



TAKE A LOOK

NORTON
MUSEUM
OF ART

José Bedia (Cuban, born 1959)
Si se pudiera (If Only I Could), 1993
Acrylic on canvas
63 x 78 in. (160.0 x 198.1 cm)
Purchase, R. H. Norton Trust, 95.15
© José Bedia



Si se pudiera

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A CLOSER LOOK

CONTEMPORARY COLLECTION

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ABOUT



The Artwork

In 1990, José Bedia left his home country of Cuba. He arrived in Miami in 1993, the same year he created *Si se pudiera*. In this painting, we see a person rowing a boat away from what looks like an island. Viewers may notice a thin line between the boat and the island which upon further inspection resembles a rope tethered to a palm tree. Viewers may also notice José Bedia has painted three lines underneath the tip of the island to suggest ripples in the water. Three words are painted as if they are emerging from the rower's mouth: 'me la llevo' which translates as 'I'll take her with me'. A mermaid, a recurring mythological figure that represents Cuba in Bedia's work, calls to him. At the bottom of the painting, Bedia has written 'Si se pudiera', which translates to, 'If only I could'.

José Bedia adds to the atmosphere of this work of art by using his handprints to create texture over the entire canvas. Bedia's handprints convey a sense of personal reclamation of the work of art and alludes to certain indigenous American painting traditions. Also referencing the ancestral past, elongated figures and basic geometric shapes in the foreground (lower), middle ground (middle) and background (upper part) of the painting tell a vibrant story about his experience as an immigrant.

The Artist

José Bedia is one of the leading Cuban-born contemporary artists. He was born on January 13, 1959, in La Havana, Cuba. As a child, Bedia enjoyed sketching and drawing comics. He joined the prestigious art school, San Alejandro Academy, where he refined his painting skills and developed his interest in indigenous cultures of the Americas and the African Diaspora. During his studies at San Alejandro, he began to portray figures in an elongated manner, referencing indigenous American cultures.

Bedia became a key figure among a group of artists called the "Generation de Los Ochenta" (Generation of the '80's) who were educated and worked during the time of Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba. During Cuba's intervention in Angola, Bedia was sent to Central Africa as part of the Culture Brigade in 1984. This journey sparked his interest in African influences in the Americas even further.

José Bedia left Cuba in 1990 and moved to Mexico and then the United States, settling in Miami, Florida where he still lives today. His artwork references many topics including immigration, ancient, indigenous cultures, Afro-American cultures, and how cultural heritage influences our everyday lives.

SEE



Observe & Describe

Have students take time to look at José Bedia's painting *Si se pudiera (If Only I Could)*. Ask them to observe shapes, lines, colors, textures, and the position of people and/or objects. Encourage students to try to observe as many details as possible before giving any information about the artwork.

You can use the following questions to guide the conversation and to encourage them to look closely.

- What do you see?
- Where do you look first? How do your eyes move around the work of art?
- What do you notice about the shapes? The colors?
- What do you notice about the texture?
- What medium/material do you think might have been used to make this work of art? Why?

Looking Closely

Ask students to look closely and describe what they see. Provide students time to answer the following questions:

- If you were inside this work of art, what would you see, hear, taste, smell and feel?
- What time of day do you think this might be? Why?
- What do you notice about the two figures in the work of art?
- What do you think they might be saying to each other?
- How do you think the person feels in the boat? Why do you say that?

Above

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© José Bedia

Right

Teresita Fernández (American, born 1968)
Nocturnal (Rise and Fall), 2010
Solid charcoal, graphite, and mixed media on wood panel
96 x 72 x 2 in. (243.8 x 182.9 x 5.1 cm)
Purchase, R. H. Norton Trust, 2011.21a-b
© Teresita Fernández



THINK

Let's Compare

Have students observe closely *Nocturnal (Rise and Fall)* by Teresita Fernández.

- What do you see?
- What looks familiar to you?
- Does this place remind you of anywhere?

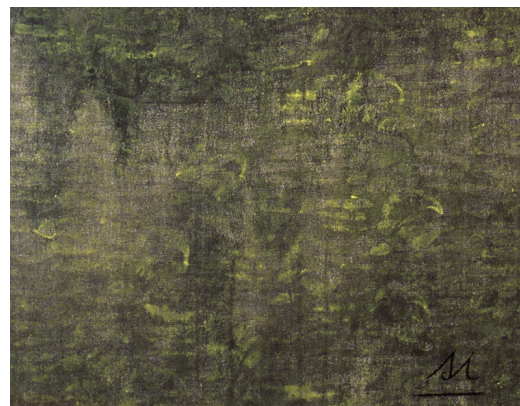
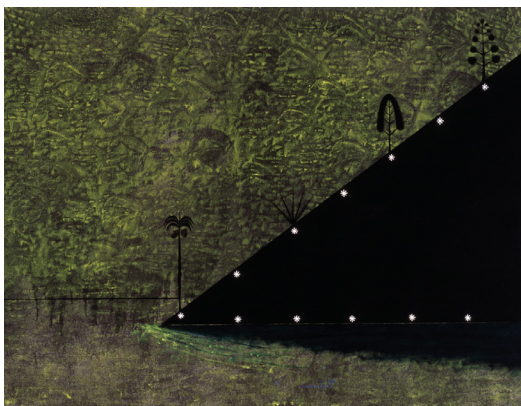
Teresita Fernández

Born in 1968 in Miami, Florida and currently residing in New York City, Teresita Fernández creates large- and small-scale sculptures and paintings using materials from the earth such as graphite, iron, silver, and glass, to reexamine what a landscape can be. As she begins to research for her artwork, she thinks about the place she is depicting. Fernández creates landscapes inspired by places all over the world, but like Bedia, she has also researched and made art about her own ancestral land of Cuba.

Now, have students look carefully at the artworks by José Bedia and Teresita Fernández. Ask students to observe the foreground (front), middle ground (middle) and background of the artworks. Have students think about the following questions:

- How are these two artworks similar?
- How are these two artworks different?
- Bedia uses acrylic paint in *Si se pudiera (If Only I Could)* and Fernández uses graphite. Do the materials used influence how we view the works of art? Why or why not?
- How do these artists use texture to create mood or atmosphere in these works of art?
- How are the compositions (arrangements of visual elements) in each work of art similar or different? What makes you say that?
- What do you think the artists are trying to communicate through their work? What makes you say that?
- Do you connect personally with these works of art? How so?

WONDER



Extend it! Activity Ideas

For Younger Students

Along with an adult, have students use the internet to research a place they would like to visit. Encourage them to tell a story about their imagined journey through art. They can use all kinds of media to communicate their story, from drawing to collage paper to paint to writing, even video!

For Older Students

Have students write a letter (a couple of sentences to one paragraph) from the perspective of the person in the boat. Share the letters in small groups or through a large discussion.

Classroom Discussion

José Bedia creates work of art about where he is from because it is an important part of who he is. Name something special about you that makes you who you are.

- *Did you learn something new about yourself or about your classmates through this discussion?*
- *If you could take a journey anywhere, where would you go and why? What would you want to take with you?*
- *Is there anything else you wonder about this artwork?*

Details from José Bedia
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