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# Spiritual Forces

TAMBARAN 2 GALLERY PRESENTS EXHIBITION OF WORKS BY CUBAN ARTIST JOSÉ BEDIA.

## NEW YORK, NY

The Cuban artist José Bedia began drawing at the age of 11. At 13 he was drawing pictures of American Indians. His interest in the art and artifacts of indigenous people has resulted in his house being “full of things,” he says. “Tribal objects mostly. Displayed all around. For me it’s not a collection. It’s like an open library. I learn from these objects in front of me, slowly, day by day. Maps, weapons, all kinds of things. Baskets, pots. African, American Indian, South American.”

The exhibition, *José Bedia: Tribal Affinities*, explores the relationship between his collections and his work. It runs at the Tambaran 2 Gallery in New York through May 28. It was curated by James Trotta-Bono and Jose Bedia Jr.

Trotta-Bono writes, “José has trained himself

1. Painted and incised shield, Southwest/Pueblo, ca. early 19<sup>th</sup> century, buffalo hide and mineral pigments, 22”

2. José Bedia (Cuban, b. 1959), *maestro y discipulo*, acrylic on canvas, 2009, 70½ x 97½”

3. *Bapende – mbuya*, Africa/Pende, wood, natural fiber coiffure, rust, black and white pigment, 18 x 8½”

4. José Bedia (Cuban, b. 1959), *blood indian cayuse*, mixed media on paper, 2015, 38 x 50”

through experiencing and studying tribal art and cultures both in the field and academically. From the age of 18, Bedia has been immersed in tribal cultures. The spiritual beliefs and deep animistic iconography is ingrained in Bedia’s unique painting style. Whether he is living with the Sioux in North Dakota or witnessing Holy Week ceremonies of the Cora Indians in the Sierra Madres, Bedia takes copious notes and sketches to supplement his memories.”

In 1983 Bedia was initiated into Palo Monte, a religion that originated among Kongo slaves from Africa who were brought to Cuba. Bedia explains, “Palo teaches that there are spiritual forces within the natural world. Our lives depend on them. The religion offers ways to relate to those forces and bring their energy to play more directly in our lives.”

He explained his interest in tribal cultures. "There is a common pursuit, how to look at the world, how to look at nature, how to think even in a way which is currently being discussed as ecology." For indigenous people it was "just common sense." In his research and in his work he explores "a series of constants, although there is no possible link between this culture and the other. More than anything I have engaged in the idea of looking for similarities rather than differences."

Bedia sometimes collages vintage photographs onto his paintings and then enlarges the image in expressive brushstrokes. Bedia's *blood indian cayuse* contains an image of an 1882 photograph of a Kainah (Blood) Indian with his horse, a Cayuse. The man is dressed in a coat made from a Hudson's Bay Blanket. Cayuse



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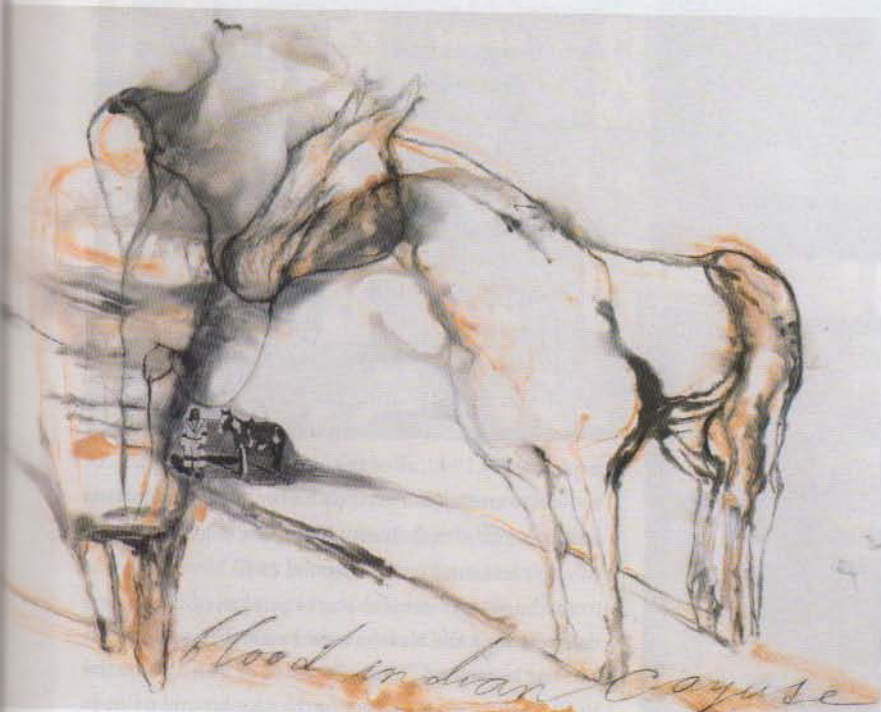


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ponies were common among the Indians of the Northwest and are now nearly extinct. The Hudson's Bay Company traded blankets as far back as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Later, more colorful, manufactured trade blankets were traded with the Indians and adopted as significant objects in their daily and ceremonial lives.

The painting *maestro y discipulo* depicts a man kneeling before a man/deer. Bedia explores the parallel worlds of man and animal as well as man and machines and man and the world at large. The man/deer is common in Native American stories as is the concept of animism—the attribution of souls or spirits to animals and nature. Bedia notes that Western culture rejects animism but it has been a concept that has been with him since his youth and his introduction to Palo Monte.

Bedia's work is not transparent. The allusions and relationships don't immediately reveal themselves. They perpetuate the mystery of the human/animal/spiritual world. «



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Tambaran 2 Gallery  
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