



Major Career Retrospective of José Bedia at Miami Art Museum

Featuring Large-Scale Installations, Paintings, and Works on Paper that Reveal the Artist's Spiritual Journeys and their Rich Cultural Foundations

MIAMI—April 12, 2012—A major career retrospective of the work of José Bedia at Miami Art Museum (MAM) explores the influence of indigenous cultures and religions from the Caribbean, North and South America, and Africa on the artist's work over the last three decades. *Transcultural Pilgrim: Three Decades of Work by José Bedia*, featuring 35 artworks including large-scale figurative paintings, installations and drawings, highlights the layering of spiritual, social and historical constructs in Bedia's body of work—all of which are retold through a highly personal lens. On view from Thursday, May 24 through Sunday, September 2, 2012, the exhibition is the first to comprehensively examine the rich iconography of Bedia's artistic output. *Transcultural Pilgrim* is among the last four exhibitions MAM will show in its current building, before making the transition to its new Herzog & de Meuron facility in Museum Park in fall 2013.

"The incredible melding of cultural ideas and symbols in José Bedia's work has a special resonance in the distinctly diverse Miami community, where so many nationalities, races, heritages and religions come together and Bedia, himself, lives," said Thom Collins, director of Miami Art Museum. "*Transcultural Pilgrim* reveals the unexpected parallels between the cultural practices of disparate communities from around the globe and, in doing so, creates new parallels to contemporary life—exemplifying MAM's dedication to presenting artists and works to which our audiences will have strong connections."

Bedia is an acclaimed member of Cuba's "Generation of the '80s," a group of pioneering young artists who incorporated Cuban vernacular and spiritual references into their work and experimented with eclectic visual forms. Throughout the last 30 years, Bedia has traveled to the Sonoran Desert in Mexico, North American Plains, Amazonian rain forest, Dominican countryside, and the Central African savanna, among numerous other locations, in search of artistic and spiritual peers and to participate in what he defines as "diverse spiritual worlds." The featured works in *Transcultural Pilgrim*—with their sacred and autobiographical references, strong graphic quality, and philosophical complexity—represent the traces of Bedia's artistic and spiritual journeys, which have shaped his artistic practice. The exhibition also includes select artifacts from Bedia's persona collection, which have inspired the forms and content of his work.

Organized by the Fowler Museum at UCLA and guest curated by Judith Bettelheim and co-curator Janet Catherine Berlo, *Transcultural Pilgrim: Three Decades of Work by José Bedia* unfolds as a narrative of Bedia's pilgrimages around the globe.

- The first section includes works that address Bedia's involvement in the Afro-Cuban religion Palo Monte Mayombe—which he began practicing in the early 1980s in Cuba—as the foundation of his artistic practice. The central icon of the religion, the *nganga* or cauldron, is a recurring theme in his work. It is visible in *Mama quiere menga*, 1988, which depicts Bedia's torso in a brilliant red, showing the sacred marks of religious initiation and an empty *nganga*—which as it is filled represents the initiate's growing power.
- The works in the next section address Bedia's travels in Mexico, his studies with the Lakota peoples in North America, and visits to shamans in the Peruvian Amazon. They fuse his

cultural experiences and reveal religious parallels in the contemporary world. The large painting *Tunkashila*, 1995, depicts a central figure as a personified mountain, which holds in its hands an Edward Curtis photograph of a Plains Indian man, holding in his hands an eagle that will be used for ceremonial purposes. Bedia frequently uses such collaged historical photographs to add layers of meaning to his works.

- Another grouping pays homage to Caribbean revolutionary figures who combined their religious beliefs with a strong sense of social justice and activism. In this series, Bedia also uses reproductions of early photographs and reanimates them by contextualizing them in his work. One portrait entitled *Andrés Facundo Cristo de los Dolores Petit*, 2002, depicts Petit, a mid-19th century leader who established integrated houses of Afro-Cuban religions, with a full nganga—a representation of the centrality of Palo Monte to his practice.
- The final grouping focuses on Bedia's long-standing interest in African art and his pilgrimages to Zambia. It includes large-scale, almost 15-foot-wide, brightly-colored paintings, such as *Utenu Kazaye* and *Mupala*, both from 2007, which reference specific Chokwe masquerades from Zambia.
- The exhibition will also include three "Moments of Inspiration," displays of selections of objects from Bedia's vast personal collections, which include sculptures, textiles and drawings, principally from Africa and the indigenous Americas.

"José Bedia's work has a distinct anthropological quality and is imbued with his rich experience of diverse cultures, religions and histories," said Tobias Ostrander, chief curator at Miami Art Museum. "It expresses the connections between the physical and spiritual worlds, natural and man-made, as well as rituals created across time, region and culture in a deeply personal and, yet, openly accessible manner that draws the viewer into his world."

About José Bedia:

José Bedia was born in January 1959, the same month and year that Fidel Castro marched into Havana. He graduated from the Instituto Superior de Arte and was included in the groundbreaking Havana Biennials of the 1980s. He was selected for the exhibition *Magiciens de la terre*, held at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in 1989 and in 1991 moved to Mexico. In 1993, he immigrated to the United States. He presently lives and works in Miami.

Bedia's major projects include an invitational installation concurrent with the São Paulo Biennial and a travelling retrospective organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, both in 1994; and exhibitions at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Monterrey, Mexico, and Site Santa Fe in New Mexico in 1997; and a major solo exhibition at the Museo de Badajoz, Spain, in 2004. In spring 2011, the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno in Las Palmas, Canary Islands, mounted a retrospective exhibition of Bedia's installations.

Bedia's work is in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art; the Guggenheim Museum; and the Miami Art Museum, among others.

Exhibition Organization and Support:

Transcultural Pilgrim: Three Decades of Work by José Bedia is organized and produced by the Fowler Museum at UCLA and guest curated by Judith Bettelheim and co-curator Janet Catherine Berlo. Major support for the exhibition is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and the

Donald B. Cordry Memorial Fund. Additional support was provided by the Fay-Bettye Green Fund, the Pasadena Art Alliance, and Manus, the support group of the Fowler Museum.

The Miami presentation is supported by Macy's Foundation and Funding Arts Network. Additional support has been provided by ArtesMiami, Inc., EDGE Steak & Bar and Mily and Raúl de Molina.



About the Curators:

Judith Bettelheim holds a Ph.D. in art history from Yale University and is Professor Emerita of Art History at San Francisco State University where she taught from 1980-2009. She specializes in the Arts of Africa and the African Diaspora with an emphasis in Afro-Caribbean culture. She has received funding for fieldwork and publications from the Social Science Research Council, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Rockefeller Research Colloquium. In 1988, Bettelheim co-curated and co-authored *Caribbean Festival Arts* for the Saint Louis Art Museum. She is the editor of *Cuban Festivals: A Century of AfroCuban Culture* (2001). She authored "Ethnicity, Gender, and Power in Carnival in Santiago de Cuba" in *Negotiating Performance in Latin/o America* (1994). In 2005 she curated the traveling exhibition *AfroCuba: Works on Paper 1968-2003*, and in 2008 published "Lam's Caribbean Years: An Intercultural Dialogue," in *Wifredo Lam at the Miami Art Museum*.

Janet Catherine Berlo is an art historian who specializes in the indigenous arts of the Americas. She holds a Ph.D. in art history from Yale University and is a Professor of Art History and Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester. She received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1999 and a Getty Fellowship in 1995, and is the author of numerous articles and books on the arts of the Americas, including *Plains Indian Drawings 1865 - 1935* (1996), *Black Hawk's Vision of a Lakota World* (2000), *Native North American Art* (with Ruth Phillips, 1998), *Spirit Beings and Sun Dancers* (2000), and *American Encounters, Art, History and Cultural Identity* (co-authored, 2008). Berlo has conducted field research in Native American communities from Guatemala to the Canadian arctic.

About Miami Art Museum:

Miami Art Museum, a modern and contemporary art museum located in downtown Miami, FL, is dedicated to collecting and exhibiting international art of the 20th and 21st centuries with an emphasis on the cultures of the Atlantic Rim—the Americas, Europe and Africa—from which the vast majority of Miami residents hail. Miami Art Museum's educational programming currently reaches more than 30,000 people every year, with the largest art education program outside the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Miami Art Museum will reopen as Pérez Art Museum Miami in fall of 2013 in downtown Miami's Museum Park. The new, expanded museum, designed by Herzog & de Meuron, will provide room to showcase growing collections, expanded exhibition space to bring more world-class exhibitions to Miami-Dade County and an educational complex. For more information about Miami Art Museum, visit miamiartmuseum.org or call 305.375.3000.

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RELATED PROGRAMS

MAM @ Books & Books: Reading Art
Tuesday, May 22, 2012, 6:30-8pm
Books & Books, 265 Aragon Avenue, Coral Gables, FL 33134
Free and open to the public

Education@miamiartmuseum.org / 305.375.4073

Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy by Robert Farris Thompson, 1983. Thompson, and admirer and scholar of José Bedia's work, wrote this classical study of the spiritual art of the Afro-Atlantic world in 1983. Books & Books, 265 Aragon Avenue, Coral Gables, FL 33134. Free to the public. RSVP required to Education@miamiartmuseum.org.

Opening Reception for *Transcultural Pilgrim: Three Decades of Work* by José Bedia
Wednesday, May 23, 2012 / 6-9pm

RSVP@miamiartmuseum.org / 305.375.1704

MAM members free / non-members \$10

Transcultural Pilgrim: Three Decades of Work by José Bedia opens with a conversation between Bedia and exhibition curator Judith Bettelheim. Talk begins 6:30pm. Seating is limited. First come, first seated. Exhibition preview and reception 6-9pm.

Second Saturdays are Free for Families: "Symbolic Ships" presented by MetLife Foundation
Saturday, June 9, 2012 / 1-4pm, tours 2pm

Free and open to the public

Education@miamiartmuseum.org / 305.375.4073

Look for boats in the art of José Bedia in the upstairs galleries. He has travelled across oceans in search of knowledge and experiences connected to different cultures. What would you bring to share from your life on a trip far away? In the workshop, create a small ship to carry special symbols from one culture to another. Additional support provided by Miami Salon Group, Inc.

Lecture by Robert Farris Thompson: "The Grand Illuminator: The Art and World Impact of José Bedia"

Saturday, June 16, 2012 / 2-3pm

MAM members free / non-members \$8 (general museum admission)

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In conjunction with *Transcultural Pilgrim: Three Decades of Work* by José Bedia, Robert Farris Thompson, Col. John Trumbull Professor, History of Art at Yale University will be speaking on "The Grand Illuminator: The Art and World Impact of José Bedia." An acclaimed writer and lecturer, Professor Thompson has devoted his life to the study of music, dance and the art history of the Afro-Atlantic world. Seating is limited. First come, first seated.

Curator-Led Exhibition Tour of *Transcultural Pilgrim: Three Decades of Work* by José Bedia
Saturday, July 21, 2012 / 1pm

MAM members free / non-members \$8 (general museum admission)

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Exhibition co-curator Janet Catherine Berlo will lead a walk-through of *Transcultural Pilgrim: Three Decades of Work* by José Bedia, and will address the Native American elements in Bedia's work. Berlo is an art historian who specializes in the indigenous arts of the Americas. She holds a Ph.D. in art history from Yale University and is a Professor of Art History and Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester.

Public Tours

Sundays / 2pm

Museum tours, free with museum admission, are offered Sundays at 2pm. Museum visitors meet in the lobby. Thematic tours are offered periodically to correspond with current exhibitions.

Group Tours

Docent-led tours in English or Spanish can be scheduled upon request. Docent-led tours are free to student groups. Contact Miami Art Museum's education department at 305.375.4073 for additional information.