

José Bedia

George Adams

This beautifully edited selection of 13 paintings and drawings by Cuban artist José Bedia, composed between 1992 and 1996, gave a concise overview of the lyrical threads that run throughout his work. Long immersed in Afro-Cuban religions and later in Native American traditions, Bedia freely synthesizes the human and spirit worlds in strong, graphic images replete with stories at once personal and universal.

In *Wings My Enemies Give Me* (2001), a crowd of kitchen knives and scissors stabbing the back of a figure assumes a wing pattern, alluding to the reactions Bedia got when he left Cuba in 1993 and his career took off. In *Lungoa* (1999), a long, vinelike form stretching across a horizontal swampy green field takes on human dimensions. As the ends sprout hands holding a walking stick, the plant becomes a metaphor for humanity groping through the morass of life. For several ink drawings, including *Confusión del oso hormiguero* (Confusion of the Ant Eater, 2007), Bedia used mottled amate paper, handmade in Mexico from bark. In this image, the supposed natural order of life appears to have gone topsy-turvy, as a giant stylized anteater bears down with its curlicue tongue on a little mound filled with tiny flailing human figures.

All of Bedia's works blend humor with pathos, even two from his series of ominous "warship" paintings, begun in 2000 after his wife's death. In *A Promising Future* (2005), a steely gray tanker plowing through the water seems indomitable, but as the name of the ship, *Cassandra*, indicates, danger is in the offing. Indeed, little horned tricksters, both comic and menacing, are scaling the sides of the craft—symbols of life's unpredictability.

—Hilarie M. Sheets



José Bedia, *Confusión del oso hormiguero* (Confusion of the Ant Eater), 2007, ink and conte crayon on amate paper, 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 94 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". George Adams.