

# TROPICAL LIFE M

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NIGHT VIEW: Sarah Morris' 'Monaco Reflecting Pools' peek through the palms. PHOTOS BY STEVEN BROOKE STUDIOS

## ISLAND TREASURES

BY BETH DUNLOP  
Special to The Miami Herald

Key Biscayne has always been a magical place. The condos have come and conquered. The strip shopping centers line too much of Crandon Boulevard. There's plenty of traffic. And yet, somehow despite everything, it still feels, and looks, like an island.

There is no better reminder than the series of eight small public plazas — place makers, really — created under the auspices of Key Biscayne's admirable, ambitious and even visionary public-art program. They are works that speak to time and place, nudging us to pause and think about the island's fragile ecology.

Seven of the plazas were designed by the Cuban-born Miami artist Jose Bedia and the last by the American-born artist Sarah Morris, who is based in London and New York. Wrought in terrazzo (by Bedia) and tile (by Morris), these installations offer momentary respite or the opportunity for long contemplation.

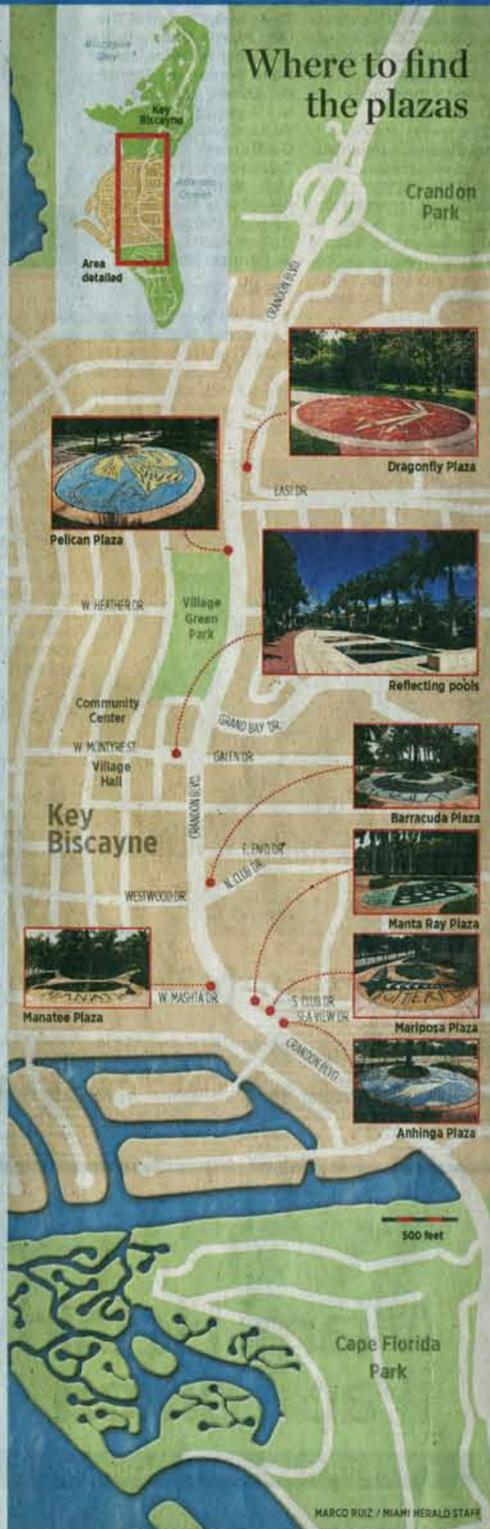
Bedia's, in particular, are a reminder of the fragility of the environment, though a long look at Morris' two tiled pools might yield the conclusion that rather than being merely abstract geometries, they might also be saying something about a once-lush, once-native landscape now crisscrossed with roadways.

Bedia's plazas are stretched along the sweep of Crandon Boulevard from the Key Biscayne Library to the north and ending almost at Bill Baggs State Park at the south. They are tucked unexpectedly into sidewalks and corners that might otherwise have gotten an olive tree or two. A few have shade and benches, beckoning for a longer stay; others sit in more circumscribed locations.

Each pays homage to the natural world, invoking the mysterious underwater and airborne life of the semi-tropics, sea and sky. Each

•TURN TO PLAZAS, 3M

*Eight artist-designed plazas strung along Crandon Boulevard celebrate Key Biscayne's lifestyle and environment*



### VISUAL ARTS



ISLAND DWELLER: Detail from Jose Bedia's homage to the pelican at 'Pelican Plaza,' part of the public-art project on Key Biscayne. PHOTOS BY STEVEN BROOKE STUDIOS



UNDERWATER CREATURE: 'Manatee Plaza' carries the Spanish name for the gentle giant.

### THE POOLS

For Key Biscayne's Civic Center Oval, she created *Monaco Reflecting Pools*, two rectangular tiled pools flanked by two benches. The pools are shallow and lean, and the tile pattern is one of a fairly haphazard urban grid rendered in gold, pink, coral, rose, aqua, white and black. And though the pattern could be considered just that, a pattern, it also manifests itself as an urban plan, thus the intimation of a paradise paved, or at least transformed.

The work is sleek and seductive, a perfect companion and counterpoint to the Bedia plazas, which are tactile and engaging. Both contain some potent ideas, provocations for further thought.

Be forewarned; the adventure of viewing these places is not entirely easy and is, perhaps, best done by bicycle. (Appropriately, Crandon Boulevard is the best-bicycled street in Miami-Dade County, but it is also a busy thoroughfare.) Many of the plazas are in spots where there's no real parking, though, in a way, that sort of placement is the point: these are little jewels to stumble upon, now part of the land and the landscape and not separate, vaulted objects.

More evidence of the depth and breadth of the key's art program lies within the Community Center and Village Hall. Some of Bedia's studies for the plazas — colorful works on paper — hang on the walls of a hallway and a multi-purpose room mingled with a set of photos of pioneer William John Matheson's Mashta House taken by him in or around 1918. In an even more obscure and hard-to-find location (in the conference room for the Building and Zoning in the second floor of Village Hall) are two sets of photography, one by Quisqueya Henriquez, and the second by Cecilia Arboleda. They are well worth seeking out, though all the works are — as fine as they are — seem at best a corollary to the main event, the plazas.

Indeed, the plazas are deeply important. They are brilliant yet accessible expositions on ideas that range from the polemical to the metaphorical. They have a message, though, in fact, it is delivered in such a way that you really only want to smile, laugh, sing or dance (or perhaps indulge in some rare quiet contemplation, or even feel sad at the precarious state of our natural environment). It's always a wonderment that in an artist's hands such static materials — crushed stone, glazed tile — can make us, make our intellect and emotions, come so alive.

### PUBLIC ART

## PLAZAS CELEBRATE ISLAND TREASURES



CURVING FISH: 'Barracuda Plaza' surrounds a palm.

### •PLAZAS, FROM 1M

has its inspired palette of sea blues and aquas and earthen tones of gray, rust and white. The plazas were part of the Crandon Boulevard Masterplan, done by the urban planning and engineering firm CT3s.

Although his works have been the subject of numerous gallery shows and are part of important museum collections, Bedia is perhaps best known in Miami for his virtuoso transformation of the floors and balustrades of

the lobbies of both halls in the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts. The mystical-mythical creatures and symbols come together there as a unified work that lifts what would otherwise have been less-than-ordinary spaces into a new dimension.

### THE FAUNA

Same deft hand, but they are not quite so enigmatic. North to south, they depict the dragonfly, pelican, barracuda, manatee, manta ray,

butterfly and aninga — all indigenous to the Key. (Is it coincidence, one wonders, that the two most ferocious of the group — the barracuda and the manta ray — face the condominium-lined beachfront?)

The various fauna are identified in terrazzo with their names — some in English, some in Spanish and some in both — part of the art, part of the iconography. The English word *manatee* comes from the Spanish *manati*, which is the identifier of choice. Butterfly, in Spanish, is *mariposa*, and Bedia inscribed both labels into what is appropriately the most colorful of the plazas. Cesar Trasobares, consulting artist to the Village of Key Biscayne Art in Public Places Board, says that Bedia uses the "potent combination" of image and text to "enhance and amplify the meaning of his images."

Morris is no stranger to Miami. Though she is primarily a painter, she also makes films, prints and three-dimensional public projects. In 2003, the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami showed her film, *Miami*, an ode to architecture, highways, waterways and much more. Her work, though geometric and abstract, often centers on architecture.



SLEEK AND SEDUCTIVE: Sarah Morris' tiled 'Monaco Reflecting Pools' is a place to reflect.