

PACKAGING AND FREIGHT FOR CERAMICS - part one

– Article by Sandra Black

Some hints for getting your work to market safely.

Every year numbers of ceramic works fail to turn up at the gallery on time, disappear completely or are broken in transit. This is often due to the artist not packaging correctly, poor labelling or careless freight companies. Getting your work to its point of sale or exhibition is a vital part of the art of survival. When goods arrive in a damaged state it is not only you who is at a disadvantage but also the shop or gallery is without work at a critical time.

Making an insurance claim can also absorb time and effort better expended elsewhere. For artists learning to send their work beyond their studio for the first time it can seem a little daunting. Again it is always better to consult with fellow artists to get some help with the appropriate materials to protect your work.

Each type of ceramic work needs to be assessed as to its strengths and weaknesses to ascertain the best method of protecting the work in transit.

There are a number of processes to go through as follows.

Identify the weak points of the works where extra padding may need to be placed to protect projections such as handles, extrusions spouts etc

Check the weight of each object as to placement in the box. Always place the heavier items in the base of the box not on top of fragile works.

Photograph, label and number the base of each object before packing

Select the correct size and type of box for each work or group of works.

Have a selection of packaging materials for protecting the surface and to provide padding.

Sources of Packaging Materials Tissue, shredded paper, news paper

Tissue paper is available from a number of companies including my supplier Vital Packaging in Myaree. Buy in bulk sheets. Shredded paper can be obtained from many local businesses wanting to get rid of this. The best means of obtaining this is to purchase a shredder for your own office. You will be amazed how much junk mail and other stuff that comes through your letter box that can be shredded each week. It's immensely satisfying and environmentally sound!

Lots of newspaper arrives also in our letter boxes each week so this can also be utilised around work.

Boxes

Card board boxes may be scrounged from many businesses but avoid fruit and vegetable boxes as quarantine will confiscate these boxes if sent overseas or interstate delaying delivery of your work. Some boxes may be a bit thin but can be used for packing into larger boxes as extra protection. There are companies such as Visy board where you can order new boxes but you will need to make a

significant order. Better still you can look for box recycling companies and find the sizes and strengths you need. Australia Post also has a range of boxes which can be used to send small items as long as they are well padded. Rolls of corrugated card board may also be useful around some objects to protect forms. If you are looking to send a large shipment of boxes over seas you can purchase a half cubic metre or a cubic metre box on a wooden pallet from Visy board. The product is called a Sampal box and is excellent to stack smaller boxes within. Other boxes to use are polystyrene boxes which are great for smaller works. You can get these recycled from fruit and vegetable suppliers or restaurants. Unlike card board boxes these can be washed and disinfected. Shops will often sell them for \$2.00 each. Packaging suppliers charge around \$7.00 new.

Polystyrene and polyurethane products

Check under yellow pages "Polystyrene Products" and "Polyurethane products". Also look under the listing "Plastic Products –manufacturers and/or wholesalers". For sheets of foam rubber "Clark rubber stores are great for foam in many thicknesses plus off cuts and wadding. Thin foam blankets and yoga mats are available quite cheaply and can be cut up to wrap around fragile objects or pad between works. Polystyrene beads are not a favourite packing product of mine as they tend to drift around the studio, but if you do end up with some put them into plastic shopping bags and use as cushions to pack around work. There is a product now made from starch which looks very like polystyrene but is biodegradable and can be disposed of in your garden as compost. Avoid getting it wet as it will dissolve in water.

Bubble plastic

This is an excellent packing material and if used carefully can be recycled many times. You can get both the fine and large bubble varieties. I use the fine bubble to wrap around work and the large to line boxes and put between layers. You can again buy it in a large roll or by the metre from packaging suppliers. Office works and Australia post sell smaller widths and rolls around 10-15 metres in length.

Packaging Tapes, Rubber Bands and Labels

You need a range of tapes from the clear tape to go over labels, strong packaging tape to seal the box and fragile tape to warn people handling your boxes. You may also find duct tape useful though it is expensive. Many artists use tape to secure tissue and bubble around forms. As an alternative consider using rubber bands. Rubber bands can be purchased in a variety of sizes from Office works and have the advantage of not damaging the packaging allowing it to be reused more often. It is also quicker to pack and unpack. Bands may not be suitable for more fragile items so use carefully. Label packs can be purchased from Office works for you to print out the senders and receivers labels or to hand write on.

Packaging should not be a huge financial outlay if you are prepared to recycle and reuse what is available free or sold cheaply. Do not however skimp on packaging. It is your best insurance.

General Recommendations Photography

With the digital photography processes we have today it is quick and easy to photograph our work before sending it away. This documentation is extremely useful for a number of reasons. If work is

lost or stolen in transit or from the exhibition we have a record for insurance purposes. The images can also be used to promote your work on the gallery website or in art journals, books or newspapers. It also serves to show how multi piece articles are to be displayed.

Labelling

Work must be labelled on the base with a number and price. Objects with two or more parts should also be labelled individually e.g. 2a, 2b, 2c etc. Your box should have a large label for the destination of work, a smaller senders label, a contents label, fragile labels, box number label eg box 2 of 5 and sometimes a this way up label, top load label or instructions for where to open the box. If you still have room leave space to attach your invoice envelope, the couriers freight label and customs declaration form for overseas destinations!!! Your labelling is critical to the safe arrival of your work. Also place extra labels inside your box in case of damage to the external label. Labels should be protected by waterproof printing ink and covered by clear tape or contact plastic.

Packaging your work

When packaging you need 2-3 different layers of packaging around your work. The first layers should be a white tissue to protect the surface. Fill the interior of your pots if possible with softly crumpled tissue. Avoid coloured tissue as many of these are not colourfast and if your work gets damp it can stain the surface. Pad any protrusions by wrapping in layers of tissue followed by thin foam blanket and fine bubble wrap. After protrusions are wrapped cover the work with 4-5 layers of tissue, a layer of yellow foam blanket or white foam blanket and then bubble wrap. Secure the wrapping with tape or better still use rubber bands. Rubber bands mean that bubble wrap is more easily reused as tape will damage it. NB: With more fragile or multi piece articles place a note in your box for the gallery to instruct them how to unpack, display and repack your work.

Line the base of the box with padding of large bubble wrap, soft foam at least 2cms thick, polystyrene beads in bags or crumpled news paper to create a buffer zone of at least 4-5 cms deep. Place the wrapped pot on this and pad the sides of the box as well. Place some padding between pieces laid side to side as well as placing a good layer of padding on the final layer before closing the lid. My experience has been that a slightly loose pack of articles works best. If you jam pack to create a rigid mass the shock from the box being dropped will travel through more easily and create breakages. Do not assume that freight companies will handle the work with care. If your works are particularly fragile you may consider floating your first box inside a larger padded box. Seal your boxes well paying particular attention to taping up the base of a cardboard boxes and reinforcing the corners. Label and despatch.