



MAPA

**THE AIRMAIL PAINTINGS
OF EUGENIO DITTBORN
1984 – 1992**

JUNE 1930

This is the plane of Henri Guillemet, pilot of L'Aéropostale (Compagnie Générale Aéropostale), at the moment of its recovery. On June 13, 1930, Guillemet, en route from Santiago in Chile to Mendoza in Argentina, carrying mail, was forced by a violent snow-storm to make an emergency landing in the Andes mountains, at an altitude of 3,500 metres. The plane was undamaged by the landing but finished upside down: the pilot jumped out and after walking for six days without interruption, finally arrived at an inhabited area. There he was met by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the French writer and flyer, who was working for L'Aéropostale in Buenos Aires.

The photo shows the moment at which the plane was righted and set back on its wheels again by means of ropes and mules. The mail was still in the plane, intact, and was able to continue on its journey.

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2 March – 8 May 1994

City Gallery **WELLINGTON**

MAPA

THE AIRMAIL PAINTINGS OF EUGENIO DITTBORN 1984 – 1992

For three weeks every two years the Wellington International Festival of the Arts provides New Zealanders with an overwhelming range of opportunities to enjoy performances by cultural groups who travel from the 'four corners of the globe'. In this age of air travel and telecommunications it is easy to disregard the often enormous distances the performers traverse to reach New Zealand.

As the French Chilean writer Nelly Richard has said, the art of Chilean artist Eugenio Dittborn is above all work which travels, explores distances. It is with this fact in mind that the City Gallery, Wellington has chosen to present *MAPA: The Airmail Paintings of Eugenio Dittborn*, as the key international component of its Festival programme.

This survey of Dittborn's Airmail Paintings was organised by the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London and the Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam. The organisers and the artist were keen to have a Southern Hemisphere venue before the paintings were dispersed. The return of the work to the South of the world is a particular feature of this exhibition at the City Gallery.

MAPA: The Airmail Paintings of Eugenio Dittborn 1984-1992, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand, March 1994. Photo: Michael Roth



Eugenio Dittborn *Airmail Painting No. 95* 1991 (detail)

THE AIRMAIL PAINTINGS

Since 1984 Eugenio Dittborn has sent Airmail Paintings from Santiago de Chile to cities all over the world. At the end of each exhibition the works are folded up and posted in envelopes to their next destination. They travel as letters, arrive, are unfolded and become paintings, then leave again as letters.

As well as travelling themselves, the works explore the idea of travel and distance: journeys between cultures and places as well as travel through time.

Dittborn gathers together images from many sources: police mug shots of petty criminals, pictures from how-to-paint manuals, photos of his baby daughter, drawings by schizophrenics. . . . He joins these diverse images together as if making a patchwork quilt. Each small segment becomes part of a complex pattern connecting images and stories from different times and different places.

Dittborn's first Airmail Paintings were made on large sheets of brown wrapping paper. Later he replaced the paper with stiff, non-woven fabric, normally used as interfacing on clothes to stiffen collars and lapels. On this material, Dittborn has stitched, stained, silkscreened and painted. The material is lightweight and usually inconspicuous — ideal for making paintings which travel incognito.

Although not immediately recognisable as Chilean, the Airmail Paintings refer metaphorically to the recent political situation in that country.

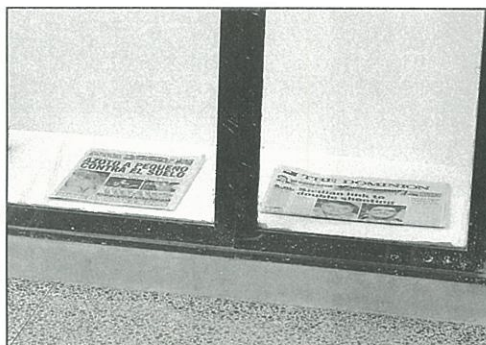
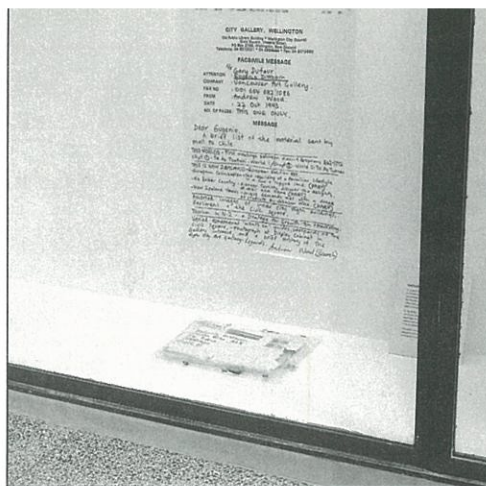
I myself have gone through the experience of being present at the exhibition of the Airmail Paintings abroad. The first triggering elements are the preestablished meanings in those places with regard to Chile, the military dictatorship and Latin America in general. Those meanings are generally ossified. The undoing and unsettling work that the Airmail Paintings and I accomplish is not, cannot be efficient. Two months ago in Canada, at a round table about the Airmail Paintings, I was asked with a certain urgency, what was the political aspect of my work. I answered that the political aspect of my work was to be found in the folds of the Airmail Paintings (like a *poisonous powder* hidden there)

These words brought about, provocatively, an edging-away from the immaterial and abstract notion of the political to a precise and particular notion of the political *in my work*: The airmail-ness or airmail strategy, as a material option, an artistic cunning to disguise a painting as a letter, to infallibly reach places that are far away from the starting point, to break through the isolation, separation and international confinement. All of this is possible because of and from within the folds.

The travelling is, thus, *the political element* of my paintings.

And the folds, *the unfolding of that politics*.

Extract from "An Airmail Interview, Sean Cubitt and Eugenio Dittborn", *Camino Way*, 1991



Santiago — Wellington (details)
Photo: Michael Roth

SANTIAGON — WELLINGTIAGO

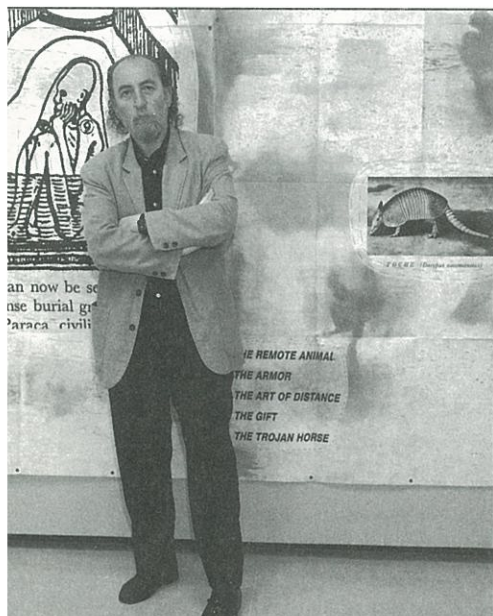
As a special feature of his exhibition and visit to Wellington, Eugenio Dittborn has created a site-specific work in the display cases which flank the entrance to the Gallery. More correctly the work refers to Santiago and Wellington as well as both the physical and cultural distances between these two sites.

In 1993 Dittborn asked for information on Wellington to be sent to him in Santiago, Chile. Dittborn has returned the resulting parcel to New Zealand unopened by him. It has however been opened by someone else on its journey to Chile and subsequently resealed in a transparent plastic bag.

This object is the centrepiece of the work along with an enlargement of the list of contents that was faxed by Andrew Wood of the Gallery to Dittborn. Also included are Chilean and Wellington newspapers which were collected on three successive days in February.

As well as reflecting on distance *Santiago — Wellington* also comments on the role of the press in editing and transforming both regional and global information. In this way the papers of Wellington and Sanitago display similarity as much as they reveal difference.

Eugenio Dittborn,
City Gallery, Wellington
March 1994 in front of
Airmail Painting No. 95,
1991
Photo: Michael Roth



THE ARTIST

Eugenio Dittborn was born in 1943 in Santiago de Chile, where he now lives and works. He studied graphic art and painting in Santiago, Paris, Madrid and Berlin, and now lectures in art.

During the repressive years of the Pinochet regime Dittborn remained in Chile, and continued to work as an artist. Despite the harshness of the political situation, an avant garde or 'avanzada' flourished in Chile. Dittborn was associated with this loose grouping of artists who created unofficial and subversive work within the rules of censorship. The avanzada artists opposed the rules, but worked from inside the system.

Dittborn's work took many forms: painting and graphic works, video and installation. The airmail paintings developed from his involvement in mail art, communicating with artists around the world via small works sent in the post.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

AIRMAIL PAINTING NO. 86

Pieta (The Bed, The House, The Madison Square Garden), 1990

210 x 280 cm

Photosilkscreen, Charcoal, Xilography, and Stitching on two sections of non-woven fabric

Jouy-En-Josas, France, June 1990

Buenos Aires, Argentina, Nov-Dec 1991

Vancouver, Canada, July-Sept 1992

Rotterdam, Holland, Dec 1993 — Jan 1994

AIRMAIL PAINTING NO. 95

The 13th History of the Human Face (The Portals of H), 1991

350 x 860 cm

Paint, Stitching and Photosilkscreen on ten sections of non-woven fabric

Antwerp, Belgium, Jan-May 1992

London, England, April-May 1993

Southampton, England, Aug-Sept 1993

Rotterdam, Holland, Dec 1993 — Jan 1994

AIRMAIL PAINTING NO. 96

Liquid Ashes, 1992

420 x 420 cm

Paint, Stitching and Photosilkscreen on six sections of non-woven fabric

Kassel, Germany, June-Aug 1992

London, England, April-May 1993

New York, USA, June-Aug 1994

Rotterdam, Holland, Dec 1993 — Jan 1994

AIRMAIL PAINTING NO. 71

The 6th History of the Human Face (Red and Black Camino), 1989

210 x 1400 cm

Photosilkscreen on ten sections of non-woven fabric

Berlin, Germany, Sept-Oct 1989

Santiago, Chile, Jan 1990

Manchester, England, Mar-April 1990

Banff, Canada, July-Sept 1990

Boston, USA, Jan-Feb 1990

London, England, April-May 1993

Southampton, England, Aug-Sept 1993

Rotterdam, England, Dec-Jan 1993-94

AIRMAIL PAINTING NO. 103

To Return (RTM), 1993

420 x 420 cm

Painting, Charcoal, Stitching and Photosilkscreen on six sections of non-woven fabric

Rotterdam, Holland, Dec 1993 — Jan 1994

AIRMAIL PAINTING NO. 75

If Left To Its Own Devices, 1989

203 x 280 cm

Paint, Embroidery, Stitching and Photosilkscreen on two sections of non-woven fabric

Sydney, Australia, Oct-Nov 1989

Santiago, Chile, Nov 1989

Melbourne, Australia, April 1990

Canberra, Australia, May 1990

Adelaide, Australia, May-June 1990

London, England, April-May 1993

Southampton, England, Aug-Sept 1993

Rotterdam, Holland, Dec 1993 — Jan 1994

AIRMAIL PAINTING NO. 90

The Corpse, The Treasure, 1991

350 x 280 cm

Paint, Feather, Stitching and Photosilkscreen on three sections of non-woven fabric

New York, USA, Sept-Dec 1991

Seville, Spain, Aug-Oct 1992

Paris, France, Dec 1992 — Jan 1993

London, England, April-May 1993

Southampton, England, Aug-Sept 1993

Rotterdam, Holland, Dec 1993 — Jan 1994

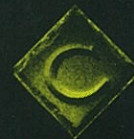
A project of the New Zealand International Festival of the Arts, 1994.

Organised by the Institute for Contemporary Arts, London in association with the Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam.

Generously supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile and the Embassy of Chile, New Zealand.

City Gallery

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