

Contra-Band: Hidden in Plain Sight

GREGORY THOMAS SPAW

American University of Sharjah

LEE-SU HUANG

University of Florida

Have laptop—will travel. We are representative of the next generation of global academics and design practices. The demarcations of distance and time zones between our collaborations are seldom a real hindrance; digital information is happy to travel underneath the oceans at half the speed of light. Perhaps the real encumbrance in working as a geographically estranged practice is dealing with the physical manifestations of our work. We make things and thus the logistics of procuring, fabricating, and transporting our constructs across state lines and international borders is the real challenge.

Our proposed portmanteau plays on the ease by which ideas, images, and intellectual property move across geopolitical borders, while inversely operating across similar lines of demarcation with physical means can prove taxing, fraught, and risky. Starting from the Samsonite bag made famous by Diller+Scofidio's Tourisms installation, we have employed our skills in fabrication and interactivity to augment the enclosure such that the personal contents are exposed to all that dare look as the piece serves its intended role as luggage for the conference attendee.

Beyond the discomfort this radical transparency may elicit in both bystanders and owner, the inclusion of illicit contra-band as suggestive imagery printed in invisible UV reactive ink is hidden in plain sight, illuminated by UV LEDs when the inquisitive passerby comes in for a closer look. Winning this game can only be achieved by taking the risk of smuggling this peculiar paraphernalia across international borders and arriving in Milwaukee with the baggage tag firmly attached.

