

# The Art of Smuggling

By [Hiya Swanhuysen](#), Wednesday, Mar 23 2011



Julio Morales makes the horrible beautiful. His art is calm and precise, and it has a specifically airy quality that might be a middle finger to the term “heavy-handed” (a catchphrase for those who say art and politics don’t mix). It hurts to look at.

At his first solo show, “**Contrabando**,” you don’t understand, at first glance, what you’re seeing; it looks like something simplified or unserious, a cartoon character or an architect’s blueprint. But soon enough you see the people, pastel-colored and transparent in their watercolor rendering, underneath. That’s when it starts to hurt — once you realize a lot of Morales’ work is based on photographs from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection website. These people were caught on their way into the U.S., stuffed inside SpongeBob SquarePants toys(children), sewn into car seats, or stuffed behind dashboards. Some works are based on the artist’s memories of growing up in the Tijuana/San Diego area, and another focus is the carefully constructed hidden passageways built by human traffickers; Morales builds wooden scale models of them, and the phrase “underground railroad” springs to mind whether you want it to or not.

The opening reception for “Contrabando” starts at 4 p.m.

Tuesdays-Saturdays. Starts: April 2. Continues through April 28, 2011

<http://www.sfweekly.com/sanfrancisco/the-art-of-smuggling/Content?oid=2180985>