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Imperial Slacks: Reviving the art of macrame, one light plane at a time



Artists Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro cover a light plane with macrame, with help from Susan Hutchison and Ranael Carolin from the Aboriginal Women's Weaving Group. *Photo: Steven Siewert*

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As an artistic flight of fancy, it's hard to go past parking a Beechcraft Travel Air inside the Campbelltown Arts Centre. Yet that is only one element of artist couple Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro's *DIY O.D.* installation.

Purchased for \$10,000 on eBay, the aircraft's fuselage will be covered in macrame knotted and hitched by members of the Aboriginal Women's Weaving Group.

The group's Renael Carolin describes the project as "therapeutic, relaxing and strange all at once". "It makes me question why we are covering a giant fuselage in rope, but it also makes me think, why not? "You can macrame almost anything," she adds. Cordeiro admits the installation is "an opaque work" inspired, in part, by bottles covered in the ropey, kitsch craft favoured by 1970s hippies. "Why would you do that?" he asks. "Why does anyone do that? Bottles are mass produced then let's macrame it."

Cordeiro sees a parallel urge these days to cover smartphones in elaborate cases, which he says is an attempt to stamp individuality on a mass-produced item. "It's one of those funny works," he says. "It's kind of inspired by iPhone cases and experiences like going to McDonald's and dipping fries into chocolate sundaes." Knotting rope around a fast-food dessert is harder and less impressive than a light plane, which was purchased with funds contributed by the Phillip Keir Foundation.

Cordeiro, an "eBay freak", purchased the plane from Gympie in Queensland. It was transported to Sydney and its weather-beaten fuselage painted orange. "We just feel we're in this historic moment," he says. "There's this idea of the primacy of the individual and it's such a strong thing in our society. But the flipside is we live this mass-produced lifestyle so how do we navigate this?" But he adds: "We're using that idea and putting it on steroids."

Healy and Cordeiro have built a career out of repurposing everyday objects into playful, often amusing art installations. Their previous work include buying the contents of a suburban house and bundling it together in a gallery, a tower made from 175,218 old video tapes that was shown at the 2009 Venice Biennale and perching a light airplane on scaffolding outside the Museum of Contemporary Art.

"We're trying to use a language that speaks to people and taps into the experiences we all share," he says. "And that's why we make use of the ready-made.

"I think artwork shouldn't be hard to look at if you want to say something. I think it doesn't hurt to make it palatable."

The installation at Campbelltown Arts Centre is part of *Cosmic Love Wonder Lust: The Imperial Slacks Project*, a joint exhibition with the Sydney College of the Arts of work by 15 artists who were members of Imperial Slacks. An old rag trade building in Surry Hills, Imperial Slacks was the home, studio and gallery of 16 young artists between 1999 and 2002. Campbelltown Arts Centre director Michael Dagostino says the show seeks to capture the energy and ideas of the Slackers. "They truly knew no boundaries and were able to explore their own way of thinking which created really groundbreaking works for their time," he says. "By exhibiting the artists' works from their time as a 'slacker' alongside the new commissions we are able to both celebrate what the artists were doing as part of Imperial Slacks but also how their practice has evolved since then."

Cordeiro remembers the era with fondness and his fellow artists as an inspiration.

"It was really awesome if you can imagine basically like being at art school 24-seven," he says.

"Hanging out with mates, working, making in each others' faces." Cordeiro says he has not had such a tight-knit circle of friends or colleagues since then. "Maybe that's also another thing about being in your 20s," he says. "You live a much more collective existence at that age."

Cosmic Love Wonder Lust: The Imperial Slacks Project is at Campbelltown Arts Centre from August 15 to October 18.

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/imperial-slacks-reviving-the-art-of-macrame-one-light-plane-at-a-time-20150813-gixexd.html#ixzz3ilnfcVAV>