

Art Review

Kohler Arts Center's Tales of American Diversity

BY PEGGY SUE DUNIGAN



José Bedia, *Mbua-Ndoki (Sorcerer Dog)*

Who can resist a well-crafted story? The narratives portrayed in imaginative installations, images and objects at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in its new exhibition, “American Story,” reveal national diversity while celebrating personal perseverance.

The work of each of the 15 participating artists—Xenobia Bailey, José Bedia, Hawkins Bolden, Vernon Burwell, Lesley Dill, Jack Earl, Lisa Fifield, Molly Hatch, Yoshiko Kanai, Xao Yang Lee, David Lenz, Gregory Van Maanen, Alison Moritsugu, Adolph Vandertie and Charlie Willetto—presents a distinct idea. Numerous artworks are worthy of attention, but the exhibition presents several outstanding installations that rise above the rest. Among these is Cuban artist Jose Bedia’s monumental wall drawing that emerges into three dimensions. Titled *Mbua-Ndoki*, it evokes the mythological domesticated animal leaving home to search for a more satisfying life. Bedia’s fusion of ethnic iconography and symbols of home, island, memory and the past relate to his journey to the United States after being displaced from Cuba due to political turmoil, and speaks to other psychological or physical journeys one often experiences during a lifetime.

Shimmer, a wire and foil two-wall installation by Lesley Dill, features a shower of metallic strands falling to the floor with the words of a Salvador Espriu

poem written above and below the thin silken tresses. The viewer is invited to stare upward and reflect upon art and language’s fragility, and the infinite number of possible interpretations.

Xenobia Bailey crochets rainbows of acrylic and cotton yarn into 10-foot-high tents encircled by colorful pompoms that may be physically entered for safety and shelter. Her *Moon Lodge* provides a sanctuary for childhood pleasures like reading or, in the case of *Sistah Paradise’s Great Walls of Fire Revival Tent*, spiritual meditation. Stitched with four, large, allseeing eyes on each corner and steaming teacups embedded in the outside ornamentation, the words of wisdom bordering this tent read: “She protects me with her gaze from a treasure house of abundant grace.”

Alison Moritsugu, who designs and prints tropical-hued wallpaper revisiting her Hawaiian homeland, depicts landscape through the decorative arts. Upon closer observation, her repetitive wall patterns reveal a delicate balance between nature’s beauty and treacherous disasters—including floods, lava flows, tropical storms and hurricanes—that express nature’s fury. Perhaps best of all, these pieces represent only a small sampling of this superb exhibit. The artwork whispers incredible stories to those willing to listen, and contributes to the viewer’s own evolving story.

“American Story” runs through the end of the year.