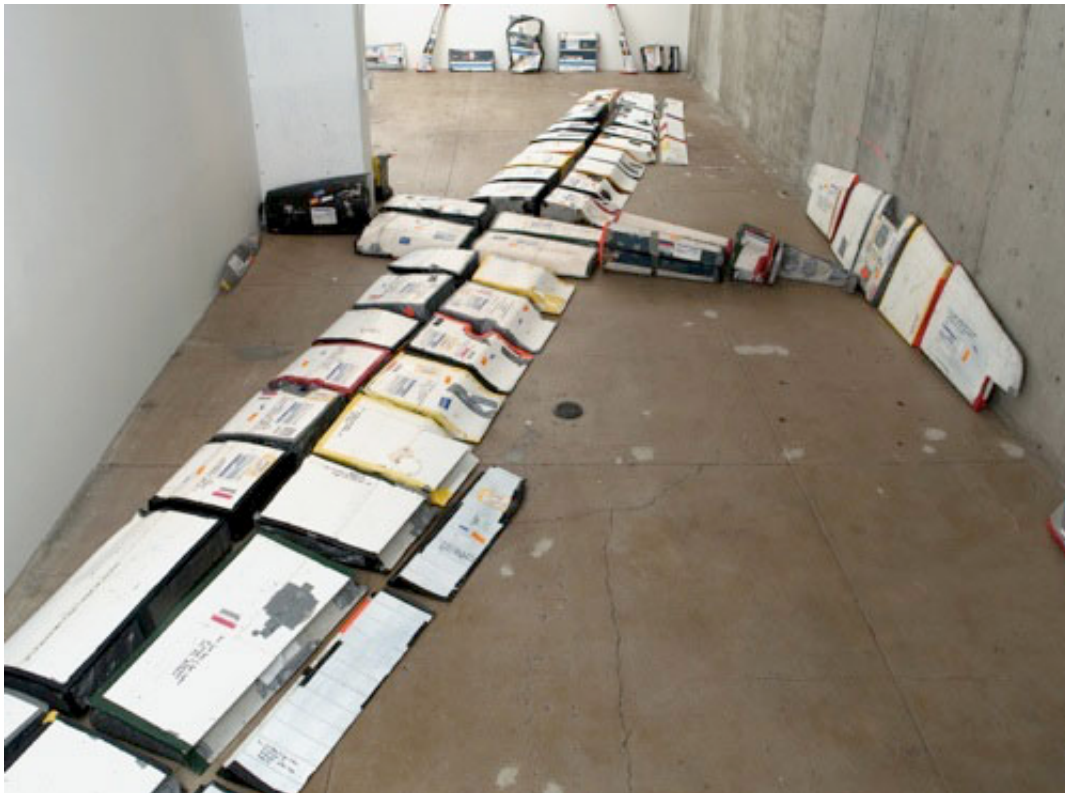
By [Marion Anthonisen](#) | Dec 24, 2011



Around this time of year, most people are mailing chunky scarves, holiday ties and jars of jam to their relatives. Australian artists Sean Cordeiro and Clare Healy mailed a fighter plane to an art gallery.

The artist team chopped up an old Cessna 172 into about 70 pieces and mailed each piece, separately, via international airmail to the Frey Norris gallery in San Francisco, where they rearranged the pieces into the shape of the original plane.

On first approach, the installation, **Par Avion**, appears to be made of a series of asymmetrical white cardboard boxes puzzled together to create the illusion of a plane. But the components are actually pieces of the plane's exterior, covered with bar codes, blue airmail stickers, addresses, duct tape and neon inspection notices. A real plane is masquerading as an imitation of a plane, which is a nice bit of twisting visual deception.



What you see is the original warplane drained of its strength and violent identity. Its wings, chopped into pieces, are useless to perform their original function. The aircraft has become a series of chunks arranged on a gallery floor, more anonymous airmail than fighter plane.

The artists began deconstructing the plane only a few minutes after purchasing it from a scrap metal yard in Australia. Cordeiro says he drove home on the highway with one wing strapped to the roof of his car, his son in the backseat gleefully exclaiming the car was flying.

This was an expensive project -- the cost of mailing each part ranged from 30-170 Australian dollars (about equivalent to US dollars). The pieces are labeled with the price of shipping and a customs declaration, the detailed description reading "Cessna 172 part." Some of the pieces do actually serve as packages, containing seatbelts or other components of the plane's interior. Exposed gaps and holes were sealed with duct tape and hollow parts were stuffed with newspaper before the pieces began their international journey.



Most of the parts have arrived at Frey Norris, but the propeller touched down in San Francisco just a few days ago. A few pieces are still missing, and may never arrive. Cordeiro and Healy didn't ship the plane's engine because, well, it no longer needs one. Airmail *was* the engine, they said.

The openness of the installation allows for an unusually close inspection of the aircraft's details, through which you'll see the craftsmanship on the plane is surprisingly delicate and ordinary. Most of the pieces are super light, and the orderly rows of tiny bolts and ridges resemble common architectural metal siding.

Discovering such characteristic plane features as the cockpit and the wing lights draws attention from the piece's current identity as a series of packages to its original identity as a plane. You realize you're four inches from the remnants of a great beast.

Some of the plane's metal is warped or heavily scratched, which effectively blurs the line between violent war wounds and innocuous airmail injuries. Did the plane acquire these scratches just last week, or 40 years ago? Is this indentation from enemy fire or just a particularly turbulent stretch of air above the Pacific?

It's surreal and a little sad to see this plane indoors, deconstructed and plastered with stickers. The piece evokes that cinematic feeling of pity for the bad guy when he's been defeated. But there's also a sense of rebirth through excavation -- the bones of the giant have been unearthed, pieced back together, and put on display to be examined with curiosity.

Par Avion runs through January 28, 2012 at Frey Norris Contemporary & Modern. For [more information](#) visit freynorris.com.

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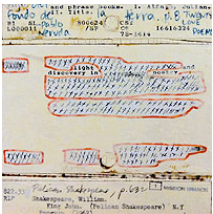
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