

# Packing Work for Shipment

by Dee Schaad

When shipping work to galleries and exhibitions, it's important to be very careful when packing the items to be shipped. I've shipped my own work for many years, and have been on the receiving end for work delivered to our university gallery many times. I'm frequently amazed at the poor packaging of fragile pieces and at the surprise artists express when informed that their carefully made items arrived broken. And while most artists do their own packing, having work packed by the shipper is no guarantee. Most packers have little training, and may not be aware of the issues involved with packing ceramics. To this I can attest from personal experience. Once (and only once) when I was in a hurry, I had my work packed by the shipper. Needless to say, it arrived broken. I watched the worker pack the piece and was suspicious but said nothing. Fortunately, it was insured and I had a similar piece to replace it, but it was a valuable lesson.

## THE RULES

Packing properly is not difficult and there are only a few rules.

- Don't be a cheapskate—make sure you have appropriate packing materials, foam peanuts, bubble pack, the correct box size, etc.
- Boxes should be big enough to allow space for packing material around the work.
- Always pack a box in a box. It's critical that the pieces be completely immobile and separated from other objects and any crushing force that may come from the outside of the second box.

## SUPPLIES

I get my boxes from two sources. There are several businesses in Indianapolis where I live that sell used boxes and new packing materials of all types. Used boxes are very inexpensive and I can usually purchase just the right size. I never look for boxes at liquor stores or other such places because they're seldom sturdy or the appropriate size. I buy bubble pack in a big roll and peanuts by the cubic yard in large enough quantities to



**1** Wrap pieces (like lids or cups and saucers) separately and thoroughly in bubble pack secured with tape.



**2** The bubble-wrapped pieces are placed in a box on a bed of Styrofoam peanuts with ample room for more peanuts, keeping the actual piece a couple of inches from the wall of the box.



**3** Finish topping off the first box with Styrofoam peanuts and then seal it with shipping tape.

be practical. If you buy in small, prepackaged amounts, you will probably pay too much. My second source is a business close to where I live that sells new shipping materials. They have a catalog and packing materials that will amaze you. Office supply stores are an excellent source. I like to keep my packing simple so I use pretty basic stuff. Check the Yellow Pages or do a web search for "Packaging Materials" and "Boxes-Corrugated and Fiber."

## ODDITIES

Sometimes work can be oddly shaped, exceptionally large or extremely fragile. This can result in the need to be extra careful while packing. Just make sure all the pieces are rendered immobile, that plenty of separation is provided, and that, above all, the boxes you use are the appropriate size for the work. If large enough boxes are not available, you may need to construct (or have constructed for you) shipping crates. If you wish to be extra cautious, you may want to contact a shipper that specializes in shipping art work. It will be expensive, but safe delivery is the likely result.

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## PACKING AS PRESENTATION

by Annie Chrietberg

Packing is part of your presentation. Recycled packing materials are acceptable, as long as they are clean (but never use newspaper). Don't allow your stored packing materials to get dusty in your studio, and don't use anything that smells bad. Think about pleasing the person who is going to unpack your work, and pack it neatly as well as safely to the industry standard.

When artist Mary Briggs sends a box of her work to the Red Lodge Clay Center, she includes a little surprise like a sprig of lavender or a couple of bags of tea. There is something so fun, kind and wonderful about that simple gesture. Small gestures like that can go a long way in terms of fostering a good gallery/artist relationship.

Remember that artwork that arrives broken cause a lot of extra work for the gallery owner. There are phone calls to make and forms to fill out, and if something isn't packed correctly and it breaks, the shipper is not liable. If this happens too often with a particular artist's work, the gallery may decide to stop working with that person. Save yourself and the gallery time and disappointment by wrapping and boxing your work carefully and choosing an appropriate shipping method.



**4**  
Place in another box on a layer of Styrofoam peanuts. Pour peanuts around the edges. Make sure you have at least one inch or more of tightly packed material between the inner box and the outer box.



**5**  
Fill the remaining space with Styrofoam peanuts.



**6**  
Seal with shipping tape. Now it should be ready for almost anything.