



NATIVE FLAGS

Xavier Cortada

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Native Flags is a participatory eco-art project that requires its participants to help restore native habitats for plants and animals in urban areas, an evolution of Cortada's ongoing Reclamation Project.

The project was initiated on June 29, 2008, when Cortada planted a green flag at the North Pole in an effort to "reclaim it for nature", a performance which inspired the participatory aspects of the project. This action taken by the artist 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 is making a literal declaration of war against climate change, as well as making a symbolic gesture of reclamation by nature.

In an effort to take legitimate action against climate change, Cortada developed a participatory project based on this initial performance, instructing his participants to plant native trees in hopes of combating the melting of arctic ice. Through the planting of a native tree alongside an easily identifiable green project flag, Cortada invites his participants to state "I hereby reclaim this land for nature".

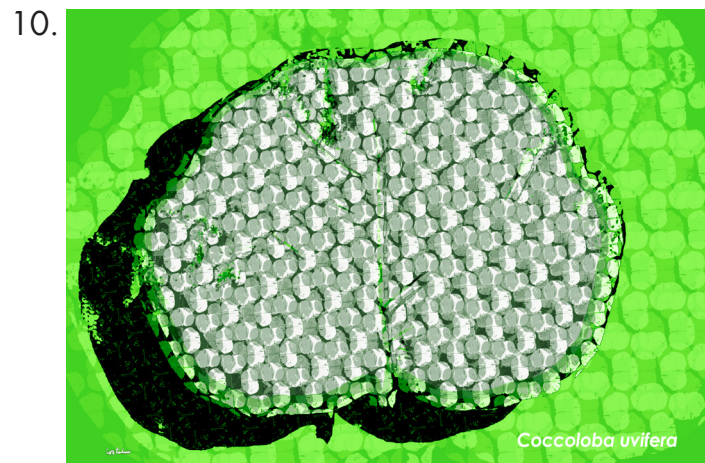
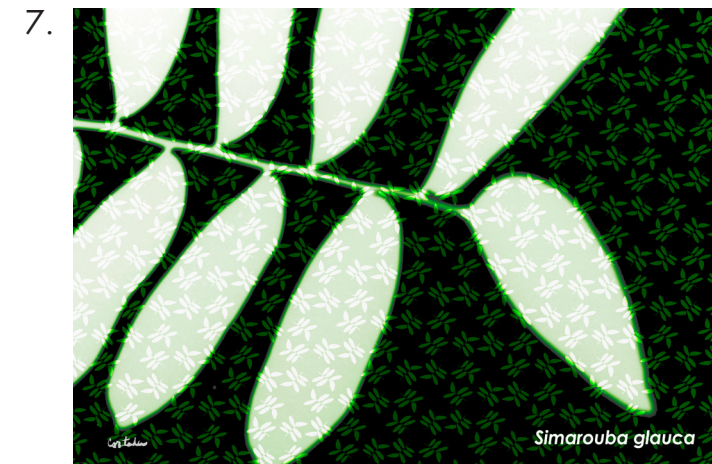
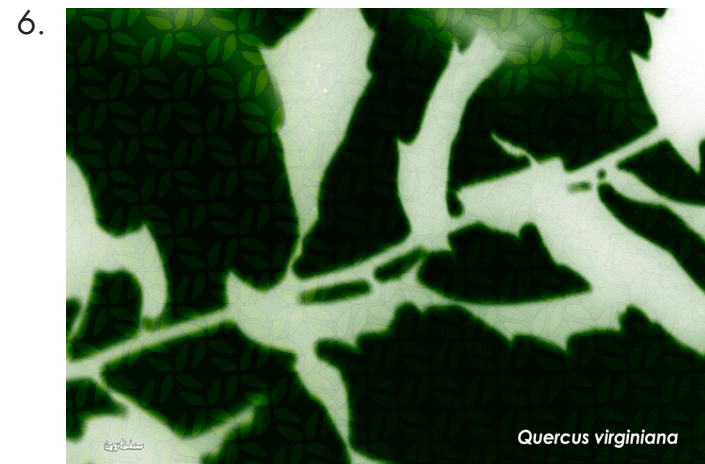
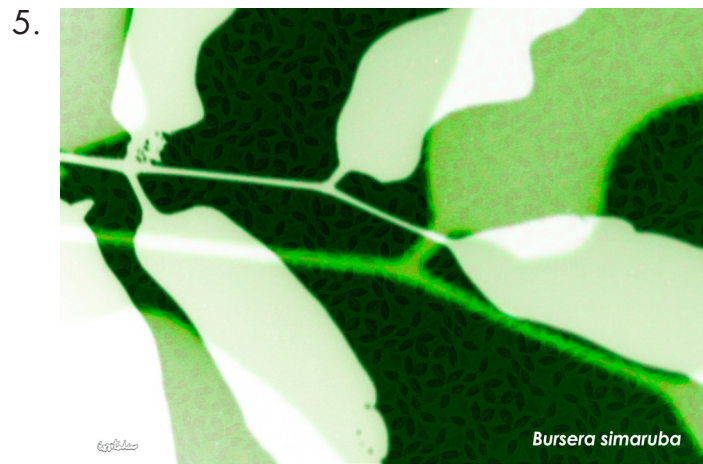
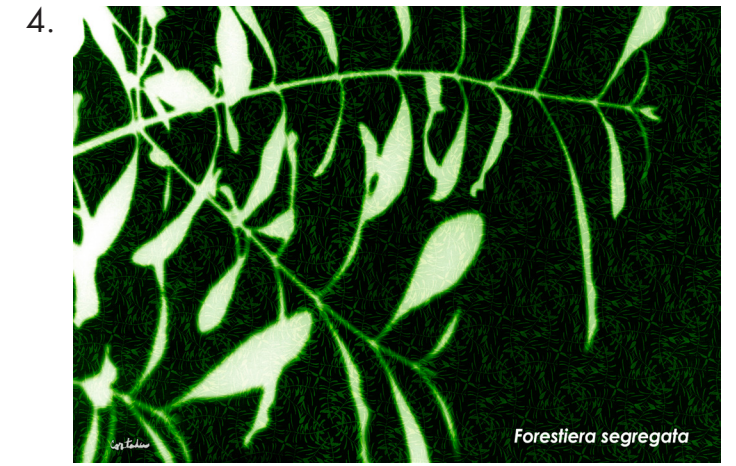
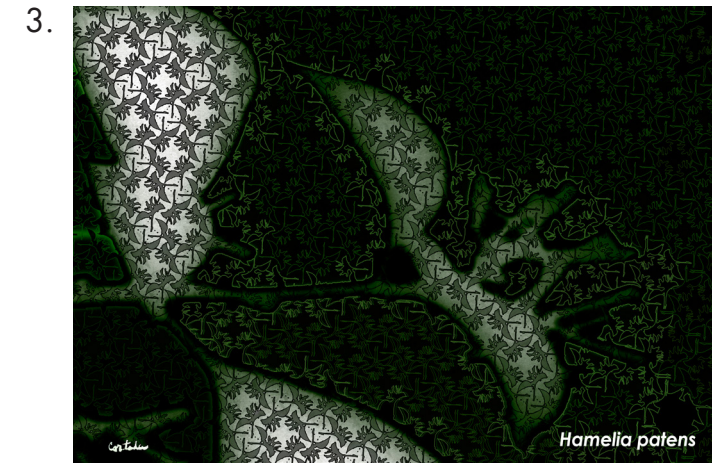
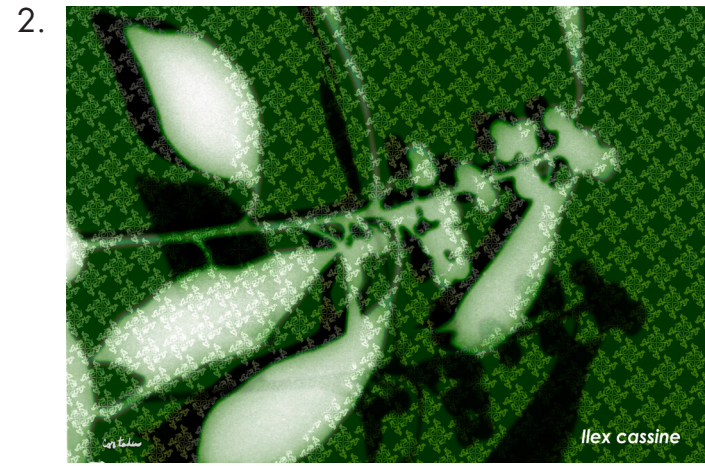
The act of planting the green flag effectively transforms their actions into a catalyst for conversation, while their statement of reclamation includes them as an integral part of a large-scale performance. This is where the project is most effective, as it not only aims to spark change in the urban environment, but to initiate conversation within the community specifically around this change.

Cortada approaches this project similar to participatory performance art, at first guiding his participants in the performance, then leaving them to lead it on their own. This transference of the project's autonomy unto various individuals allows for these individuals to take the project further than what Cortada originally prompts; a continuous eco-art performance.

Seen throughout Cortada's work is a focus on developing signifiers within communities. In Native Flags, the green project flag that accompanies the performance behaves as a statement of reclamation and a point of departure for participants to initiate new action.

In turn, the environmental impact of Native Flags is amphibolic, as it not only terraforms the urban landscape, an action against climate change through the initiation of a natural tree canopy, it also spurs conversation throughout various communities for other actions to be taken.





SOUTH FLORIDA NATIVE TREES

Cortada created images of the twelve native trees he encouraged his South Florida neighbors to plant alongside the project's conspicuous green flags to serve as a catalyst for conversations with neighbors. As a result, more neighbors will be encouraged to join the effort and help rebuild their native tree canopy one yard at a time. Ideally, as they watch each tree grow, their interest in the environment will also grow.

Xavier Cortada, "Native Flags: South Florida Native Trees," 2008.

- [1] Buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*)
- [2] Dahoon Holly (*Ilex cassine*)
- [3] Firebush (*Hamelia patens*)
- [4] Florida Privet (*Forestiera segregata*)
- [5] Gumbo Limbo (*Bursera simaruba*)
- [6] Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*)

- [7] Paradise Tree (*Simarouba glauca*)
- [8] Pigeon Plum (*Coccoloba diversifolia*)
- [9] Satinleaf (*Chrysophyllum oliviforme*)
- [10] Sea Grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*)
- [11] Wild Coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*)
- [12] Wild Tamarind (*Lysiloma latisiliquum*)



Since 2009, students have planted a native tree and flag annually in every single one of Miami-Dade County's 336 public schools.



In 2011, Taiwan's Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts commissioned Cortada to engage hundreds of participants in an eco-art reforestation campaign.



Eco-art by Xavier Cortada

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

1. Purchase a native tree at your local nursery.
2. Make your own native flag by attaching a green cloth to a pole and, using white paint, draw a leaf on the flag and write "I hereby reclaim this land for nature." (You may instead purchase a flag online at cortadaprojects.org/nativeflags)
3. Plant the tree in your front lawn alongside the green project flag and state: **"I hereby reclaim this land for nature."**
4. Take a photo of the tree and flag and post it on Instagram or Facebook and tag us **@cortadaprojects**
5. Ask your neighbor to do the same.



Weeks before launching Native Flags at the North Pole, Cortada prompted Congress to address climate change by asking every member to plant a native tree and native flag in each of their home districts.



As part of a public art commission in 2009 at Florida Botanical Gardens, Cortada partnered with the Florida Native Plant Society to distribute the native flags and trees to 750 residents of Pinellas County.



In 2009, Cortada spoke at Auburn University and led art students in planting a Magnolia tree and flag to reclaim their campus for nature.



Planting a Paradise Tree on its campus, the Miami Science Museum served as the first institutional host for Cortada's urban reforestation effort.

THE ARTIST

Xavier Cortada is Professor of Practice: Artist at the University of Miami as a faculty member of the Department of Art and Art History. His science art practice is oriented toward social engagement and environmental concerns. The artist has created art installations at the Earth's poles to generate awareness about global climate change at points in between: In 2007, as a National Science Foundation Antarctic Artists and Writers Program Fellow, Cortada used the moving ice sheet beneath the South Pole as an instrument to mark time; the art piece will be completed in 150,000 years. In 2008, he planted a green flag at the North Pole to reclaim it for nature and launch an eco-art reforestation effort.

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. The Cuban American artist has been commissioned to create art for CERN, the White House, the World Bank and, locally, for Miami City Hall, the County Commission Chambers, the Florida Turnpike and the Frost Art Museum.

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.



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.



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