

Seized Cuban crop-dusting plane reassembled as piece of art

By Associated Press

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MIAMI - A vintage Cuban government-owned crop dusting plane seized by the United States after a pilot and his family used it to leave the island is now a piece of art.

The Russian-made Antonov An-2 Colt was taken by U.S. court order in a rare judgment against Fidel Castro's regime.

The eight Cubans landed in Key West in November 2002, and the plane was seized to help satisfy a \$27-million judgment won in 2001 by the ex-wife of a Cuban spy.

After sitting in Key West storage for about 18 months, the plane was taken apart and reassembled in a hangar, where artist Xavier Cortada began painting the plane Friday. He says he envisions painting open mouths to signify the lack of freedom of expression on the communist island.

He will surround the plane with 45 painted trunks numbered 1959 to 2004 for the years of Castro's rule.

The trunks will be filled with letters from exiles about their personal experiences leaving Cuba.

Cortada said he is soliciting letters now and will invite visitors to the exhibit to write letters.

"As an artist, my job is to look at my world and express it for others to see," Cortada said. "But with this project, I thought, maybe it's not just my expression that is important here. Maybe it's their expression that is of utmost value."