

# MESSAGES IN-THE-SKY

CLAIRE HEALY &  
SEAN CORDEIRO

## You are Here, 2020

Momotaro, 2020  
acrylic gouache paint and polyester  
cord on helicopter panel  
85 x 62 x 5 cm

Nami Usagi, 2020  
acrylic gouache paint and jute cord on helicopter  
panel  
157 x 125 x 14 cm

Fukusuke, 2020  
acrylic gouache paint and polyester cord on  
helicopter fuselage door  
140 x 210 x 20 cm

Sumito Zaibatsu, 2020  
acrylic gouache paint and jute cord on helicopter  
panel  
130 x 165 x 10 cm

Bekkako, 2020  
acrylic gouache paint and polyester cord on  
helicopter engine cowling  
107 x 60 x 14 cm

Koinobori, 2020  
acrylic gouache paint and polyester cord on intake  
cowling  
210 x 85 x 50 cm

Fugu, 2020  
acrylic gouache paint and polyester cord on  
helicopter panel  
90 x 120 x 8 cm

What is the difference between a kite and  
an airplane?

Kites and planes come from the same family  
but the philosophy behind flying kites and  
planes is quite different. A kite is a flying

object that inspires daydreams while locating  
you within a specific time and place. Like a  
pin stuck in a map, the tethered kite marks  
us within the here and now. Conversely, an  
airplane makes the drive to be somewhere  
else entirely, a possible reality.

We have reversed the evolution of manned  
flight by taking Australian Air Force surplus  
plane parts and with a bit of paint and string,  
turned them back into kites. We have used  
traditional Japanese kite designs because  
a) they look really awesome and b) Japanese  
kites are not representative of a culturally  
hermetic system<sup>1</sup> and are therefore a great  
visual example of transculturation. Our aim  
is to re-focus on the here and now without  
suffering from cultural myopia.

Our reclamation of the kite is a notional de-  
militarisation of the flying machine. It is not  
commonly known that it only took six years  
after the Wright Brothers' first successful  
powered-flight in 1903 for that technology  
to be sold by the Brothers to the American  
Military. It was an act that was anathema  
to their Australian predecessor Lawrence  
Hargrave who believed that flight belonged to  
mankind as a whole. It was not the first time  
that an object of marvel was re-purposed into  
a tool of war. The transformation of fireworks  
into deadly weapons is a process that took  
place at the beginning of the first millennium  
CE.



Image: Messages in the Sky - Installation view © Adelle Minahan

Put simply, we have used the 20th century militarisation of the kite as a metaphor for the 21st century weaponisation of social media. The transformation of an object of entertainment to a tool of subjugation is a process that has played out before our eyes. The tools that facilitated the Arab Spring of 2010 have now given birth to anti-vaxxers, QAnon, flat-earth theorists, birthers, climate-change deniers, corona-virus sceptics and satire-proof Presidents. The human urge to be Liked™ has broken the Wisdom of Crowds, which has been used by state and non-state actors to breed extremist views in individuals in order to foment chaos.

It seems that if religion is the opiate of the masses then social media has become our Fentanyl. Our addiction to a socially mediated reality draws us out of the here-and-now and places us in a seemingly consequence-free virtual world.

1 Chinese Buddhist missionaries introduced kites to Japan during the Nara period (710-794 AD).

## The Pilgrims, 2019

One channel video, 8.58 min

Filmed in what is known as the 'Bangkok Boneyard': an interesting suburban oddity, located about an hour east of central Bangkok. The Boneyard is the antithesis of the usual airplane bone yards found in arid desert locations around the world: humid, surrounded by weeds and medium density housing; the Bangkok Boneyard houses the carapaces of several large-scale commercial airplanes. Rumoured to be remnants of a pre-1997 Asian Financial crisis idea, these days, the Boneyard is home to an extended family of 'caretakers' who charge the curiosity seeker a negotiable 'entrance fee' into the boneyard.

At the time of shooting, the Boneyard was primarily a haven for millennial tourists eager to document an out-of-the-ordinary travel experience. Almost tailor-made for the Instagram generation, the Bangkok Boneyard offered an edgy piece of self-promotion in a pretty convenient location. In the end this video is primarily interested in the concept



Image: Messages in the Sky - Installation view © Adelle Minahan

of the modern ruin. Ruins have always been places of marvel, yet the ruins of our age are decades rather than centuries in the making.

The narrative of *The Pilgrims* is ambiguous. The young tourists in the video could be seen as latter-day pilgrims. They are people drawn to the ruin for unknown personal significances. The soundtrack is spacious and suggests a kind of torpid state juxtaposed against the obvious fun that the hipsters are enjoying within the ruins.

*The Pilgrims* was made in response to the quickening loop between the production and obsolescence of objects within our age. Insta-tourists took delight in navigating the ruined planes, taking selfies and photos of their friends in the ruins of mass air transport. The idea of ruin- a concept that once took millennia or at least centuries to develop, is now a phenomena that now takes only decades to brew.

*The Pilgrims* owes much to the follies of the 19th Century such as Gustave Doré's *The New Zealander* - a lithograph that depicts an antipodean sketching the remains of St. Paul's Cathedral - as it does to our collective video consciousness that includes images of bright young things at festivals such as Coachella, Burning Man and of course the infamous Fyre Festival. Part Pepsi advertisement part JG Ballard sketch; *The Pilgrims* is a homage to the decade of self-worship.

MADE WITH THE SUPPORT OF

The Shadow Places Network

<http://shadowplaces.net/>

Cinematographer: Sukrit Srisathaporn and Cake Napatsorn

Editors: Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro

Post Production: Vera Hong & Craig Bender, Thomas Dicker

Sound designer & Mix: Tim Mahony

Fixer: Krianu Manokam



Image: Team Spirit 2023 - Installation view © Adelle Minahan

## Team Spirit, 2023

Two channel video, 8.13 min

The Artwork is a playful study on scales of community engagement. Filmed in Shirone, Japan, the visuals focus on the yearly Giant Kite Battle that takes place along the Nakanoguchi river bank. This kite festival has been happening for over 300 years in Shirone, located on the West coast of central Honshu. It takes local teams an entire year to create these kites, which are then battled against other neighbourhood teams over the course of a week. At the end of the week, all kites have been destroyed in the individual bouts. The kite battle is a remarkable mix of community spirit, chaos and fun. One video channel focusses on the creation of these kites while the other channel documents the kite battle festival.

The audio component of the project is narrated in Esperanto. Esperanto is the most widely spoken constructed international auxiliary language. It is a language filled with global Utopian ideals of peace and

understanding between nations. We collaborated with members of Esperanto NSW to translate and voice-over the narrative that takes place in tandem with the kite festival footage.

Esperanto is a manifestation of the desire to create a global community of people, developing global cross-cultural connections.

The grand communal ideals of Esperanto are juxtaposed with the highly localised subject of the narrative. The narrative is an account of a volunteer's participation in a Sausage Sizzle. It is difficult to explain to a cultural outsider, the sentiments that are aroused within the mind of an Australian when they hear these two words. Sausage Sizzle is more than cooking meat: the act is communal, it conjures vague images of democracy, it is two words that somehow encapsulate the *Je ne sais quoi* of Australian-ness.

To explain the place that Sausage Sizzle holds within the Australian psyche is like trying to explain the significance of Tea Ceremony.

Anyone can drink a cup of tea and most people can fry a sausage but somehow these simple acts can take on larger significance...

The clash of the exciting Kite Battle with the quotidian Sausage Sizzle represents two different types of local cultural activity. These two locally-based community activities are nestled within the globally community-minded Esperanto.

The two-channel video is subtitled in English as well as Japanese.

MADE WITH THE SUPPORT OF

The Australia Council for the Arts (Creative Australia)

THANKS TO

Videographer: Kazuma Miyano, Sunny Rain co., Ltd, Tao Nashimoto, for second channel: Yusuke Mizuno

Sound: NSW Esperanto House

Voice: Jonathan Cooper. Esperanto

Translation: Dmitry Lushnikov.

Proofreader: Nicole Else

Japanese Translation: Kureh Durant

Proofreading: Honoka Sato

Kite Teams: Sakuracho group (桜蝶組), Isshin Tasuke group (一心太助組), Benkei group, Hajime Otake

Shirone Town Guide: Keisuke Tomii and Michio Hando

Special thanks: The Niigata Toridako Group, Katsushiro Ichikawa, Aoki Hiromi, Igarashi Naoko, Keisuke Soga, Honoka Sato,

Yui-Port: Niigata City Centre for Creative Arts and International Youth Exchange

## Many hands make light work, 2023

One channel video, 3.32 min

Similarly the video Many hands make light work illustrates the collective co-operation of the people working together on the ground to achieve a desired outcome: flight. It was filmed at Pipers Gliding Club in Bathurst. Although gliding is perceived to be a solo pursuit, it takes many people working together to launch the glider into the skies.

The video is set against the narrative of an historic account of the Leicester (UK) hot air balloon riot of 1864. The riot was caused when a crowd at a festival became angry when the hot air balloon was late to launch. The rioting crowd worked together to destroy the hot air balloon and assaulted the pilot.

People can work together to either create mischief or for the benefit of others. Both the audio and the visuals illustrate different forms of co-operation shown within the romantic pursuit of flight. This juxtaposition illustrates the fine line between community spirit and collective riot.

THANKS TO

Create NSW

Bathurst Soaring Club, Charles Durham, David Walker

Videographers: Vera Hong, Craig Bender

Voice Over: Lara Cal

Japanese Translation: Sayo Jones

Proof reading: Honoka Sato



Image: Messages in the Sky - Installation view © Adelle Minahan

## Mayday, 2021

Stickers and acrylic paint on Piper aircraft wing

166 x 552 x 58cm

Our work *Mayday*, 2021, uses the pathos of a discarded wing as a canvas to announce a cry for help. The scale and materiality of the work makes the work fall somewhere between an aviation accident and an act of vandalism. It is a cry for help to a disinterested audience.

## Revolting Youth, 2021

Wood, spray paint, spray paint cannisters, paper and other event materials on Beechcraft Duchess BE76 wing

550 x 150 x 360 cm

We created a sculpture that is basically a plane wing made vertical. Unlike the aerodynamic verticality of a Brancusi, this wing is more akin to a stand-alone section of the Berlin wall: it is more like a wall than a bridge. Spray-painted in garish colours, this sculpture is also a gesture of reclamation.

The vertical wing represents the sense of stasis felt during this era. With nowhere to go and nothing to do during the pandemic, social interaction was limited to the confines of the internet. Youth were invited to spray paint the surface of this wing. Carried out at the end of the second lock-down in Sydney, this devious action can be seen as a small break out from the uncertain era that they had just experienced.

The effects of the pandemic have been particularly felt by our youth. Not only have they been estranged from their peers at the most socially engaged part of their lives, they are also the generation that must repay the massive debt that has been incurred to keep our country afloat during the first two lock-downs. Our aim was to give the children of our neighbourhood a voice via spray painting the wing surface; directly serving as a reminder of the pandemic.

Complete with a functioning QR code (the unofficial symbol of the pandemic era) that links to a video of the painting process,



Image: Journey to the West , (Installation detail) 2023 © Adelle Minahan

spray painting upon the airplane wing was a reclamation of agency in contrast to the uncertainty that the future holds for these kids.

#### SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Create NSW

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### Journey to the West, 2023

Gouache acrylic and polyester cord on two Beechcraft Twin Bonanza wings

430 x 40 x 90 cm

Two Beechcraft Twin Bonanza wings affixed to a structural cradle to resemble a giant kite stationary ahead of take off.

Kites and planes come from the same family but the philosophy behind flying kites and planes is quite different. A kite is a flying object that inspires daydreams while locating

you within a specific time and place. Like a pin stuck in a map, the tethered kite marks us within the here and now. Conversely, an airplane makes the drive to be somewhere else entirely, a possible reality.

We have reversed the evolution of manned flight by taking Twin Bonanza Beechcraft wings and with a bit of paint and string, turned them back into a kite. Our aim is to re-focus on the here and now. This tension between being stuck somewhere and wanting to be somewhere else is strangely reminiscent of those early adolescent years trapped in the 'burbs: those years of feeling that somewhere, elsewhere, something interesting was happening – it just wasn't where you were... Conversely, this informed dislocation can inspire a punk DIY attitude of making your own fun regardless of skill-level: bands are formed, low-budget films are made and painfully earnest art is produced.

This work was realised with the generous engineering support of Tilt Industrial Design.



Image: Messages in the Sky - Installation view © Adelle Minahan

## Wishes for the Sky, 2018 – 2023

Pine, acrylic tubing and tracing paper with drawings by community members

400 x 400 x 300 cm

Inspired by their experiences in Sapporo at Tenjinyama artists' studios in 2018, we conducted workshops with children to give them the opportunity to create a large community kite. We now invite children and families from the Mid-Western Region to join us in the making of a giant tetrahedral kite, a replica of a massive Alexander Graham Bell design. The kite will be decorated with pictures and writing similar to Ema, the wooden wishing plaques of Japan. What is your wish? Will it fly? Gambate! Good luck!

This first iteration of this work was made with the support of Asialink at Tenjinyama Artist Studios, Sapporo Japan

## Wanderlust Terra Firma, 2023

Vintage National Geographic découpage on two Cirrus SR-22 wings

449 x 27 x 156 cm

Wanderlust Terra Firma was created on Cirrus aircraft wings that were salvaged by the artists from a crash that occurred during the plane's landing in Ballarat, Victoria in January 2022. Caught in a sudden gust of wind, the landing gear clipped a fence and nose-dived into the ground. Appropriately, the registration of the aircraft is VH-WTF, the acronym from which that artwork takes its name. Continuing the theme of collaboration and flight, the piece comprises découpage made from vintage National Geographic magazines donated by members of the local community and organised into archipelagos.

The artwork is a meditation upon our place in the world. The nostalgia of the old National Geographic Journals combined with the experience of creating a giant collage brings forth memories and ideas of nascent dreams of independence.

### THANKS TO

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Mudgee Yout Services

Kandos Opp Shop for their kind donation of the National Geographic Magazines





Image: Origami Aeroplanes, (Installation detail) 2011 © Adelle Minahan

## Origami Aeroplanes, 2011

Cessna 172 wing aluminium.

A number of small origami folded airplanes, crafted from the skin of Cessna 172 aircraft and impacted into the gallery's walls. The artwork is a lyrical musing on the relationship between daydreams and reality.



Image: Wishes for the Sky, (Installation detail) 2018 – 2023 © Adelle Minahan



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CLAIRE HEALY & SEAN CORDEIRO: MESSAGES IN THE SKY  
 1 September 2023 – 26 November 2023

**N.Smith Gallery**  
 Claire Healy & Sean Cordeiro  
 are represented by N.Smith Gallery.

For more information on the artists visit  
[claireandsean.com](http://claireandsean.com)



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