

Bullets, pencils, ties – all fair game for this artist

Colombian-born Federico Uribe's whimsical works find beauty in found objects

By Jan Sjostrom
 The Palm Beach Post

Federico Uribe's work proves that you can make art out of just about anything. Shoelaces. Neckties. Colored pencils. Coins.

And bullet shells.

That's what the motherly tiger cuddling a panda cub in his sculpture "Vulnerable" is made of.

Uribe buys them by the pound from a recycling plant.

"I'm Colombian," he said. "I grew up in a country at war. Thinking about bullets is not a choice."

Bullets also are inescapable in the United States, said the artist, who now lives in Miami.

That's the dark side of Uribe's work. But there's always a light side, which is probably why his exhibition at the Ann Norton Sculpture Gardens is titled "The Practice of Optimism: Sculpture by Federico Uribe."

"I work with the purpose of beauty," he said. "I make statements, but beauty is my priority."

That's even true when he's making a statement about a global crisis such as plastic pollution in the oceans.

On Jan. 9, Uribe's installation "Plastic Reef" will go on view in a tent on the scul-

ture gardens' east lawn.

It's a seductively beautiful "reef" made of bottles, cutlery, flip-flops and other plastic trash accompanied by a soundscape created for it by Brazilian artist Alvaro Alencar.

The 25 works in "The Practice of Optimism" include sculptures and dimensional wall pieces.

Uribe enjoys turning a material on its head. With bullet shells, for example, "I use a material that in everyone's consciousness is related to death and use it to portray life," he said.

Trained as a painter, he approaches his unusual materials much as an artist using more traditional mediums would.

For "Silence," a large-scale portrait of a seated man deep in thought, he laid down shoelaces as though they were brushstrokes.

He made the landscape "Sun and Trees" using neckties, after a friend who exports ties to Latin America gave him 4,000 when the style fell out of fashion.

Colored pencils are one of his favorite materials.

They pop out as three-dimensional elements in cheerful drawings, such as "Out," in which a cat made of colored pencils emerges from under a tablecloth.

Colored pencils make up most of "Enlightened Woman," a close-up of a woman whose hair is a froth

of drawn light bulbs.

"I always relate them to memories of childhood," he said. "Even if you had a dysfunctional childhood, the moments you used colored pencils were fun. It's part of your childhood you associate with affection."

"Affection" is a word that comes up frequently when Uribe talks about his art.

His work, he said, "is all about creating affection. When people witness something beautiful they reconcile themselves with life and help the people they're with."

It's also very popular.

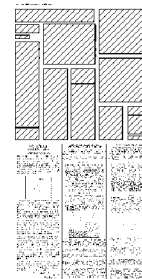
Adam Adelson of Adelson Cavalier Galleries fell in love with Uribe's work when he saw the artist's installation "Fantasy River" in 2013 at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers.

"It was unlike anything I'd ever seen before," he said. "It was this immersive environment."

The gallery mounted a solo show for Uribe soon after it opened in November 2018 on Worth Avenue. Sales were brisk.

That's one reason why the Ann Norton is featuring Uribe's work during the Palm Beach Modern + Contemporary art fair, which will be held Jan. 9-12 in a temporary building in downtown West Palm Beach.

As the fair's cultural partner, the sculpture gardens

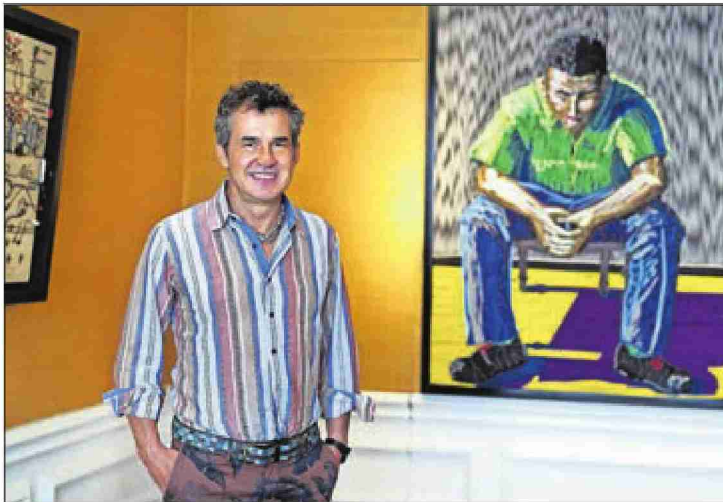


shows work by exhibitors' artists during the fair. Uribe's Ann Norton shows also are supported by the Perry J. Cohen Foundation, whose mission includes environmental, marine and wildlife education and preservation.

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Federico Uribe made "Ladybug" out of a jet ski and other boat parts. "I've thought upside-down boats look like bugs since I was a kid," he said. [MEGHAN MCCARTHY/PALMBEACHDAILYNEWS.COM]



Federico Uribe stands alongside his artwork "Silence," which he constructed with shoelaces. His work is on view at the Ann Norton Sculpture Gardens in West Palm Beach. [MEGHAN MCCARTHY/PALMBEACHDAILYNEWS.COM]



Federico Uribe's piece "Out" combines a colored pencil drawing with an image of a cat made with actual colored pencils. [MEGHAN MCCARTHY/PALMBEACHDAILYNEWS.COM]