

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item G-2
July 9, 2024
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Amos Rojas, Jr.
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Arts and Culture Specialist, Catherine Cathers

Public Speaker(s)

Fredric Snitzer
Jose Bedia, Jr.
Maria Cruz
Jackson Rip Holmes

Agenda Item G-2 [12:40 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission approving the purchase and installation of the sculpture “A Perfect Place” by Jose Bedia (recommended by the Arts Advisory Panel, approval/denial vote: 7 to 0, and the Cultural Development Board approval/denial vote: 6 to 0); authorizing an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 amended budget to recognize as revenue a transfer from the Art in Public Places reserve, and appropriating such funds to put toward the purchase, cost, transportation, installation and related expenses.

Mayor Lago: Moving onto item G-2, time certain 12:00 p.m.

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City Attorney Suarez: G-2 is a Resolution of the City Commission approving the purchase and installation of the sculpture “A Perfect Place” by Jose Bedia (recommended by the Arts Advisory Panel, approval/denial vote: 7 to 0, and the Cultural Development Board approval/denial vote: 6 to 0); authorizing an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 amended budget to recognize as revenue a transfer from the Art in Public Places reserve, and appropriating such funds to put toward the purchase, cost, transportation, installation and related expenses.

Mayor Lago: How are you. Good afternoon.

Art Specialist Cathers: Good afternoon again. So, we have a presentation for this piece. So, I just want to review the process of how this project and proposal is coming before the Commission. The city did receive a proposal from Fredric Snitzer Gallery for the city to purchase “A Perfect Place” by artist Jose Bedia. On April 5th of 2023, the Arts Advisory Panel reviewed the proposal and recommended the acquisition of the piece. On December 4, 2023, staff conducted an appraisal, an independent appraisal of the piece. And on the 19th of December, the Cultural Development Board also reviewed the proposal to acquire the artwork and accepted the Art’s Panel recommendation and is recommending acquisition to the City Commission today. There is a location proposed, there wasn’t a final determination for the proposal went to either of these boards. So, these are just a couple of images of the piece which we’ll see throughout the presentation. A little bit about the artist. Jose Bedia is born 1959 in Cuba. He does live and works in Miami. Early on, he excelled in drawing and illustration and draftsmanship, and his work reflects the artist’s interest in anthropological studies and Afro-Transatlantic cultures, including the religious beliefs of the artist. The imagery has strong storytelling aspects. It’s informed by the ancestral culture and the influence of popular cultures. His work has been exhibited in Havana, a, Sao Paulo, Venice, and Beijing Biennales. The artwork is in prominent private and public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan, Whitney, Guggenheim, Tate Modern, the Smithsonian, and so many more. This is another view. You can see it has quite a different look, depending on which side of the figure that you’re on. The piece, “A Perfect Place” was created in 2001 and the materials are steel, telephone poles, and different hardware. It did say steel in here, but it’s an alloy steel. It’s a rather large, unique piece by about 20 by 23 and 7 feet. About the artwork itself. The sculpture represents Miami as a reclining figure in a hammock and presents a projection of the artist animal alto-ego face, which is an important symbol used frequently in the artist’s work. The piece further represents a duality of the human character and animal spirit. Just to review the current condition. It’s currently installed at the Bass Museum of Art, which has been on loan from Fredric Snitzer. It has been installed on this site for about 23-plus years and does require removal of the sculpture for redesign of the museum’s outdoor space. It has received minimal maintenance through the years and upon observing it myself, you know it has done incredibly well for its location. It does however require some cleaning, replacement of some of the hardware, replacement of the telephone poles, and restoration of the color of the chain. There have been no recorded incidents of public interaction with the artwork either, even though it’s been in a very public and accessible location. So, these are just some of the elements that would be addressed in restoration. This is the attachment on the telephone poles. Both of the telephone poles would be replaced as part of the restoration. That’s a closeup of that chain element. And as far as the locations that we are thinking of, the piece does require something that would have high

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visibility, is in a pedestrian-friendly location, requires an open area, and consideration of potential physical interaction, which of course if it is in a highly visible public location that helps deter any concerns for physical interaction. So, we are recommending that it be placed in the William H. Kerdyk Park. You can see it in the upper left-hand corner here where the small, yellow oval is, which is a high-trafficked area, probably the highest trafficked area on that corner, and also gives us the opportunity to place a public art piece on the south side of U.S.-1 where we don't have very many pieces. We do have the agreement that is attached within the item. So, the breakdown of the funding estimate. The appraisal which is already been conducted came in at about \$1,500. The artwork purchase itself is estimated at \$90,000. There are engineering costs. These are all estimates, we don't have final estimates since we haven't gone to bid for any of these things yet. The foundation work, lighting, signage, etc., and we are sharing some of these costs with Fredric Snitzer. And I believe Fred is here today, so he can come up and speak to you more about the work itself and about this proposed acquisition for the city.

Mayor Lago: Good afternoon.

Mr. Snitzer: Good afternoon. I brought with me the artist son, Jose Bedia, Jr. He's going to talk to you a little bit about the work itself. I have to tell you it's very nostalgic for me to be here. I opened my gallery here in 1977, on Biltmore Way and have been in business for 46 years. So, it's kind of a pleasure to be back in Coral Gables. We're happy to answer questions. Jose Jr. can tell you more about the implications of the work, how it was made, and I can tell you any other issues that you might have. So, Jose, do you want to tell them about the piece?

Mr. Bedia: Yes. Thank you for your time. Just basically, my father wanted me to speak on his behalf about the meaning of the work. It's called "A Perfect Place" because it's meant to embody Miami itself as-a-whole. And this figure reclining on this hammock is supposed to represent someone coming to Miami and just being in a state of bliss and relaxation. And what seems to be a mask for a cap is actually the figures alter-ego, which is usually something he does in a lot of his work, is represent the human and animal nature of man and the duality of that, the symbiosis of both. One thing he wanted me to mention that was very important is that this was made 23 years ago, in a time before digital files. This was all done by hand and that aesthetic is not only something intentional. He literally into chalk etched into a giant piece of sheet metal this. Nowadays it would be done on a computer, it would be done laser etched. He wanted to do this, this way for the longevity of the piece. And the way it looks, which is kind of rustic, is intentional for the longevity. It's looked like that for 23 years. It's going to look like that for another 23 years. And that's something he wants to say, this is not a thing that is supposed to look shiny and pristine and perfect. Those things due intent to deteriorate quickly over time. This is basically going to look like that, and it's been next to the water, basically a block from the ocean for 23 years and it's survived, and it's been in perfect condition. Some minor repairs would be needed, but it's not anything crazy, and it is very emblematic of him and his work. The classic figure is something that you see in the work and again, that duality of man and nature is something he wanted to show in this work.

Mr. Snitzer: He's also probably the most important living contemporary artist in Miami, internationally well-known. Every major collection in the world has been important for many,

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many, many years, and the idea that a work by Bedia would be in Coral Gables makes perfect sense.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here.

Mr. Snitzer: Sure.

Mayor Lago: What is the will of the Commission? Any comments?

Vice Mayor Anderson: I do have some comments. He has some proposed locations; one is down at Kerdyk Park area. Ms. Cathers, I wonder if you could appraise us as to whether there was notice or community engagement to that neighborhood as to whether or not how they feel about this piece of artwork.

Art Specialist Cathers: We have not.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay. Is this the only piece that was considered?

Art Specialist Cathers: For that, yes, because we were specifically looking for a location for this piece. So, we did look at some other locations and we worked with the City Manager's office on that as well, and this is the one that seemed to make the most sense.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay.

Art Specialist Cathers: We did speak with Fred's team about it, and it is on the opposite side of the park from where the playground area is. It's not too far from the path where there's, like some exercise equipment.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Its fairly apparent, but I don't want to assume that the product is steel, and that the coloration is natural.

Art Specialist Cathers: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Based upon natural rust and so forth.

Art Specialist Cathers: Natural weathering, although it does not, I have to say, I did see it, it doesn't flake off or anything like that.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, when you touch it, it's not rust on your hands.

Mr. Snitzer: No.

Vice Mayor Anderson: My preference is to have notice to the community to make sure that they are going to love this piece. The last thing I want to do is put a piece in and then later on you get a thousand emails plus saying, why did you put this in our neighborhood. That's my preference.

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Mr. Snitzer: I can just mention that the piece has been in the Bass Museum in public display in a neighborhood, in a community for 23 years without any sort of negative or issues of any kind. And again, the Bass Museum, so the credibility of it in terms of a viable, important work of art is also there.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Then hopefully it will be well received by the community, but the last thing I want to do is say yes to something, put it there, and they say, oh my God, why didn't you ask us.

Mr. Bedia: And the subject matter itself is pretty...it's a figure hanging in a hammock. It's not anything controversial in any way, I would think.

Commissioner Castro: Well, I concur with the Vice Mayor. I've gotten some emails and phone calls regarding that maybe would be liked or disliked. So, I think if we engage with the community, I think it would be the best suggestion.

Commissioner Fernandez: My concern obviously is the patina. We receive complaints all the time about artwork which is fading. This one, obviously it looks like rusted metal, and I understand it's been in Miami Beach. We have a different art culture here than we do on Miami Beach. Nothing against the art piece. I understand the message that it's trying to relay, and I think it does. I'm just not sure it's something that the community would sign off on, and I agree with the Vice Mayor. My recommendation would be to maybe have a community meeting and then come back to us with what the response of the community was. I'm not comfortable approving \$153,000 for the art piece, unless we have the community's input on it.

Commissioner Fernandez: My thoughts, if the issue already came up as to people being on it or climbing it, the last place you'd put it is in a park where there are kids. That logic didn't make sense to me. It's an active park, they have little kids' soccer, they have a playground. Open space obviously, they want an open space, but one that kids naturally would climb things that are there. If they climb trees, I'm just saying.

Art Specialist Cathers: I think it was the placement. We talk about having it positioned higher than where it currently is and that was really coming from an anticipation of some comments that we might get, not from actual concern, and from what I understand that hasn't happened in almost 25 years.

Commissioner Fernandez: But I would have a secondary concern with that, these telephone poles are flimsy during a hurricane. The last thing we want is the art piece flying during a hurricane because the telephone poles give way. Closer to the ground it has a little more stability during a storm.

Mr. Snitzer: Again, with all due respect, to give you, our points. It's been there for 23 years on Miami Beach, a couple of hurricanes, public, a park, it's in Collins Park. I think that if we were proposing this with none of that history, I would certainly be asking the same questions, but we

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have this great history for the work in terms of oxidation, in terms of pretty much any question that you might have other than community support for. With all due respect, I'm just personally curious, with every work that you put in Coral Gables you get community consensus, do you take a vote on it, or just curious about the process.

Mayor Lago: So, if I may, I'm going to be very brief. You have to understand, things are very different now. At the end of the day, this gentleman's credentials speak for themselves. His work is all over South Florida. It's all-over major cities and museums. Just the museums that you mentioned are the most important museums, not only in this country, but probably the most important museums on the planet. So, we can't debate his credentials. We have to find something to debate. I don't have a problem with notice. If we want to have notice, it's perfectly fine. If they don't want to have it in a park, even though this is a pretty vast park and I think it would look really nice in this park. Let's move it to the proposed future park in downtown Coral Gables. We can move it into the Publix Park. I think it would be a very nice location. You could have it there and it would just be another beautiful amenity, another beautiful artwork that would be enjoyed in the downtown. Again, I think there's value. I think the pedigree of the work speaks for itself. I think the artist is a world-renowned artist. You have a pretty significant 7-0 vote from the board advising that they recommend the purchase of the work, and not only that, this work already comes with 23 years of pedigree. It comes from the Bass Museum, which again, is a significant statement and it's something that again, is innocuous. It's not an issue where it's offensive to anybody. I think it's already stood the test of time in regard to hurricanes, the elements, and when you look at the issue of the aesthetic, you are talking about Corten steel similar, correct.

Art Specialist Cathers: Its very similar. It's an alloy from what I understand, but not Corten.

Mayor Lago: But it's similar. If you look at Richard Serra's work, if you look at Robert Indiana's work, individuals who use that type of steel and that rust in their work, over the years the work gets that rustier look. It's part of the aesthetic of the work. I don't have an issue with going and getting additional public comments with potentially offering maybe two or three locations in the city where the work can go. I think that as a Cuban American artist who has been working in this community for the last 30-plus years, I think it's a strong addition to the arts and culture here in our community and it's another opportunity for you to come and visit and enjoy public art. So, whatever is the will of the Commission, I'm willing to move forward. I'm in favor of it. I think it would be great to discuss how we can have a public conversation in regard to the work and notify the residents either in the downtown or in this park that's being proposed.

Art Specialist Cathers: Just for the benefit of the Commission and to answer your question. Fred, if a piece is located in an urban environment or more commercial district, we typically do not do public comment, because it is in a transient environment. This one is kind of split, right. There are a lot of commercial properties there, but there are some residential too. So, whatever the will of the Commission is.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I just have a couple other questions, because there's an issue of timing.

Art Specialist Cathers: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: And the site, Mayor, you suggested would probably be not get as much public comment as you would maybe south of U.S.-1, that park is not going to be available for some time, the one behind Publix. So, I'll ask you to enlighten us on the timing issue.

Art Specialist Cathers: Yes. Right now, where it is, it does need to be removed immediately, you know, as soon as possible, so if we were to acquire it, then of course there would be storage costs because that particular location would not be available for a while.

Commissioner Castro: For \$500 a month.

Mayor Lago: Listen, I don't have an issue with storing it until we find the appropriate location in the city that either garners public support or doesn't need public support if it's in the downtown. So, what is the will of the Commission?

Commissioner Castro: I don't feel comfortable making a decision right now. I feel like maybe this piece can be a little controversial as the flower, the steel flower. I feel a little doubtful. I appreciate it. I love it. I just don't know if it's the greatest fit for our city.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Is there another location other than Kerdyk Park that you looked at?

Art Specialist Cathers: The other two locations that we looked at didn't have, well one was across from the Youth Center, which we were advised that was not a great location, and then another location was, it would end up being, I don't remember the cross street, but kind of close to the Underline, so in that area of the Underline, but on city property, we wouldn't want it on the Underline property for logistical reasons. It would not have as much pedestrian traffic. It would be more vehicle traffic, but we could look at that site again. That site was reviewed with the previous City Manager, so we could talk with your office again about different locations.

Vice Mayor Anderson: What are the cross streets on Ponce or U.S.-1.

Art Specialist Cathers: The one over by the Underline was between Ponce and U.S.-1, maybe close to Granada. It's just off the top of my head. I don't recall exactly. We were looking at some of those locations. There are a couple of pockets where it could still fit and be on city property.

Mayor Lago: That's why I mentioned, I think that the Publix is an opportunity. It's a great site, it's 20,000 square feet, it's downtown. I think that it wouldn't trigger any opposition. Again, we won't have it for another two years. The storage is minimal, and it could be something that we look forward to adding to the collection and making it visible in the downtown. The intent of acquiring the art in the downtown area that we've been adding is to have it in a walkable location where you can visit everything from Thomas Housecall work to Tony Craig, to...

Art Specialist Cathers: The other reason for this location was because, you know, I mentioned before wanting to get some artwork on the other side of U.S.-1 and that still is, there is some pedestrian traffic there and we felt that it could be interacted with really well.

Mayor Lago: I understand what you're trying to do, but at the end of the day, if its whether acquiring the work, an important work like this from a local artist or not acquiring, I'd rather have it in the downtown as part of our art portfolio which draws people to the community than not have the work. If the work is moved to the downtown and we find an appropriate location, is there more appetite to have the work in the downtown?

Commissioner Fernandez: I'm not – personally, I'm concerned with the condition of the art piece to spend taxpayer dollars towards purchasing it. Nothing against the artist and as I've spoken to Catherine and the City Attorney, my preference is always going to be to purchase pieces that are commissioned for work in the city, not something that has been displayed somewhere else, purchased through a gallery, to then have it in the city. That's my personal preference when it comes to art.

Mayor Lago: If I may correct you on one issue. This is not taxpayer dollars. This is money that comes in, in regard to Art in Public Places, as part of the one percent that comes in. No taxpayer dollars, not coming from the city coffers. It's not coming from taxes. It's not coming from anything at all. It only comes from when a person pays for a permit fee that one percent. At the end of the day, we don't have support for the work. I'm in favor of acquiring the work. I think it's a great piece of work. If it's good enough for the Bass Museum, and to hang in the Momo and the Whitney and those beautiful and the Guggenheim, I think it's great enough for the city, but at the end of the day, I just want to say thank you for your continued support for all your efforts, for always leading the way. To say that you started in Coral Gables is a big feather in our cap 47 years ago, that's a big deal, because you are one of the few galleries that – I think there are two galleries in Miami-Dade County that's accepted into Art Basel and you have been accepted to Art Basel since the first day that Art Basel moved to Miami-Dade County and that is amazing. So, outside of the sculpture and you've been representing Mr. Bedia for how many years?

Mr. Snitzer: Thirty.

Mayor Lago: So outside of the sculpture, putting the sculpture aside, we're moving on from that, to me, the fact that you started here in Coral Gables and that you've been around for 47 years and that you are in Art Basel and you do all the museum shows, excuse me, all the shows all over the United States and all over the world, it's a testament to the art community that you help build here, because as of what you've done here, you've seen other galleries sprout up, but you were the leader, you were the one that did it first. So, congratulations and thank you for your hard work, my friend.

Mr. Snitzer: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

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Mr. Snitzer: It means a lot. Thanks for your time.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yes.

City Clerk Urquia: We did have public comment.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. We'll have public comment.

City Clerk Urquia: Mrs. Maria Cruz.

Mrs. Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road. I don't know how this happened. The resolution was to approve the purchase, first we have to approve the purchase and then this goes where? All of a sudden, it was a given, we're going to approve the purchase and now let's find a place. First of all, I don't think we should approve anything under pressure. The fact that it has to be moved concerns me. Why does it have to be moved? It's been at the Bass Museum, you know what, that's not a children's area. The Bass Museum is not where you see lots of children. Okay. I know Miami Beach well. Number two, if you look at the pictures, our people, our residents have issues with the flowers, a number of other art in public places. Let me tell you, even the one in front of the Police Department has had some comments, and we are going to bring a piece, we are going to bring an art piece that is already rusted, that was not made for us, that was already someplace else, that doesn't make sense. I'm sorry, but you know what, we keep talking about, you know we're going to be a world art place, this is not. Nothing against the artist. I'm sure he has a hundred other things that we could get from him. This one will not be accepted by the people. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Jackson Rip Holmes.

Mr. Holmes: So, I'm going to be brief and just say that I support the caution. It seems like we could do better than this piece of art.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Alright. Perfect.