



CA Mission

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CÉSAR RUBIO

Bay Area artist Yoram Wolberger says that the contrast between his *CA Mission*, an 18-by-14-foot wall sculpture inspired by a cheap plastic toy, and the sleek lobby of San Francisco's luxury Millennium Tower, where it hangs, makes him grin. The idea for the piece came to Wolberger when he noticed a model kit for a Spanish mission at a local hobby shop and was told that many fourth graders in California use the item as part of the state's social studies curriculum. His curiosity stoked, Wolberger did a bit more digging into the history of missions and uncovered a dark past: Spanish missionaries and soldiers often enslaved indigenous people to construct the buildings, bringing harsh working conditions and European diseases that eventually decimated the tribes.

Feeling that the innocent school assignment didn't reflect the disturbing historical accounts, Wolberger decided to literally magnify the issue. In past projects, the artist has

enlarged the distorted details of toy soldiers and cowboys and Indians in order to expose a stark contradiction often found in children's playthings. "Enlarging items makes it more difficult to disregard their imperfections," Wolberger says. "A toy soldier represents war, but kids play with them all over the world."

Using 3D computer modeling, Wolberger created an amalgamation of different California missions, melding the towers of Mission Santa Cruz and the walls of Mission Dolores into one structure. With a background in commercial design, Wolberger knows all about the downsides of mass production: The industrial molds that shape these products are often shoddy and lose their form over time. This disposable construction manifested itself in the frame holding *CA Mission* together; Wolberger purposely made it crooked because if it were part of an actual model, it would be tossed in the trash. The sculpture, however, appears to have staying power. —Carolyn Cotney