

# Pet Projects

The new year brings personal visions rendered in a spectrum of media.

By George Melrod

From Tang dynasty ceramics to the stately 18th-century renderings of George Stubbs, horses have served as one of art's most venerable icons. For the past two decades the equine muse has found a devotee in sculptor Deborah Butterfield. Butterfield's horses, made from scraps of rusty



metal, or twigs and wood cast in bronze (as in *KaPakabi*, above), are studies in sculptural concision, no less elegant for their raw or rugged mien. Dexterously capturing gestures in a gnarled branch or a sweeping arc of metal, her volumetric sketches are dense with coiled energy. But the sculptures are as much a testament to her own deft manipulation of materials as to the untamed spirit of her subjects. Butterfield's newest works are at Edward Thorp in New York City through January 18.

José Bedia came to Miami in 1993, having spent most of his life in Cuba under Castro's rule. Since then, he's become one of Miami's rising art stars, and a symbol for the arrival of a new generation of Cuban artists. It is not surprising then that exile, migration, and dislocation are all central issues in Bedia's work. His characters are never truly isolated, however. In Bedia's worldview, humanity and nature, the physical and the spiritual, all flow together. While his imagery addresses contemporary geopolitics, it draws its voice and heart from primitive cultures, particularly the Afro-Cuban religion of *palo monte*, imported to Cuba by Kongo slaves. *Palo monte* celebrates the harmony of man and nature, as well as the mystical powers contained within a ritual object or graphic symbol. Likewise, a summer spent with the Dakota Sioux in the 1980s left Bedia with an abiding appreciation for the beliefs and pictographic traditions of Native Americans. Bedia's own graceful style draws from both these sources, along with his childhood love of comic books and a modern

appreciation for Western art. Like cartoons, Bedia's paintings, drawings, and installations have a strong narrative content. Some works show his signature silhouetted figures spanning rivers or crossing in boats; others depict his characters interacting with animals or spirits; others, such as *Y Ahora Pa Donde Tata* (above), present more celestial vistas. Conflating mythical passages and real-world wanderings, Bedia's universe is simultaneously grounded in hard fact and brimming with wonder. On view at Fredric Snitzer in Miami January 3-31.

Like a precocious child of Warhol and Albers, Kate Shepherd creates simple, delicate artworks combining a love of color composition with cartoony renderings of animals or domestic images. Fusing a detached tone with her would-be lovable subject matter, her work is at once deadpan, playful, and wryly humorous. And small: Her drawings, made of graphite,

pen, or carbon-paper transfer over pastel-colored paint chips, as in *Small Catmen* (10), at left, often measure just a few inches. Her sculptures, though larger, also employ boxy serial elements and nuanced colorations. On display at Boesky & Gallery in New York City from January 16.

