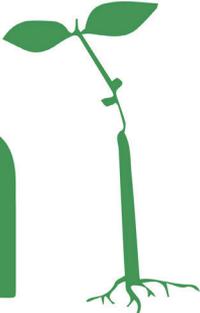




*Xavier Cortada, "Plan(T)," 2019*

Plan   
ECOART BY XAVIER CORTADA



Xavier Cortada, "Pinecrest Mangrove Forest," 2019, Pinecrest Gardens, Pinecrest, FL.

# Plan(T)

The mangrove finds itself as the central aspect of many of artist Xavier Cortada's socially-engaged art projects, most notably within Plan(T), a natural evolution of Cortada's Reclamation Project from 2006. Mangroves are salt-tolerant plants that eventually grow into large trees most often found along coastlines. The environmental impact of mangrove trees' existence in coastal areas should not be understated, as mangroves actively stabilize coastlines by reducing erosion and combat sea level rise by allowing for a buildup of sediment in the water. They also serve as an integral part of coastal ecosystems, the trees themselves providing shelter for a variety of marine and avian life. After witnessing the removal of mangrove forests within his community, Cortada set out to reclaim urban environments for nature through the planting and exhibition of mangroves throughout Miami.

The focus of mangroves in Cortada's work can be initially seen in projects like Miami Mangrove Forest, a large-scale public art project from 2004 that saw the artist and volunteers paint mangrove propagules along the underbelly of Miami's I-95 interstate in an effort to create a conceptual reforestation of the urban area. This eventually led way to a literal reforestation of the urban Miami area in the Reclamation Project, initiated in 2006. The Reclamation Project was an attempt at reintroducing nature into the built environment, specifically to strengthen coastlines from storm surges, but also an acknowledgment of the precarious nature of such a meeting. Plan(T) builds upon this by looking towards the future and the importance of utilizing salt-tolerant mangroves to address issues of climate change facing Miami as paramount. All of these projects, as well as Cortada's Underwater HOA initiative, are a part of an overarching concept of protecting Florida's various coastlines.

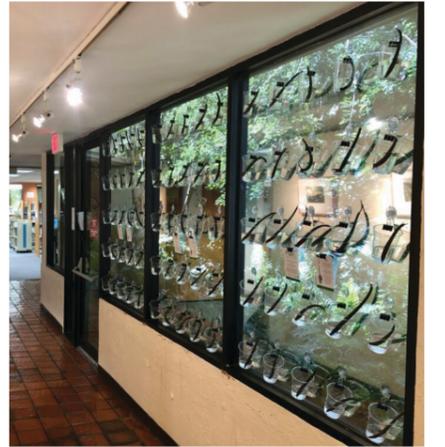
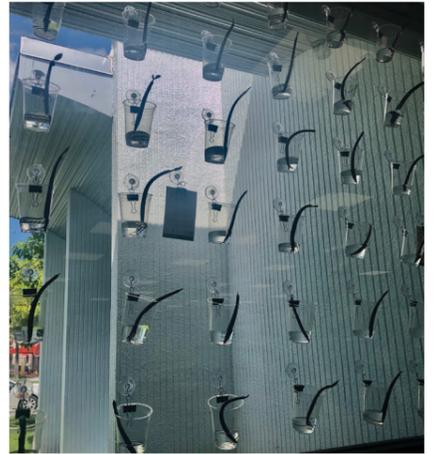
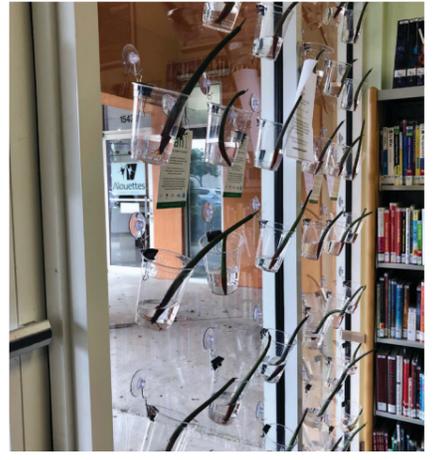
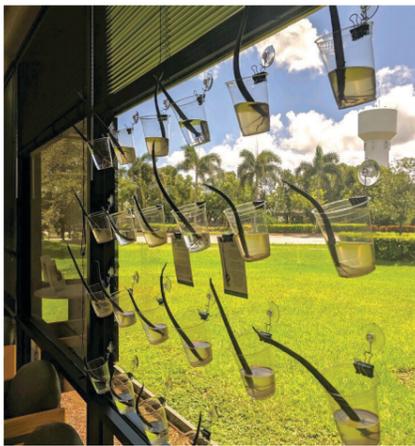
While all of these projects, Underwater HOA, Plan(T), and the Reclamation Project, are working in some capacity to address environmental issues, their functionality and scope differ from one another. However, these projects work as an evolution of their predecessor, all working in cohesion to address similar issues that affect Florida's coastlines. This began with the Reclamation Project, a literal reclamation of coastal wetlands by the reforestation of mangroves in an attempt to protect the coast against future storm surges and create a natural habitat for a variety of marine life. Underwater HOA builds upon these environmental issues and addresses them through a visualization of the invisible by allowing homeowners the opportunity to learn their home's elevation above sea level. Through the implementation of an actual "Homeowners Association", Cortada asks his participants to work together within their community to spur action towards change. As the environmental problem grows and climate change refuses to slow down, the importance of looking towards the future becomes increasingly obvious. This is the main inspiration of Plan(T), the goal of which is planning and planting for a future devastated by climate change. Plan(t) is very much an acknowledgment of a changing coastline, one that is moving progressively inland as time passes. As this happens, the natural freshwater aquifers across Florida will become increasingly salinized to the point of disaster for local ecosystems.

Where Plan(T) differs from the Reclamation Project is in its focus, as Cortada strives to plan for the future in the later iteration. There is a strong sense of urgency in the Plan(T) project, a necessity to acknowledge current issues directly. In a future devastated by climate change and sea-level rise, salt-tolerant plants will be the only type to survive in Florida due to the salination of fresh water aquifers throughout the state. In Plan(T), residents are asked to plant a mangrove propagule in their front yard alongside a white flag with their current elevation above sea-level written across it. The tree functions both as a literal act against climate change, specifically sea-level rise as the planting of mangroves promotes increased carbon sequestration, as well as a visualization of the growing problem. As the tree is nurtured and grows, so does the vulnerability of the area it resides in, the beauty of the tree juxtaposed with what its growth represents. The mangrove lends itself as a subversive quality in this project, as once the mangrove is planted it is illegal under Florida law to remove it, an allusion to the permanence of the issue at hand.

In both Plan(T) and the Reclamation Project, public exhibitions of the project occur with the installation of mangroves in a geometric grid upon the windows of community spaces such as schools and libraries. As noted critical art theorist Rosalind Krauss states, "The grid functions to declare the modernity of modern art...flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is anti-natural, unreal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature."

The implementation and function of the grid offers a strong contrast from the natural qualities of the mangroves, effectively allowing for the mangroves to be placed into an aesthetic context of "art". Beyond just a contextualization of the project as artistic expression, the functionality of the grid references urban planning and non-natural environments, the inclusion of the mangroves effectively behaving as a reclamation of the built by the natural environment. These exhibitions are very temporal in function, coextensive with their intention, the mangroves being living plants, and thus require human attention to survive. The longevity of such an installation depends entirely on the ability to welcome nature into an urban habitat.

The development and undertaking of such a large-scale project requires no small amount of community outreach and involvement. Plan(T)'s success is contingent on Cortada's ability to effectively communicate his ideas to the public in a way that not only raises awareness but promotes community involvement. The grid exhibitions function in this way, especially with their placement in every library and public school within Miami-Dade County, offering an introduction to the project and educating the public on the issue. Cortada Projects also utilizes its volunteers to help raise awareness for the project, the volunteers operating as eco-emissaries to offer an introduction about the project to local community members. Through these public interventions, not only does awareness and involvement in the project rise, a model for future conversations is presented for participants to follow.





Plan(T) installation at the Hibiscus Gallery at Pinecrest Gardens



Plan(T) director, Adam Roberti, engaging participants at the Pinecrest Gardens Farmer's Market



Miami-Dade College students participating in "Plan(T)"

# Plan(T)

The Plan(T) project is built on participation from the greater Miami community, all participants engaging in a literal reforestation of the city's urban tree canopy through the planting of a mangrove propagule.

Over the duration of the project, Plan(T) has been installed in numerous public schools and colleges, as well as every library across Miami-Dade County, generating awareness and action towards climate change mitigation from an institutional level.

To participate in Plan(T), one must commit the simple act of planting a mangrove alongside a white flag marking the respective area's elevation.

After engaging in this performance, Cortada invites his participants to further their participation in the project through the utilization of social media, posting photos of their newly planted mangrove using the hashtag #plantforfuture.

# THE ARTIST

Xavier Cortada is Professor of Practice at the University of Miami as a faculty member of the Department of Art and Art History. The crux of Cortada's work finds itself rooted in a deep conceptual engagement of his participants. This is an engagement that prompts shifts in ideological perspectives within its audience through an infiltration and implementation of self-interest. Particularly environmentally focused, the work Cortada develops is intended to generate awareness and action towards issues of global climate change.

Cortada has exhibited and produced works internationally, including in Belgium, Bolivia, Canada, Cyprus, Holland, Latvia, Monaco, Norway, Northern Ireland, Panama, Peru, South Africa, and Switzerland. Cortada's work is in the collections of the Perez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), the NSU Museum of Art in Ft. Lauderdale, the Whatcom Museum, the Patricia and Philip Frost Art Museum and the MDC Museum of Art + Design.

Cortada, who was born in Albany, New York and grew up in Miami, holds degrees from the University of Miami College of Arts and Sciences, Graduate School of Business and School of Law. To learn more, visit [www.cortada.com](http://www.cortada.com).



## CORTADA PROJECTS

Artist Xavier Cortada implements his participatory art practice through Cortada Projects at Pinecrest Gardens in Miami, Florida. Cortada Projects uses the power of art to engage the community in learning about and addressing important ecological concerns including climate change, sea-level rise, and biodiversity loss. By using art's elasticity to reach across disciplines, the organization aims to build a community and transform citizens into stewards of the environment.

Through exhibitions at the Hibiscus Gallery, programming at the weekly Farmer's Market, and open studio at the Whilden-Carrier Cottage, Cortada Projects uses the power of art to engage the public in learning about and addressing environmental concerns. Learn more at [www.cortadaprojects.org](http://www.cortadaprojects.org).



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 PINECREST  
GARDENS