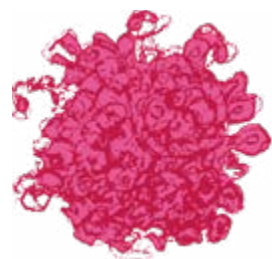Xavier Cortada, "Coronavirus," digital art, 2020.

MIAMI CORONA PROJECT

## A SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART PROJECT BY XAVIER CORTADA

ABOUT MIAMI CORONA PROJECT

University of Miami Professor of Practice, Xavier Cortada developed the "Miami Corona Project" to assess and address the coronavirus pandemic in Miami. As part of the University of Miami COVID-19 Rapid Response effort, Cortada provides coronavirus updates to the community through videos and conversations, documenting and honoring the lives of Miami-Dade residents who have succumbed to the virus.

The Miami Corona Project is based on a consistent online presence that engages individuals through a variety of platforms. At a time when social distancing is the norm, this web-based project gives voice to individuals who feel disconnected from society. The project serves as a real-time record of the impact the coronavirus pandemic has had on Miami-Dade County, while also providing an outlet for cross-communal engagement between a multitude of individuals. Through the chronicling of data and information related to the virus, as well as a series of participatory art projects, Cortada captures stories from individuals across South Florida as they are being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

RIGHT: Xavier Cortada, "Miami Pronouncements (March 26 – June 15, 2020): 826 Deaths in Miami-Dade," digital art, 2020.
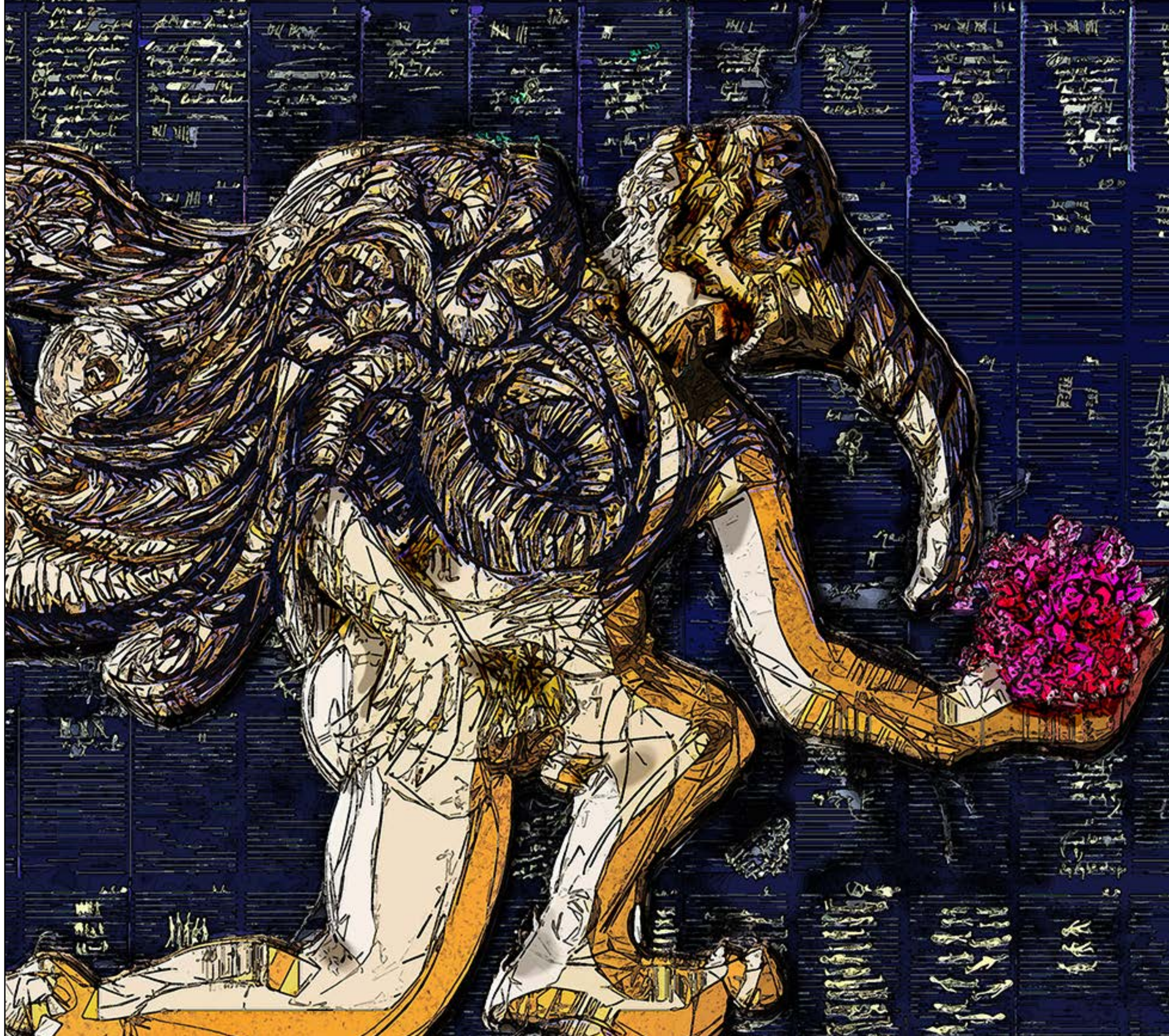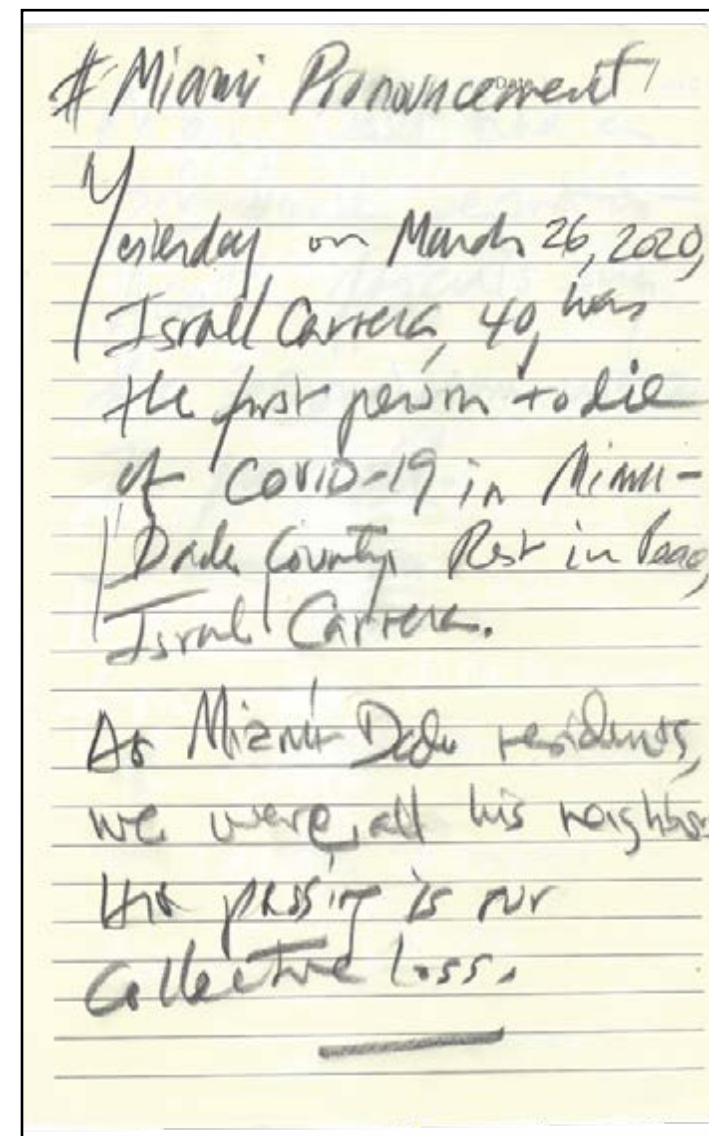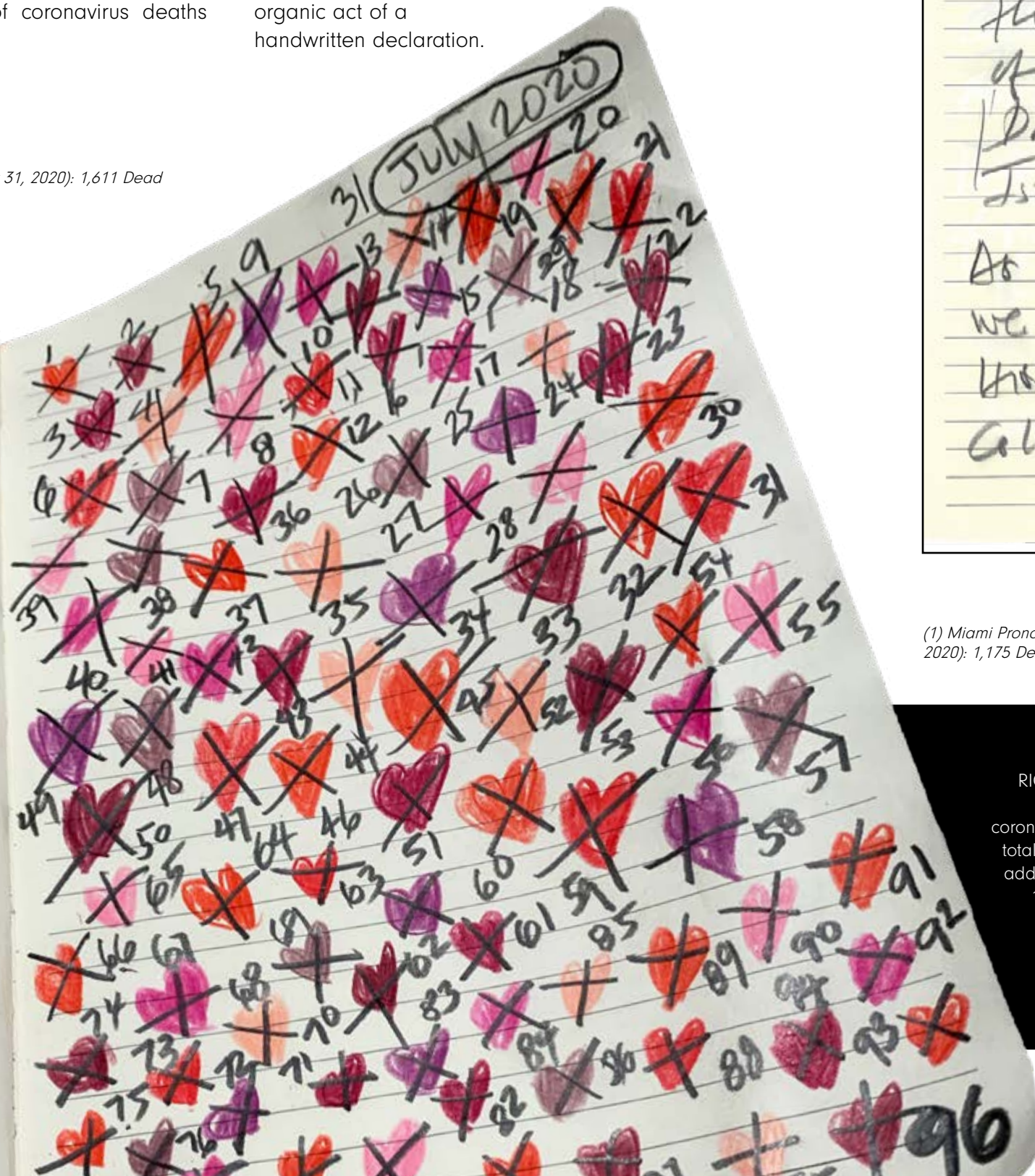
MIAMI PRONOUNCEMENTS

The Miami Pronouncement is a daily record of those that have passed away due to coronavirus, the title implicating a conceptual, and literal, statement of death. This is done through social media posts that provide the audience with accurate data (by the Florida Department of Health) on the number of coronavirus deaths within Miami-Dade County.

This data presented in a handwritten, sentimental format becomes increasingly ritualistic with each passing day. Through a consistent digital presence, the artist Xavier Cortada aims to bring attention to this data, effectively producing and archiving a real-time record of the coronavirus pandemic through the organic act of a handwritten declaration.

BELOW: Miami Pronouncement (July 31, 2020): 1,611 Dead

(1) "#MiamiPronouncement
Yesterday on March 26, 2020, **Israel Carrera, 40, was the first person to die of COVID-19 in Miami-Dade County**. Rest in Peace, Israel Carrera. As Miami Dade Residents, we were all his neighbors. His passing is our collective loss."

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

(1) Miami Pronouncement (March 27, 2020): 1 Dead; (2) Miami Pronouncement (July 9, 2020): 1,092 Dead; (3) Miami Pronouncement (July 14, 2020): 1,175 Dead; (4) Miami Pronouncement (July 16, 2020): 1,246 Dead; (5) Miami Pronouncement (July 30, 2020): 1,515 Dead

RIGHT: Cortada illustrates the Miami Pronouncement for August 8, 2020, the 135th day since the first coronavirus death in Miami-Dade County. On this day, a total of 29 neighbors lost their lives to the virus and an additional 1,808 tested positive, bringing our county to 131,217 active cases of coronavirus in four months.

Miami Pronouncement (August 8, 2020):
1,838 Dead (video screenshot)

ABOVE: Screenshots of Cortada's MCP Conversation Videos

CONVERSATIONS

Miami Corona Project Conversations was created to function as a platform in which the issues of the coronavirus pandemic can be addressed through video interviews of professionals from a variety of different disciplines and industries. "Miami Corona Project Conversations" presents these problems in an educational and involved way.

By engaging local leaders, influencers, elected officials, and personnel from various sectors in informal conversations and interviews that asks questions about how they and their sector have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, we explore the lessons being learned so that we are better prepared to face the future.

Through August 12, 2020 and listed in chronological order, these conversations included:

- **Michael Spring**, Director of Miami-Dade Cultural Affairs
- **Katherine Mach** and **Jessica Owley** from University of Miami's Climate Migration and Retreat Team
- **Ana Maria Kleymeyer**, International Climate Policy and Law Advisor
- **Carlos J. Martinez**, Miami-Dade Public Defender
- **Karla Hernández-Mats**, President of United Teachers of Dade
- **Matthew Dietz**, Litigation Director of Disability Independence Group
- **Sharuna Verghis**, Senior Lecturer at Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine and Health Sciences
- **Daniella Levine Cava**, Miami-Dade County Commissioner for District 8 and Mayoral Candidate
- **Besty Damon**, Artist, Activist and Founder of Keepers of the Water
- **Xavier L. Suarez**, Miami-Dade County Commissioner District 7 and Mayoral Candidate
- **Alex Penelas**, Miami-Dade County Mayoral Candidate
- **René Morales**, Director of Curatorial Affairs and Chief Curator at Pérez Art Museum
- **Kathryn Mikesell**, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Fountainhead Residency
- **Esteban L. Bovo**, Miami-Dade County Commissioner District 13 and Mayoral Candidate

- **Karyn Cunningham**, Mayor of the Village of Palmetto Bay
- **Sally Philips**, Mayor of the City of South Miami
- **Manny Cid**, Mayor of the Town of Miami Lakes
- **Dr. Kerry Burnstein**, University of Miami Professor of Molecular and Cellular Pharmacology
- **Dr. Ekaterina Denkova**, University of Miami Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology
- **Dr. Erin Kobetz**, Vice Provost for Research at the University of Miami
- **Dr. Lawrence S. Prince**, Division Chief of Neonatal and Developmental Medicine at Stanford University School of Medicine
- **Annette Taddeo**, Florida Senator for District 40
- **Oliver G. Gilbert III**, Mayor of the City of Miami Gardens
- **Dr. William Butler**, Former University of Miami Vice President for Student Affairs
- **Eileen Higgins**, Miami-Dade County Commissioner for District 5
- **Brent Latham**, Mayor of North Bay Village
- **Matthew Pigatt**, Mayor of the City of Opa-Locka
- **Iveta Silova** and **Ann Nielsen**, Associate Director of the Center for Advanced Studies in Global Education
- **Alex Piquero**, Chair and Professor at the University of Miami Department of Sociology

DAILY UPDATES

The MCP Daily Update initiative is a short videotaped report on what occurred the day before, documenting the number of local and national cases of coronavirus. From April 7th to May 3rd, Cortada also noted the number of deceased neighbors each day. The daily report also includes new and relevant information relating to the spread of coronavirus, aggregating news and sources from both Miami-Dade County and national-level news.

Through the inclusion and communication of this information, a generation of awareness and engagement towards the issue is achieved, prompting the audience to further their involvement with the project as a whole. However, the purpose of MCP Daily Update is to function both as an assessment of what is currently happening across Miami, as well as a historical record of the impact coronavirus has had throughout our community.
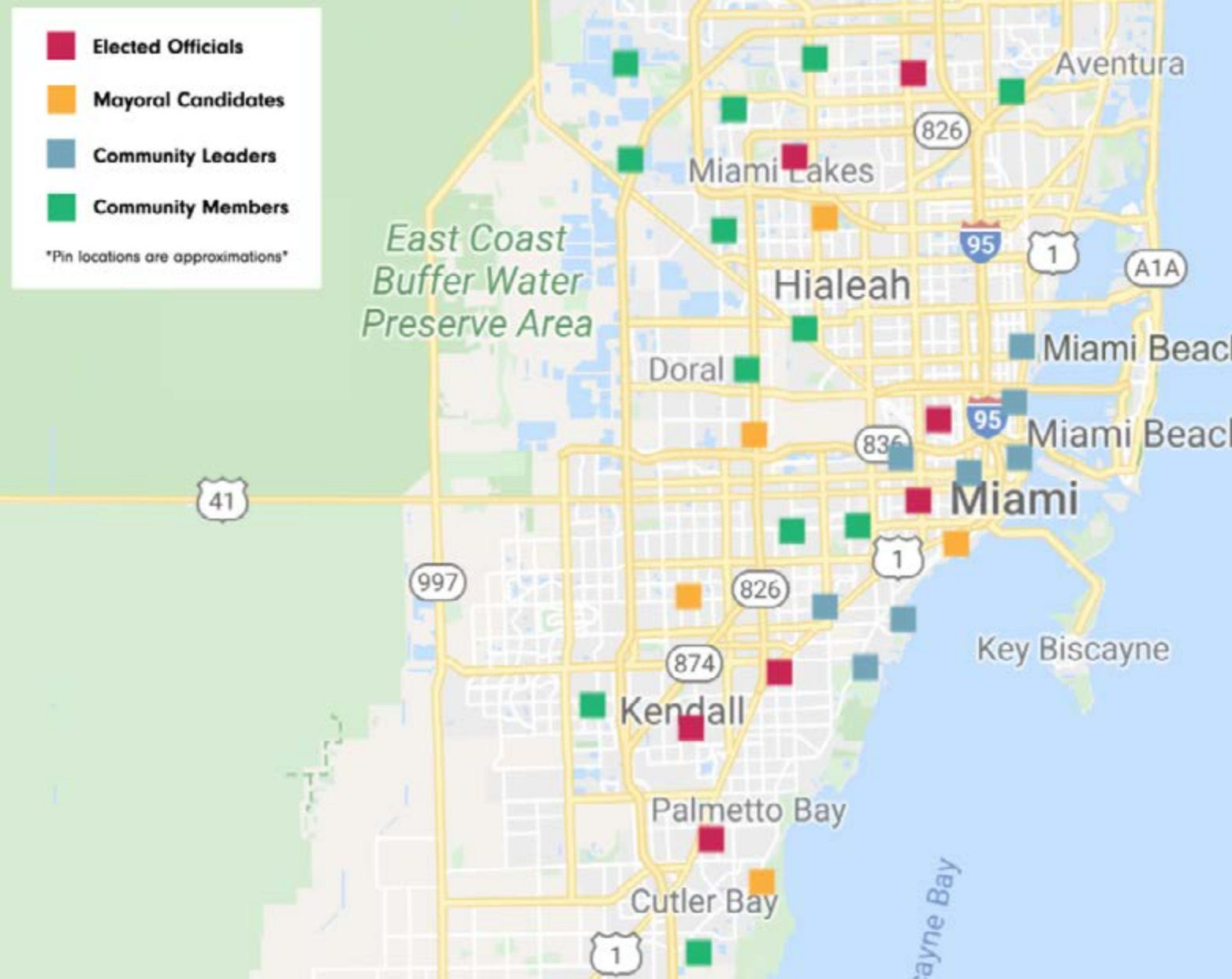
SHARE YOUR VOICE

An ongoing process throughout the Miami Corona Project, "Share Your Voice" is a participatory art piece chronicling the four month duration of the project by sharing participant posts. This aspect of the project aims to prompt individual engagement from the participating audience whose messages will be posted online.

This piece takes Cortada's message murals as a point of departure. Starting in the mid-90s, Cortada worked with participants from a variety of backgrounds, notably HIV/AIDS affected individuals, to create powerful collaborative message murals.

These murals were important, not just because of their power to commemorate, to educate and to advocate, but because of their ability to document humanity's response to crises.

Responses were collected digitally via Miami Corona Project's webpage. A form asked participants to share their voice and include their name and zip code to help place an identity to our fellow neighbors. In addition to these shared voices, a visualization map literally places each community member in our city as well as messages and links to conversations from elected officials and community leaders.

This virus has weighed heavily on me and my community. I don't get to see my family as much as I used to and I am not sure that I will be able to fully experience my Senior year in high school. However, these problems are incomparable to those who have suffered truly from this virus and have lost their lives or have lost someone close to them. I wish that more people, especially In south Florida, would take this virus seriously and to stop being selfish and realize that this thing affects all of us and it's up to us to take precautions to keep ourselves and our community safe.

GAELLE A., 33029

Coronavirus, moreso than anything, has been mentally exhausting. I feel as though it's illuminated parts of our culture that have been toxic but somehow hidden - up until this pandemic, they've slipped between the cracks as people haven't wanted to acknowledge them. However, now it's as though we've put a magnifying glass to them and we are forced to stare at the ugliness that we as humans put other humans through.

LENA S., 33332

Isolation, Alone, Stressed, Overwhelmed, Unsupported, Challenged, Disheartened, Uncertain, Anxious, Questioning humanity, Humbled, Protective, Nervous, Afraid, Insomnia, Mothering, Creative, Unmotivated, Wanting normalcy, Desire for change, Optimistic, Rage, Reset, Meditating, Longing, Dreaming, Connections, Nature, Hope, Dispair.

SANDRA P., 33145

I am one of the lucky ones [...] Corona ruined flag football season, and will most likely affect xc season and soccer season. There are many student athletes that are depending on sports to help them to get a college scholarship. I wish others would be more considerate and stay home especially since Florida is literally the epicenter and because Corona has proven to be a deadly disease.

STEPHANIE D., 33010

Ever since the U.S decided to close their borders there has been a lot of stress energy in the world and around me. I was forced to come back to the U.S with a 3 day notice before I wasn't allowed in the country. Me and many other international students are either back home wondering if they can ever come back or wondering whether they'll be able to see their family.
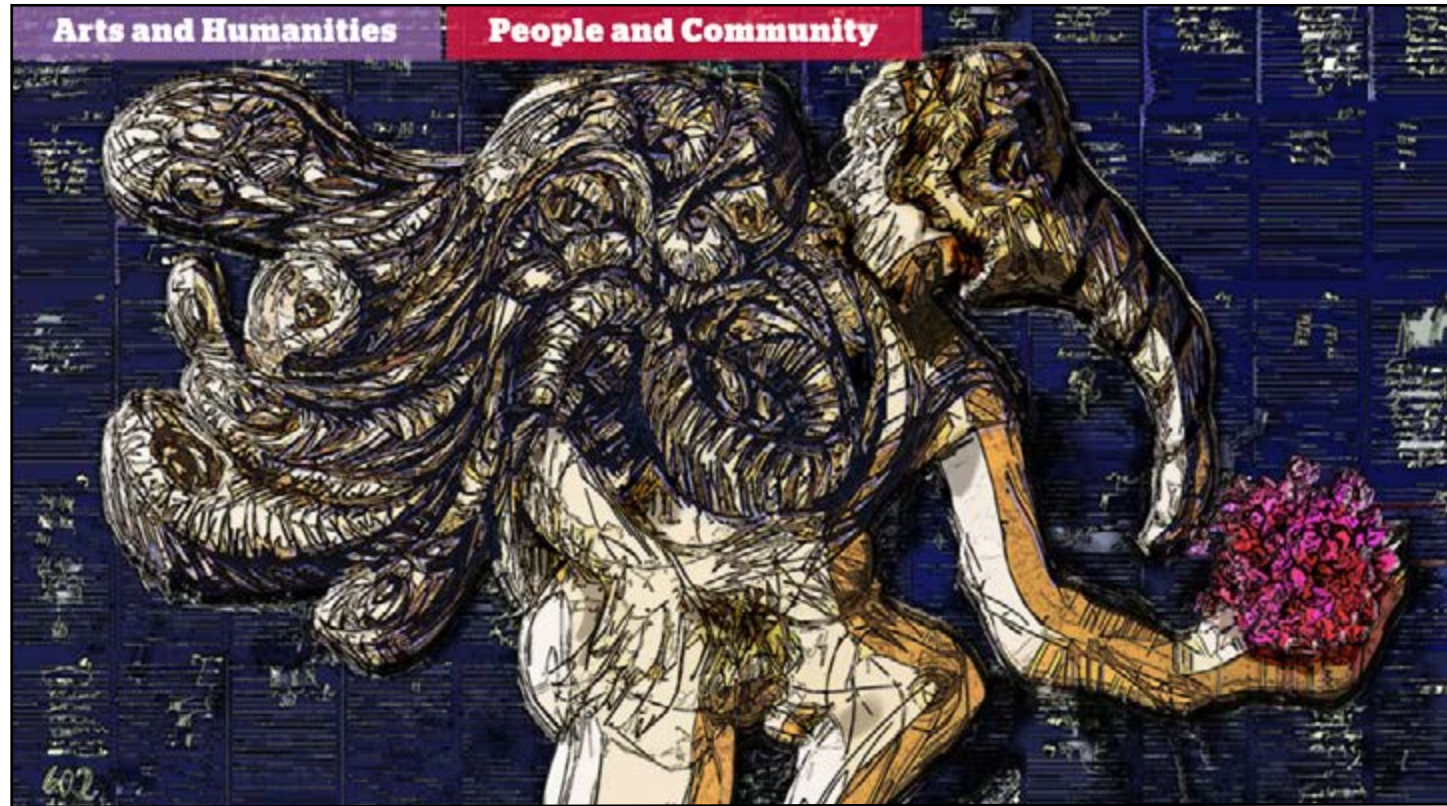
SAMI A., 33131

During these difficult times I've heard from friends that their parents have passed away and their entire families have become infected with the virus. My family in Italy hasn't been able to return and it terrifies me to see the videos on the media showing how different countries approach tackling the virus. I'm scared to go outside and see my friends and family yet that's the only reoccurring thought in my mind. [...] I have a heart condition which makes me vulnerable and more susceptible to becoming sick, I've had to stay in Naples far away from my own family so I wouldn't risk getting sick. Today is my first day back and I'm still scared of hugging my mom.

ANGELINA C., 33145

ABOVE: Screenshot of Share Your Voice participant visualization map

Artist captures the voices of the pandemic in real time

BY KELLY MONTOYA (NEWS@THEU JULY 8, 2020)

Arts and Humanities   People and Community

Xavier Cortada leads the Miami Corona Project, an art program presented as part of the University of Miami COVID-19 Rapid Response that records and addresses the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in Miami-Dade County.

Twenty years ago, during the AIDS pandemic, Xavier Cortada, University of Miami professor of practice, dedicated his work to amplifying the voices of the victims through a collaborative art process. In 2000, he was invited to share his method at the World AIDS conference in Durban, South Africa, where he would create a massive mural that magnified the stories of what victims endured from a personal to a societal level, and also the stories of those who perished and would otherwise be forgotten.

"It was my way of capturing that moment in time by using this collaborative art-making process to engage people who felt vulnerable or felt like they didn't have a voice," said Cortada. "It was also a way to commemorate the millions of African lives that were going to be lost."

Cortada was persistent about archiving the way society responded to the AIDS pandemic because he knew future outbreaks were undeniable and that it would be just a matter of time until another pandemic struck.

"In the last 20 years since I painted those murals in Africa, all we have done in society is make our species more vulnerable to pandemics," he said.

As Cortada explained, this is all a ripple effect caused by the climate crisis.

"We have exponentially increased our population, polluted our environment, made our planet more deforested, and by pumping carbon into the atmosphere, made it hotter, which problematically brings viruses to us through mosquitoes and other vectors more frequently," he said.

"When you mix in traditions of bringing live wild animals into wet markets, where they're stressed in small cages, you have animals that would never be in contact with other animals,'' he pointed out, "in contact with each other and with humans—who spread diseases to a moreinterconnected, globalized, polluted, climate-sacrificed world."

Now, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, Cortada is applying the lessons learned from past experiences to assess and address the coronavirus pandemic in Miami by developing the Miami Corona Project, an extensive socially engaged art program that is now presented in conjunction with the University of Miami COVID-19 Rapid Response effort.

"We have a University that's investing to make sure the knowledge we develop internally is applied outside academic circles into problem solving and helping the community," said Cortada. "We're addressing everything from a social and mental health perspective to a clinician's perspective on treatment modalities to a researcher's focus on what happens at the molecular level to an artist's perspective on capturing this moment in time for future generations.

"I thought it was very visionary for our university to fund not just 23 scientists but also an artist to address this issue. Because, through the power of art, we have the ability to engage others and bring them into the conversation," he noted.

With the help of his team, Cortada developed a three-pronged art model that serves to inspire, educate, and engage the public while providing a real-time record of the impact the coronavirus pandemic has had on Miami-Dade County.

"Miami Pronouncements," the first component of the Miami Corona Project is composed of daily videos where Cortada updates the community on current news. Daily drawings and reflections honor the residents of Miami-Dade County who have passed away because of COVID-19.

"It's my way as a performative and gestural piece to pause and reflect for a moment about how many of our neighbors have died," he said. "And it's also a way to inspire people to reframe the way they think. So, they take more accountability for their everyday actions, through wearing their masks, washing hands, and practicing social distancing. I'm asking you to please sacrifice a little today so that the pain that we're going to endure as a society is lessened."

Secondly, through "Miami Corona Project Conversations," the program aims to educate by engaging local leaders, influencers, elected officials, and personnel from various sectors in informal conversations and interviews that ask questions about how they and their sector have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's my way of looking at the leaders in this community, who had their hands on the wheel as we were walking into this pandemic, so they can tell us about how unprepared we were, what lessons we learned, and what we're going to do to face the future," Cortada said.

The conversations have brought to light many of the different barriers and disparities people face as they navigate through the pandemic—such as unemployment, inaccessibility to food, fears of infection during incarcerations because of legal status and delayed trial times, and the necessity to go out to protest racial injustice.

"I'm trying to capture this moment in history, have people say what went wrong, so we can chart a course of looking at new systems, new ways of engaging in policy governing, interacting with one another—so that we can come out of this crisis better repaired but also better prepared by not forgetting what happened," he said.

> **"I'm trying to capture this moment in history, have people say what went wrong, so we can chart a course of looking at new systems, new ways of engaging in policy governing, interacting with one another—so that we can come out of this crisis better repaired but also better prepared by not forgetting what happened."**

The final part of Cortada's Miami Corona Project, "Share Your Voice," uses the first two components of the project to encourage the broader community to engage and share their individual stories on an interactive online platform. At a time when social distancing is the norm, the web-based project gives a voice to individuals who feel disconnected from society.

"I want all the individual voices of all community members," said Cortada. "I want the University of Miami students to tell me what it was like for them to have to leave mid-semester last March, and what it would be like for them to get on a plane in August to start a new semester."

The goal of the project, Cortada said, is "to create a space for community engagement, just like we did with the "Breaking the Silence" mural hanging in the Durban Art Gallery in Durban, South Africa."

Adam Roberti, a two-time University of Miami alumnus and director of Cortada Projects, is one of the team members who has worked to make the project a reality by developing an innovative website that exhibits all the stories of those who participate.

Roberti said he is passionate about working on the Miami Corona Project with Cortada because he feels that the pandemic is proving to be an inflection point in residents of Miami-Dade County to have a better understanding of the changes happening within the community, at the same time that they function to capture this moment in Miami's history," he added.

For Genesis Cosme, School of Communication student and communications associate at Cortada Projects, working on this project has been eye opening and she believes change is extremely powerful at a local level in Miami when communities come together despite their differences. n the country's history.

"Transitioning into a 'new normal' will require compassionate leadership, and through Miami Corona Project conversations, we are providing a platform for our community's leaders to reflect on the situation and give their perspective on how we should be moving forward," said Roberti.

"The conversations paired with the daily Miami pronouncements allow for "I hope this project helps create a sense of urgency about the pandemic here in Miami," she said. "It's easy to become disconnected from an issue when it doesn't affect us immediately and personally. But every day we're learning from experts that we are going to be feeling the impacts of coronavirus long after the number of cases decreases and even more so in underprivileged communities."

Roberti hopes this project helps everyone to better understand the severity of the situation, and by extension, to empathize with those who are suffering the most.

"For our world," Roberti said, "I hope this project can serve as an artistic model for how to build community, amplify voices, and ultimately save lives."

U | NEWS@TheU

In Miami Corona Project, artist Xavier Cortada creates daily journal of city's plague year

BY ELISA TURNER (ARTBURST MIAMI AUG. 12, 2020)

In a video posted on his Miami Corona Project, artist and University of Miami professor Xavier Cortada draws one corpse after another on lined paper. They are lumpy stick figures, achingly childlike and blunt. Their heads and feet are doodled knobs.

As he draws, you hear the whispery sounds of his pencil brushing back and forth on the paper. The sounds could be fading gasps for air. Cortada is making a journal entry for July 30, 2020. There were 60 Coronavirus-related deaths reported in Miami-Dade County that day.

Although the short video may be hard if not tedious to watch, it is an insistent, even meditative, testament to the devastating crisis we are experiencing.

"We have yet to see 100 people die in a day, but that is coming," Cortada said in a recent interview. "When I created this project, I wanted to mark this moment in history. I wanted to document what was happening in Miami and create a place, just like I did with my other social practice projects, where the community could come together to mourn, to learn, and to express themselves."

For years, Cortada has created socially engaged, collaborative art. Miami Corona Project is very much consistent with his activist, community-based practice.

Cortada attended International AIDS conferences in Switzerland and South Africa in 1998 and 2000, respectively, to create collaborative murals with conference participants. More recently, Cortada has created numerous community art projects to promote awareness of Miami's vulnerability to rising seas and climate change.

"I understand how people can be in denial about sea-level rise," he said. "They can also be in denial about this particular virus and the pandemic in general."

Cortada aims to show connections between climate change and the pandemic. "Our climate emergency exacerbates the pandemic," he said.

Rising temperatures make it more likely that other diseases can come to Miami, he added, "whether it's through mosquitoes or animal transmissions." For the Miami Corona Project, available at Cortadaprojects.org/projects/corona, Cortada has been creating a daily journal of Miami's plague year in 2020. The project may well extend into 2021.

"I'm committed to doing this every single day until there's a vaccine," he said, "or until there's some natural organic way that tells me it's OK to stop."

Since beginning the project on March 13, he has invited the community to join with him by searching the site for information and solace. It is presented in conjunction with the University of Miami's COVID-19 Rapid Response effort.

Cortada's online platform is composed of three main sections.

His daily journal entries in the section titled, "Miami Pronouncement," record the number of deaths that day – grim snapshots of an unfolding history. These entries began on March 27, when the first death in Miami-Dade County was reported. Israel Carrera, 40, died of COVID-19 on March 26.

"I did not want us to forget them," he said of those who have died. "I did not want their loss to be in vain."
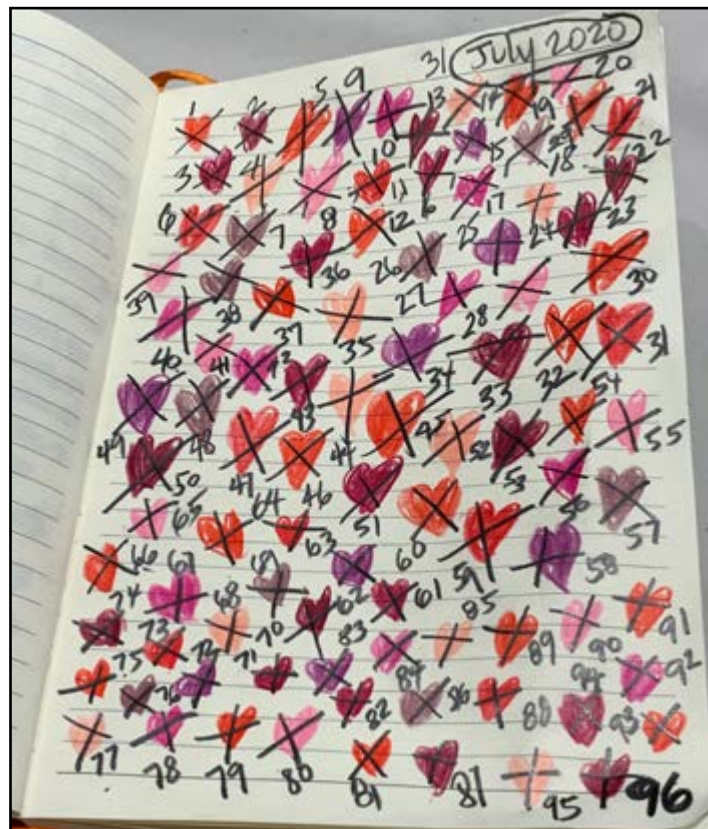
Miami Pronouncement (July 31, 2020): 1,611 Dead

Miami Pronouncement (July 34, 2020): 1,175 Dead

Against a background representing pages of journal entries documenting multiple days of death, there's an athletic, muscular man taking a knee. In these days of Black Lives Matter protests, that's a pose redolent of defiance and sacrifice.

What could be seen as suffocating swirls of arms belonging to an octopus coiled on the man's back are actually embellished wings, Cortada explained. They imply that the man is a cautionary figure, an angel of death. The man wears a mask recalling those worn in Venice during the plague. As if bearing a gift, this eerie "angel" holds out with one hand a dazzling hot pink sphere, the artist's stylized symbol for the virus itself.

We know from countless images in the media that this sphere signifies the novel coronavirus. But if we weren't so awash in that grim collective awareness, Cortada's symbol would not necessarily reek of fatal peril. It could look almost frilly and cute.

The interactive section titled "Share Your Voice" is exactly what it says, a place where community members can write about their experiences in dealing with loneliness, grief, anger, frustration and unemploymentbrought on by the virus. One comment simply pummels the site with words including "isolation, alone, stressed, rage, reset."

Other snippets, or voices, from the section:

"Coronavirus has impacted my daily ... life and has made me fear for my life every time I walk out the door."

"It's helped me focus on what matters most. Family, friends, food, nature. I don't plan to go back to the old normal. I realize I am blessed to have everything I need. My heart breaks for the many who do not."

"Coronavirus, moreso than anything, has been mentally exhausting. I feel as though it's illuminated parts of our culture that have been toxic but somehow hidden – up until this pandemic, they've slipped between the cracks as people haven't wanted to acknowledge them. However, now it's as though we've put a magnifying glass to them and we are forced to stare at the ugliness that we as humans put other humans through."
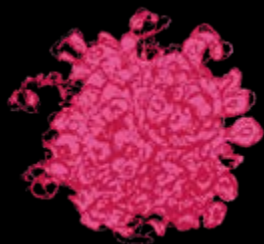
On the main page of the project website is an unflinching image, a piece of digital art identified as: "Miami Pronouncements (March 26-June 15, 2020): 826 Deaths in Miami-Dade," by Xavier Cortada, 2020.

In this context, call it forbidden fruit. That pink sphere is oddly seductive but ominous, offered by a compromised, masked figure. In one fell swoop, in this image, Cortada evokes the very human, natural temptation to gather and touch, a universal longing in our desperate time – but one strictly forbidden by public health experts.

"I'm painting an angel of death telling you that I've got this in my hand and it could come to you, too," he said. He wants more people to understand that the pandemic is "not just about [somebody else's] suffering, it's about a communal suffering."

For more information about Miami Corona Project, go to Cortadaprojects.org/projects/corona.

ARTBURST

Xavier Cortada is an artist and Professor of Practice at the University of Miami Department of Art and Art History. Cortada's work is intended to generate awareness and action towards issues of global climate change. Using the power and elasticity of participatory art to engage, Cortada educates and inspires community members to work together and learn together to solve our community's problems.

Cortada has created art installations at the North and South Poles to help address environmental issues at every point in between. His work is also in the collections of Peréz Art Museum Miami (PAMM), the Patricia and Philip Frost Art Museum, the MDC Museum of Art + Design, the NSU Museum of Art in Ft. Lauderdale, the Whatcom Museum in Washington, and the World Bank and is the Artist-in-Residence at Pinecrest Gardens.

To learn more, visit www.cortada.com.

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This project is presented as part of the University of Miami COVID-19 Rapid Response effort.