
ART IN REVIEW

José Bedia

*George Adams Gallery
41 West 57th Street
Manhattan
Through Dec. 20*

José Bedia is best known for his paintings, drawings and altar-like installations based on images drawn from Afro-Cuban religions. The new work in this show, in the form of painted wooden plaques modeled on children's toys and folk carving, is smaller in scale and lighter in tone, but is marked by the incisive graphic style and complex ideas that have been this artist's signature.

Some of the silhouette figures of animal and animal-human forms seem to enact moralizing Aesop's fable-style stories; others are more clearly religious in import; still others are politically pointed. On a carved shelf the tiny plastic figure of a white hunter is followed by two black bearers whose thoughts may be surmised from words inscribed, cartoon style, on the shelf's back wall. Cutout shapes of boats and trucks filled with crouching figures refer to the dangerous journey of immigrants trying to gain entry to the United States.

The show also includes 10 visionary drawings on paper done in colored ink and quivering, electric-current lines, which reflect Mr. Bedia's interest in American Indian ledger drawings.

Best, though, is a small box, modeled on a shaman's medicine container, which sits in the center of the gallery.

Mr. Bedia has turned it into a distillation of Cuban spiritual traditions, dividing its narrow interior into little rooms, each furnished with an altar for a different religion — Christian, Santería and Palo Monte, of which the artist is a devotee — with ritual paraphernalia in miniature provided for each. The result may look like a doll house, but, packed with significant matter, it can also serve, symbolically at least, as a passport and safe conduct from this world to the next.

HOLLAND COTTER