

15 YEARS OF
**Reclamation
Project**

ECO-ART BY XAVIER CORTADA





XAVIER CORTADA AND MANGROVES

Mangroves provide a variety of services to humans and ecosystems alike. They help to stabilize Florida's coastline and protect it from erosion, provide nearby populated areas with natural protection from storm surge, improve the water quality flowing from rivers and streams into the ocean, function as estuarine habitats and shelter to wildlife, and perhaps most importantly, capture and store carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gasses in their soils for millions of years.

Unfortunately, the mangrove is under threat. Human activities such as dredging, filling, water pollution and development are causing an exponential decline of critically important mangrove forests. Not only does this threaten biodiversity in Florida coastal ecosystems, it impacts nature experiences and tourism, the economy, and the ability for locals to recover after hurricanes. Also, when mangrove forests are cleared, they release massive amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change.

When Cortada was a child, he was fascinated by the peculiar shape of the mangrove seedling that he would see during his family's trips to Bear Cut in Key Biscayne. These seedlings propagate while still attached to the parent tree. They can grow up to a foot long, then release into the water the parent tree is growing in, floating around with the tide. Eventually, the seedling becomes so inundated with water it settles on the shoreline and roots, sometimes miles away from its parent tree.

When Cortada first witnessed a violent uprooting of mangrove forests in the Florida Keys in 2006, he became motivated to take action and protect these native habitats. He launched the Reclamation Project on Earth Day 2006 at the Bass Museum, working with volunteers to collect propagules and install them in grids of clear, water-filled cups in storefront windows along Lincoln Road, Alton Drive, and Ocean Drive in Miami Beach. As the propagules matured, they were returned to the water's edge and planted ritually with volunteers repeating the phrase: "I hereby reclaim this place for nature."

"In using arts and culture to build community," Cortada said, "we often forget that the greatest resource isn't necessarily the program we design, or the object we create, or the idea we generate. It is the people themselves."

15 Years of Reclamation Project, an exhibition by Professor of Practice Xavier Cortada, presents a long-lived ecological art intervention across the state of Florida. Over the last quinquennial, Cortada has engaged scores of Floridians in learning about and addressing the widespread disappearance of native vegetation. The Reclamation Project also lives on today through subsequent iterations in Native Flags, Underwater HOA, Plan(T), FLOR500 and Flower Force, encouraging locals to restore native habitats as coastal cities like Miami plan for a future with rising seas.



"The Journey" and "Florida Mangrove" (next page) were Cortada's earliest depictions of mangroves in his artwork in 2003. In this piece, he compares the journey of the immigrant to a mangrove seedling's journey before it settles its roots and thrives in a new community.

Xavier Cortada, "The Journey," 55" x 116", acrylic on canvas, (Commissioned by the Division of Cultural Affairs for exhibit in the Florida Capitol as part of the Governor's 2003 Hispanic Heritage Month celebration), 2003.



Florida Governor Jeb Bush unveiled "The Journey" and "Florida Mangrove" at the Florida Capitol for his 2003 Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration. Cortada created "Florida Mangrove" to illustrate the moment Juan Ponce de Leon landed on Florida's shores, changing the state's landscape and native habitats like mangrove forests forever.

Xavier Cortada, "Florida Mangrove," 55" x 116", acrylic on canvas, (Commissioned by the Division of Cultural Affairs for exhibit in the Florida Capitol as part of the Governor's 2003 Hispanic Heritage Month celebration), 2003.

MIAMI MANGROVE FOREST

The City of Miami asked Hands on Miami, a not-for-profit whose mission is building community by engaging people in volunteer service, to help its Neighborhood Enhancement Team (NET) offices beautify the Interstate's underpasses in the Downtown and Little Havana neighborhoods, as well as a flyover in the Allapattah neighborhood. Hands on Miami turned to Xavier Cortada to design artwork for the sites in a way that would make the entire project a cohesive and uniform art piece.

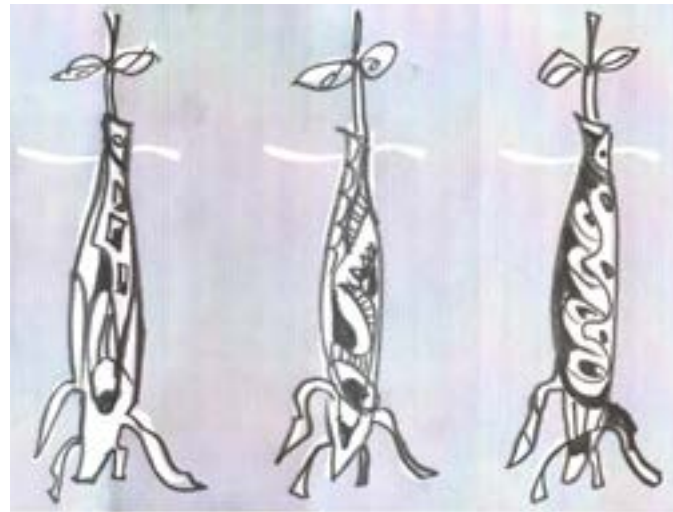
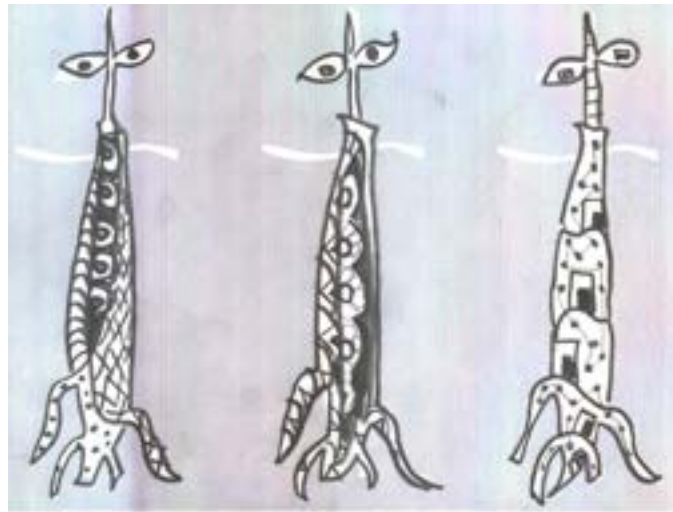
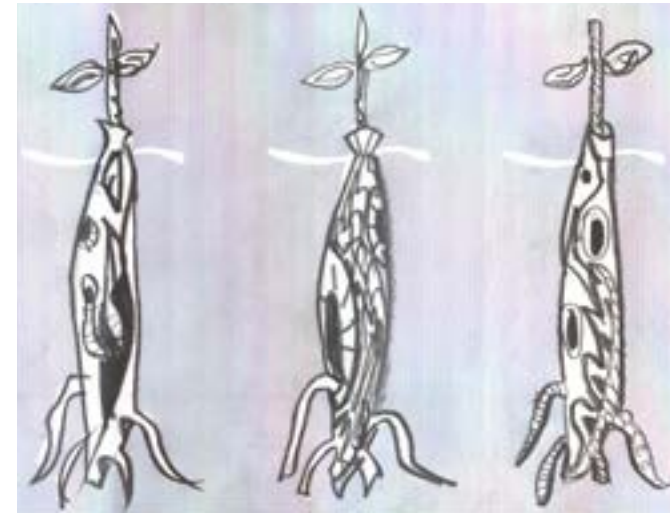
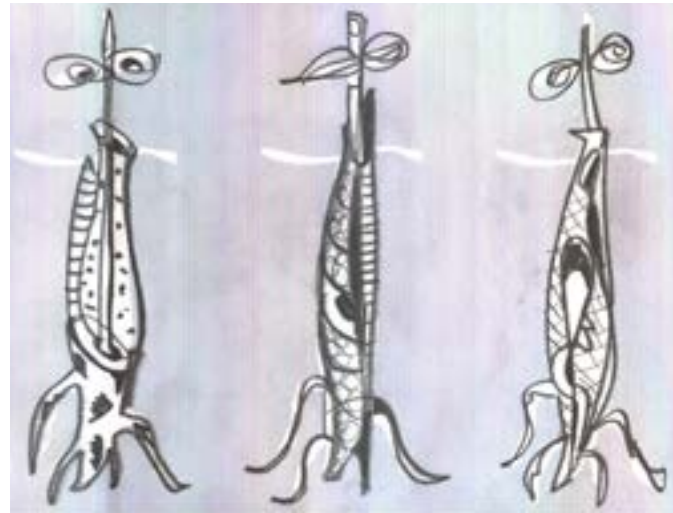
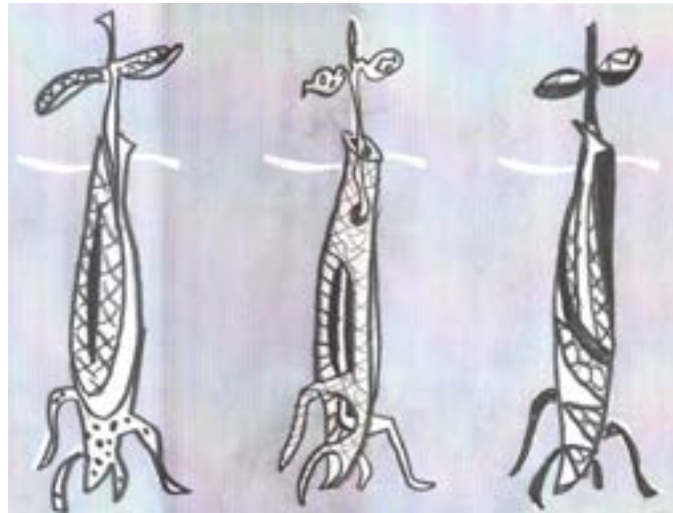
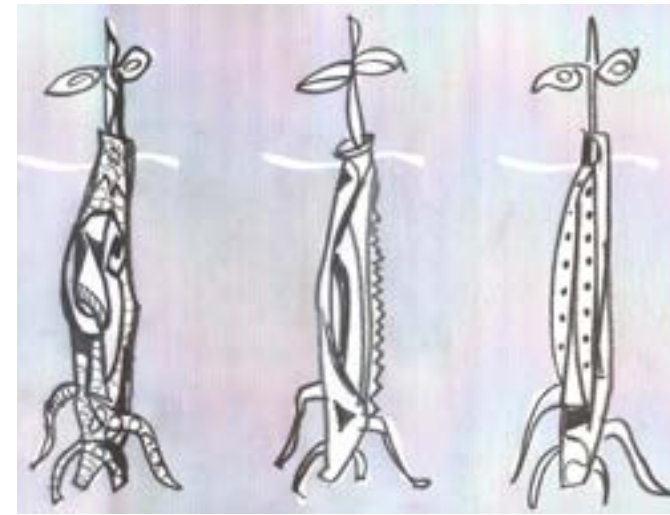
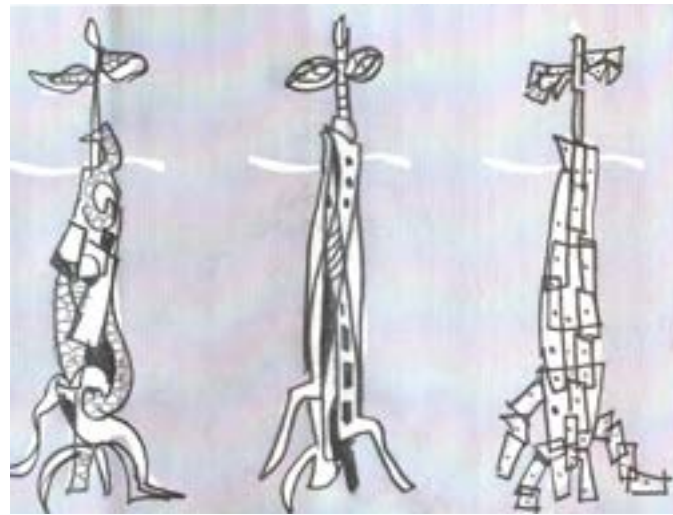
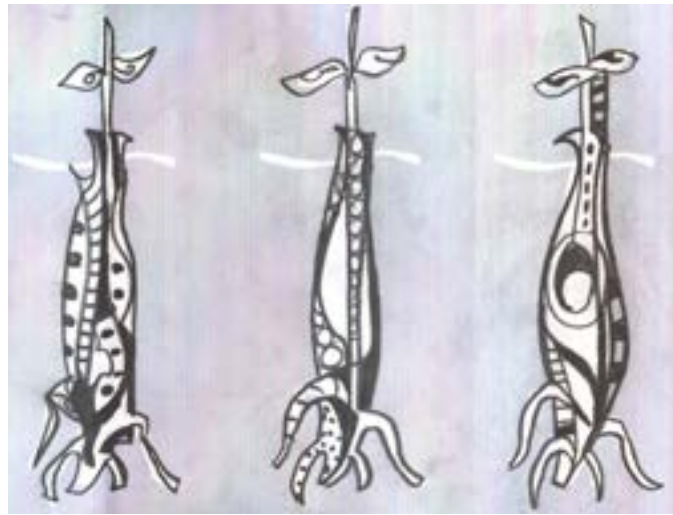
Cortada chose the image of the mangrove tree as the centerpiece of this project to transform the clammy, dingy and dark places beneath Miami's highways. Cortada decided to recreate the underpass' natural environment when the first European settlers arrived: a mangrove forest.

Miami is a young City. Instead of painting a full grown forest, Cortada chose to portray the mangrove early in its lifecycle of growth: a sea of floating seedlings readying to set their roots. Mangrove seedlings serve as a metaphor to honor the people who made the journey to Miami, set their roots, and worked to build community.

"We've all come from different places to make Miami our home," said Cortada, "much like a mangrove seed washes up and takes root on a Florida sandbar and helps build new land where new life can take hold."



Xavier Cortada, Miami Mangrove Forest (Downtown Miami, FL), 2004.



"Having this painted forest's roots spread across these different neighborhoods, depicts our interconnectedness," stated the artist, "by reaching out to others, we build a stronger community, much like the walking feet of mangrove roots do to build formidable structures and nurture new life."

Indeed, that is what hundreds of volunteers did on Hands on Miami Day 2004, when they began the transformation of what were once blighted areas. Using 8 foot by 4 foot stencils designed by the artist, Hands on Miami volunteers painted three mangrove seedlings on each of the underpass' columns. Each seedling was painted in one of 18 colors. The areas around each seedling were painted in blues to simulate the sea and sky. Students from Miami International University of Art and Design then returned to the downtown site to work on the colored seedlings. Using black paint they executed unique drawings Cortada created for each and every seedling.

Together, hundreds of volunteers came together to help transform the neighborhoods into works of art. Using paint, they planted these unique seedlings that will grow into the Miami Mangrove Forest and inspire others to reach out to other neighborhoods in building a stronger Miami.

Portraying the natural world in urban spaces is also important because it reminds us of what was here before all the concrete was poured. As generations and growth transform Miami, we as a people are grounded by nature, the one constant in this ever changing city.

Twenty seven of Xavier Cortada's fifty six mangrove propagule drawings replicated on Miami Mangrove Forest columns by Hands on Miami volunteers.



Following Miami Mangrove Forest, Cortada continued with his usage of the mangrove as a form of symbolic iconography, leading to a more conceptualized understanding of the imagery's relevance toward the Miami community. This can be seen in the subsequent OMNIART exhibitions, OMNIART I in December 2004 and OMNIART II in January 2005, that occurred during Art Basel.

While the OMNIART exhibition(s) initially had the primary purpose of exhibiting the pictures of mangrove propagules Cortada drew for use in the creation of his Miami Mangrove Forest, they became a departure point for future socially engaged works within the artist's concentration. Within the setting of the white cube, Cortada was able to acknowledge the significance of his iconography through its own presence, deploying nature in the context of urbanicity. This was done quite literally, actual mangroves arranged on a column, standing sentinel in the middle of the gallery space.

RECLAMATION PROJECT

Launched in 2006, Xavier Cortada's Reclamation Project has since evolved into a continuous eco-artwork that has influenced the direction and methodology of the artist's greater social practice. The origins of the project stem from Cortada's experiences in the Florida Keys; the artist witnessed firsthand the destruction and upheaval of native mangroves across an 18-mile stretch, a violent act which necessitated an invigorated public response.

Cortada was introduced to the symbolic aspects of the mangrove early in his childhood, his understanding of the plant inspired by his Cuban heritage as well as his family's trips to Bear Cut in Key Biscayne. The usage of the mangrove imagery was first seen in the artist's work as early as 2003 as a metaphor for the immigrant, Cortada imagining the plant's seeds floating to a new shore, putting down roots, and beginning a new community. The mangrove was also used as the central imagery of Miami Mangrove Forest, a 2004 public art project that utilized murals to inspire thoughts of a metaphoric reforestation of downtown Miami. However, after growing increasingly concerned about the impending doom of climate change, Cortada's perspective towards environmental issues began to shift from that of traditional artist to social practitioner.

While the Reclamation Project, in its original state, eventually ended, Cortada continued to address issues of social/cultural/environmental importance through this newly developed methodology, building upon relationships made during the campaign to introduce works such as Plan(T), Underwater HOA, and Native Flags. Plan(T) in particular can be seen as a natural evolution from its predecessor, though its conceptual output relies on a visualization of an inevitable future rather than an urban reforestation effort.

The Reclamation Project survives today as a point of departure for Cortada's practice, the work ushering in a process of community engagement and infiltration that has evolved continuously over the years. This is due in no small part to the artist's long-standing role in his community, the 15-year anniversary of the project marking an environmental and cultural commitment to South Florida and its people.

Reclamation Project volunteers collect mangrove propagules at Oleta River State Park, 2006.





On Earth Day 2006, Miami artist Xavier Cortada launched this eco-art intervention during the opening of a month-long installation at the Bass Museum of Art. During its inaugural year, 2,500 red mangrove seedlings were adopted by retail businesses across South Beach.



In December 2007, Reclamation Project brought 1,111 mangrove propagules to Miami Science Museum (now the Phillip and Patricia Frost Science Museum). The eco-art project was the precursor to the museum's volunteer-based habitat restoration project, Museum Volunteers for the Environment (MUVE).



Cortada's installations were created as modernist grids to resemble a cityscape. Man-made objects (cups and clips) are used to create rows and columns representing streets and avenues and placing mangroves in the installation models the idea of putting nature back into our built environment.

Xavier Cortada "Reclamation Project," 400 mangroves in clear, water-filled cups, Tampa Preparatory School, Tampa, FL. 2009.

Since its inception, the Reclamation Project has been exhibited across the United States at:

- **Whatcom Museum**, Bellingham, WA (2018)
- **Weisman Art Museum**, Minneapolis, MN (2018)
- **National Science Foundation**, Arlington, VA (2013)
- **Eckerd College Sarasota Center**, University Park, FL (2013)
- **SoHo Studios during Art Basel Miami Beach 2010**, Miami, FL (2010)
- **Auburn University Art Gallery**, Auburn, AL (2009)
- **EXIT Art**, New York, NY (2008)
- **Milander Center for Arts and Entertainment during CLIMA 2016**, Hialeah, FL (2016)
- **Deering Estate**, Palmetto Bay, FL (2010)
- **Martin County Courthouse Cultural Center**, Stuart, FL (2009)
- **Verge Art Fair**, Miami Beach, FL (2009)
- **Miami Science Museum**, Miami, FL (2008)
- **Scope Art Fair for Art Basel**, Miami Beach, FL (2006)
- **Bass Museum of Art**, Miami Beach, FL (2006)

Other participatory eco-art projects by Cortada that were inspired by the Reclamation Project include:

- Native Flags
- Underwater HOA
- FLOR500
- Flower Force
- Plan(T)

Together, these 5 participatory eco-art projects have engaged thousands of people worldwide in taking action against the climate crisis.

Excerpt from exhibition catalog for

ENDANGERED SPECIES: ARTISTS ON THE FRONT LINE OF BIODIVERSITY

Curated by Whatcom Museum Curator of Art Dr. Barbara Matilsky
Whatcom Museum, Bellingham, Washington

“The Reclamation Project is Xavier Cortada’s response to the loss of Florida’s mangrove trees. His eco-artwork revitalizes mangrove forests, one of Earth’s most biodiverse ecosystems. Working with botanists, Cortada began collaborating with Miami merchants, who raised twenty-five hundred red mangrove seedlings and displayed them in storefront windows for a year. Community volunteers then planted the seedlings along the barrier island of Key Biscayne. Similar collaborations in other locations followed, including in the nearby Virginia Key featured in this photograph and accompanying video by Bill Bilowit.

Unique to salt water swamps between land and sea, mangrove trees shelter a wide range of animals. Seventy-five percent of all tropical fish are born among the extraordinary roots of mangrove forests. Mangroves also protect humans from the flooding and coastal erosion caused by hurricanes. By filtering toxins, mangroves are essential for the health of threatened coral reef ecosystems.

Mangrove forests are found only along the world’s tropical coastlines. Drained for development, stressed by pollution, and cut down for fuel and lumber, they are among the most threatened habitats on Earth. The last decade alone saw destruction of 35 percent of the world’s mangroves¹.

Reforestation efforts such as the Reclamation Project help protect these environments. The Miami Science Museum (now Frost Science Museum) adopted and expanded the project, which now covers twenty-five acres of coastal habitat restored by seventy-five hundred citizen conservationists.”

¹Ivan Valiela et al., “Mangrove Forests: One of the World’s Threatened Major Tropical Environments,” *BioScience* 51, no. 10, (October 1, 2001), 807–815, <https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/51/10/807/245210>.





NATIVE FLAGS

Native Flags began June 29, 2008 when Cortada planted a green flag at the North Pole to reclaim the world below for nature and launch a reforestation campaign that rebuilds native ecosystems across the planet. This action was in direct response to modern nations vying for control of Arctic resources that lay below the ice. By planting the flag at this specific location, Cortada was making a symbolic gesture of reclamation by nature, like a “reverse conquistador.”

Participating residents are asked to plant a native tree alongside the green project flag in their front yard and state:

“I HEREBY RECLAIM THIS LAND FOR NATURE.”

Fusing art, scientific knowledge, and civic engagement, Native Flags seeks to involve individuals directly in restoration efforts

through the planting, maintaining, and protecting of these native ecosystems in order to regrow our native tree canopy. Trees provide various ecosystem services to humans; they help mitigate the urban heat island effect, provide habitat for animals, and conserve water. Importantly, the restoration of native trees helps to offset the threat of global warming by sequestering carbon dioxide and protecting biodiversity. Thus, urban reforestation efforts have become a top priority, specifically with the planting of drought-tolerant native plant species.

Since 2009, Native Flags has engaged thousands of participants in annual tree plantings across each of Miami-Dade County’s 336 public schools, as well as Florida’s Treasure and Gulf coasts, Auburn University in Alabama, Grand Rapids, Capitol Hill, Taiwan, Latvia, and Finland.

The conspicuous green flags of Cortada’s Native Flags project function as a catalyst for climate conversation with neighbors, friends and family who may come across it in participant yards and become curious.

UNDERWATER HOA

Mapping the topography of a conceptual coastline is the basis of Cortada's Underwater HOA project, necessary "to make the invisible visible."

Working in conjunction with his Antarctic Ice Paintings from 2006, Underwater HOA is a participatory art project that depicts South Florida's vulnerability to sea-level rise, specifically the vulnerability of homeowners in South Florida. The goal of this project is to inform citizens on the impending issue of sea-level rise while also facilitating discussions of change within the community by holding monthly "UHOA" meetings. As part of the project, Cortada worked with the Village of Pinecrest to encourage its residents to install a "marker" in their front yard, this marker being a yard sign that depicts the house's current elevation above sea level above a backdrop of Cortada's Antarctic Ice Paintings that are literal depictions of melted ice. The introduction of such drastic imagery further emphasizes the urgency of the issues Cortada presents – issues that need to be addressed now.

These markers function as a catalyst for conversation, just like Native Flag's green flags, prompting passersby to question the sign's purpose and ideally prompt further involvement. However, they are also literal markers, their installation effectively mapping Miami's elevation above sea-level across various parts of the community. By mapping Miami's elevation above sea level, the markers are able to achieve a subversive presence through their own existence, the concept of openly stating a house's current elevation addresses the current precariousness of the real estate market in Miami. This presents these issues from a rather personal perspective, as Cortada prompts action by making the problem a selfish one; even if you can't or won't initiate change for others you probably will do it if it's in your own self-interest. While this is an effective strategy for promoting involvement from its participants, it also allows for a sense of self-realization from its participants that permeate into collaborative efforts.

The Village of Pinecrest's main thoroughfare, Killian Drive, featured Underwater Markers along a 2.5-mile stretch, between US1 and Red Road, to show drivers the gradual increase in elevation from one end of the street to the next. Art students from four local high schools helped Cortada map the elevation of four major intersections along Pinecrest's Killian Drive by painting his markers on the roadway.



Cortada's acknowledgment of universal self-interest is a necessary aspect of the project, personal autonomy being the primary motivation for engagement by most participants. However, the form in which this is achieved, a participatory art project, forces a relinquishment of this autonomy from its participants as well as the artist. As noted by Claire Bishop in her essay, the Social Turn, "participatory projects in the social field therefore seem to operate with a twofold gesture of opposition and amelioration. They work against dominant market imperatives by diffusing single authorship into collaborative activities" (Claire Bishop). Contextually applied to Underwater HOA, this appears to be a necessary aspect of the project, the ability, and need, to foster community through collaborative action being twofold in its effect; that of environmental mitigation, intended, as well as a conceptual and practical point of departure reliant on communal autonomy.

As the project has grown, Underwater HOA has shifted from establishing community groups under the guise of a "homeowner association" into an infiltration of already existing, functional, homeowner associations throughout South Florida. This approach lends itself to being viewed as a form of institutional critique, the institutions in question being that of governing residential/community organizations. Where this differs from traditional forms of institutional critique within art historical canon is in its complete dismissal of esoteric values typically associated with the medium, being that of a critique of systems in an art world context.

In this way, the infiltration of already established HOA organizations offers both a critique of the systems in place as well as a solution to the problems being addressed. Rarely does this type of art allow for first-hand participants rather than a secondary audience, however Cortada accomplishes this by effectively transforming issues of global scope into a residential nodus that needs to be engaged by individuals.

Underwater HOA 8-foot elevation marker in front of Cortada's studio, the Whilden-Carrier Cottage at Pinecrest Gardens.





FLOR500

FLOR500 is a participatory art project initiated in 2013 by Miami artist Xavier Cortada to commemorate the quincentennial of Juan Ponce de Leon's arrival to the state of Florida. The flower was chosen as the focal iconography of the project for its historical significance in the naming of the state by Ponce de Leon, naming it "La Florida" after the Spanish word for flower - flor. The project, a precursor to Flower Force, was a collaboration between scientists, historians, Florida schools and libraries across 67 counties, and 500 artists.

To accomplish a work of this scale, there required an ability from the artist to navigate through large institutions and systems to accomplish the project, an intention by the artist so to later use the overarching effort of FLOR500 as a framework for others to follow in the creation of a viable social practice. While large in scope, FLOR500 operates through communal involvement requiring many volunteers across multiple disciplines to carry it out, from a team of scientists that selected five hundred specific wildflowers native to Florida to be used in the project, to five hundred different artists invited to depict a specific wildflower.

Historians were invited to develop a list of five hundred individuals that had a deep impact on the history of the state. The names of these important individuals were then used in naming wildflower gardens planted by individual FLOR500 participants as well as those organized through universities, schools and libraries across the state. Through its immense collaborative effort from the various

communities and professionals involved, FLOR500 fits into Cortada's oeuvre naturally, the socially-engaged intent of this project being similar to that of his other projects like Native Flags and Underwater HOA. This can be seen not only within the collaborative effort required to undertake FLOR500, but through the way participants interact with the project. Cortada asks his participants to approach Florida's history and commemorate it by planting a native wildflower, an attempt at returning the natural environment back to its initial state as it was in 1513.

However, through this communal involvement Cortada sets out to impart a comprehension of the state's history that is much older than Florida's celebrated birthday. Florida's history did not begin in 1513, it began much earlier. Cortada wants his audience to understand that Ponce de Leon's arrival was important as it changed the course of everything within the state, whether positively or negatively. This presents FLOR500 as a historical undertaking, the artist not only commemorating Florida's history but prompting participants to literally grow their own history, adding to Florida's already diverse natural landscape.

The production and aftermath of FLOR500 speaks to a greater and more educational opportunity for the future of the project. This is aided, intentionally, through the very processes that work to produce an effort such as this, the documentation of FLOR500 not only acting as a preservation of the work itself, but a framework for future social engagement.

Xavier Cortada, "FLOR500 Flower Force," 80 drawings (charcoal on board) and Florida native wildflower seeds inside clear bags on grid, 2012.

FLOWER FORCE

Flower Force is multi-faceted in operation, an almost natural evolution from Cortada's previous FLOR500 project that pushes the elasticity of art to the point of recognizable social practice. The project revolves around Florida's native wildflowers and Cortada's insistence on mobilizing individuals in the state to plant these flowers within their local communities.

Wildflowers magically rise from the soil in a triumphant celebration of color and form. They are architectural masterpieces, miniature cathedrals. Wildflowers can have medicinal properties and carry cultural significance. They can have practical uses and provide food and shelter to hummingbirds, butterflies, bees and other species. Wildflowers allow the planet's pollinators, with whom they co evolved through time, to fulfill their joint responsibility of sustaining life's fragile web. An intricate and complex biological process that makes Earth verdant, sustains all animals (including humans) and balances atmospheric gases (that accelerate global climate change).

The original rendition of Flower Force was designed as a participatory eco-art project, however its current evolution expands on this by utilizing the traditional medium of sculpture, specifically ceramics, as a conceptual icon throughout the project's dispersal. The ceramic flower, as it is dispersed throughout Florida similar to the wildflower seedlings, becomes an appropriation of the original wildflower. This appropriation works as both a conceptual representation of the ideals of Flower Force, as well as a literal one; the ceramic flower represents both the physical attributes of the

wildflower as well as the temporal attributes. The permanence of a ceramic flower contrasts with the impermanence of the actual wildflower.

Much like a flower goes through a process of dispersal in order to reproduce, the ceramic offerings Cortada presents act as a dissemination from the original public art installations to commemorate Florida's quincentennial for which they were intended. This is not only a literal action, but one of conceptual significance. It is the dissemination of the ideals and values that the original installation represents. In this way, Flower Force behaves quite similarly to Cortada's FLOR500 participatory art project, as the end result is the dispersal and cultivation of native flowers throughout Florida as a reclamation of the built environment for nature. This imbues the ceramic flowers with the conceptual significance and weight of the ideals that Cortada presents, the ceramic flowers both conceptually and literally representing the wildflowers that have been planted.

Audience participation in an effort to make an actual change in the environment is nothing new to Cortada's work, as seen through both Flower Force and FLOR500 respectively, as well as projects such as Plan(T), the Reclamation Project, and Underwater HOA. All of these projects require direct involvement from the community to succeed, the goal of all being to prompt specific action against climate change, rather than just raise awareness. This socially-engaged art is fundamental to Cortada's concentration, transforming his role as an artist into an effective community leader.

*Xavier Cortada, "FLOR500," hand-glazed ceramic, 2013.
This ceramic caryopsis flower was included in Secretary of State Ken
Detzner's Viva Florida 500 statewide time capsule on December 13, 2013
for the State of Florida's 500th anniversary, to be opened again in 2095.*





PLAN(T)

Where Plan(T) differs from the Reclamation Project is in its focus, as Cortada strives to plan for the future in this 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 strangeness of the propagule and white flag encourages Miami-Dade residents to start climate conversations with neighbors and guests about carbon sequestration and growing our salt-tolerant native tree canopy in order to safeguard vulnerable areas of our city and provide future seed stock for areas surrendered to rising seas. The tree functions both as a literal act against climate change and sea level rise, 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.

Plan(T) adopts the Reclamation Project grid of mangroves in clear, water-filled cups to create a sense of peculiarity in familiar spaces (schools, libraries, retail spaces, etc.) and encourage passersby to learn more about the goals of the project.

mangrove strut

Jackie Gross, a volunteer with artist Xavier Cortada's Reclamation Project, collects mangrove seedlings in Key Biscayne. The seedlings are being distributed throughout South Beach and will be replanted along Biscayne Bay after Art Basel. PAGE 3



KEY BISCAYNE AND MIAMI BEACH

SEEDS OF CHANGE

A PROJECT TO REPLENISH THE AREA'S NATIVE MANGROVE FOREST IS BECOMING A LABOR OF ART THROUGH THE RECLAMATION PROJECT. MIAMI BEACH STORE OWNERS WILL DISPLAY RECENTLY COLLECTED SEEDLINGS AND DISPLAY THEM IN STORE WINDOWS

BY RASHIDA BARTLEY
Miami News Service

The day was hot, sticky and smelly — a mosquito's paradise and a beachgoer's nightmare — unless, like Xavier Cortada, you were on a mission to help reforest South Florida's mangroves along Biscayne Bay.

Cortada, 42, a noted Miami artist and environmental activist, recently trudged through the mangroves of Oleta River State Park in North Miami and Crandon Park in Key Biscayne. Accompanying him was a team of five or six volunteers, some wearing rubber boots, others in old sneakers and gloves, who painstakingly collected seedlings that had fallen prematurely.

"The mangroves are kind of stinky," said Miami Beach resident Alex Montalvo, who participated in the Oct. 13 collection at Oleta River State Park and in other similar projects. "Actually, the smellier the swamp, the healthier it is," Montalvo said.

For Cortada, a healthy swamp means bringing back the trees that once filled the miles of mangroves that were Miami Beach before development. The mangroves, he said, were destroyed to make way for streets such as Lincoln Road. Now, as part of the Reclamation Project, businesses in South Beach and children at Key Biscayne Community School will care for more than 2,500 collected seedlings, Cortada said.

"We are taking what nature throws away here and putting it in a place where man has thrown away nature," Cortada said.

Volunteers are canvassing South Beach shops to hang the seedlings, which are in clear plastic cups, in their windows. The project, which was launched earlier this year, is



HARD AT WORK: Xavier Cortada points out mangrove seedlings Wednesday. He was collecting them for the Reclamation Project.

PROJECT DETAILS

- South Beach businesses seeking to adopt and display mangrove seedlings should call Citizens for a Better South Florida at 305-648-0000.
- For information about the Reclamation Project or to volunteer, visit www.reclamationproject.net.

tions, including Citizens for a Better South Florida and Miami-Dade County Department of Environmental Resources, designed the Re-

tural Affairs, Cortada said.

"The art is not having people collect seedlings; the art is having the volunteers — the ambassadors — ask the people inside those concrete structures to have nature inside their offices," Cortada said.

Businesses and Key Biscayne schoolchildren will be responsible for caring for the seedlings, which primarily involves watering them, until mid-December when Xavier and his volunteers will retrieve the budding plants and replant them along the bay.

grow and then plant at Bearcut Preserve or Bill Baggs State Park.

In Miami Beach, Books & Books on Lincoln Road already has hung 72 of the seedlings in its windows.

"It is beautiful and evoking enormous response," said Books & Books South Beach store manager Vivienne Evans. Customers, she said, have expressed genuine interest in the project.

"It seems to me that people are interested in the plight of the mangrove," Evans said.

Cortada said that is the kind

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bassmuseumof**art**[®]
presents

The Reclamation Project

by
Xavier Cortada

Earth Day

Opening reception

Bass Museum of Art
2121 Park Avenue, Miami Beach, FL 33139
Saturday, April 22, 2006
3 - 5 pm (free and open to the public)

sponsored by



*Invitation for the Reclamation Project opening reception on
Earth Day 2006 at the Bass Museum of Art*



Xavier Cortada prepares a Reclamation Project installation in storefront windows along Lincoln Road in Miami Beach, 2006.

Xavier Cortada is an artist and Professor of Practice at the University of Miami. Particularly environmentally focused, the work Xavier Cortada develops is intended to generate awareness and action towards issues of global climate change and social justice. Over the past three decades, the socially-engaged artist has created art at the North and South poles and across 6 continents, including more than 150 public artworks and dozens of installations, collaborative murals and socially engaged projects.

Cortada has been commissioned to create art for CERN, the White House, the World Bank, Florida Botanical Gardens, Miami City Hall, Miami-Dade County Hall, the Florida Turnpike, Miami-Dade Housing Authority, the Frost Science Museum, Museum of Florida History, and the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum. His work is in the permanent collections of the Perez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), the NSU Museum of Art in Ft. Lauderdale, the Whatcom Museum, and the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum.

Cortada was born to Cuban exiles in Albany, New York and grew up in Miami from the age of three. He holds three degrees from the University of Miami: Bachelor of Arts, College of Arts and Sciences (1986), Master of Public Administration, Miami Business School (1991) and Juris Doctor, School of Law (1991).

Learn more about Xavier Cortada at cortada.com.



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