THE MARKERS

BY XAVIER CORTADA

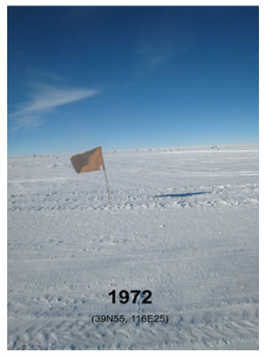
USING A GLACIER AS AN INSTRUMENT TO MARK TIME

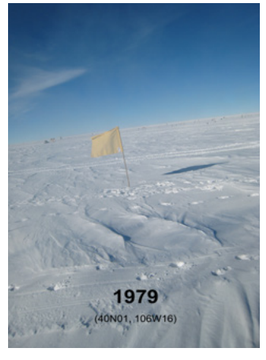
THE MARKERS

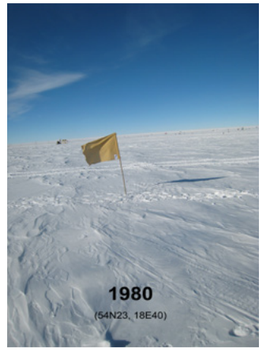
Xavier Cortada's installation highlighted events that have moved our world forward in the time it has taken the Antarctic ice sheet to move about 500 meters. Cortada chronicled the passage of time by depicting those events on flags he placed at the South Pole on January 4, 2007.

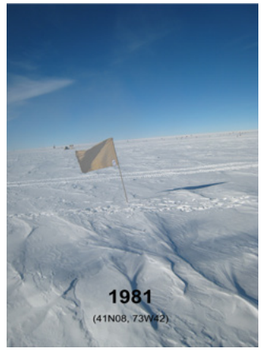
To accomplish this, the artist created 51 differently colored flags, ranging from violet to red, each sequentially representing years from 1956 to 2006. He then marked each flag with the coordinates of a place where an event took place that moved the world forward during that given year (e.g., 1963's March on Washington, 1989's Fall of the Berlin Wall). Cortada then planted each year's flag in the location on the ice where all the meridians converged during that flag's respective year; that is, where the South Pole stood during that given year. Since the South Pole, 90°S, sits on a glacier that is in constant motion, its location on the ice above changes every year.

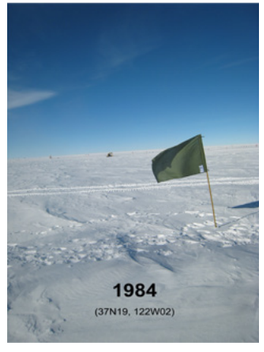
When the flags were planted they created a spectrum of color on the white surface of the ice. The first flag was planted at the location of the 2006 Geographic South Pole, with each subsequent flag spaced 10 meters apart and aligned in the direction of the Weddell Sea. Since the glacier below is moving everything in the same direction at 10 meters annually, the flags "mark" where the South Pole stood in any given year.

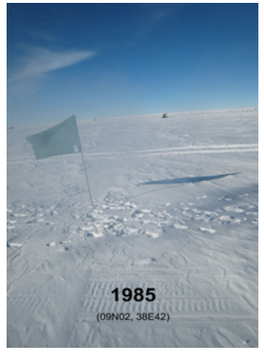


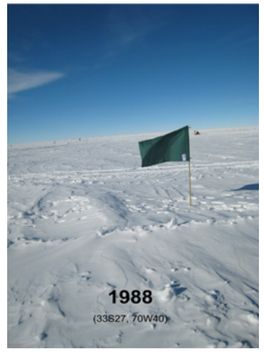


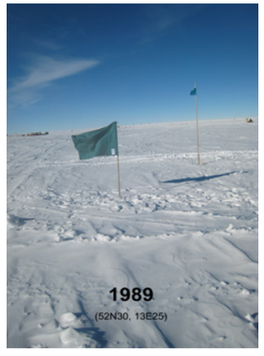


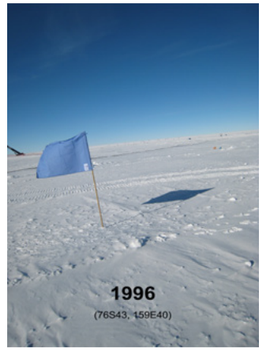




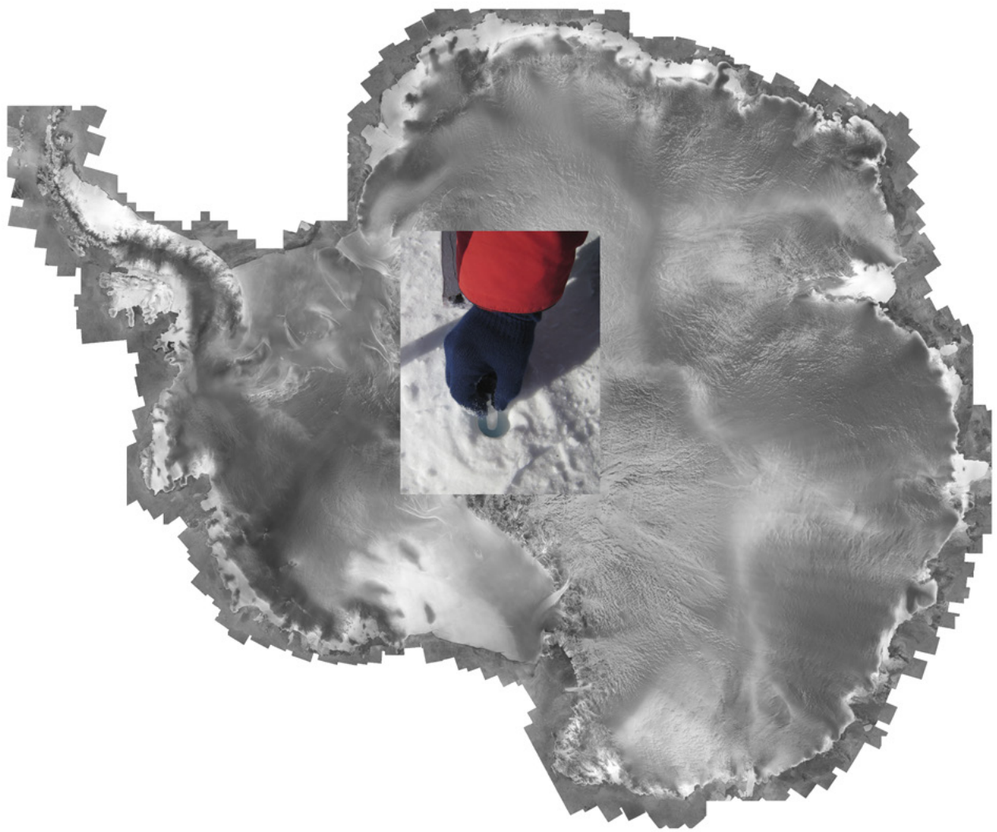








1956 Antarctica - Construction crews arrive at the South Pole; **1957** Soviet Union - Sputnik, the first satellite to orbit Earth, is launched into space from Baikonur, USSR; **1958** France - Pan Am's transatlantic 707 flight lands in Paris, jet age begins; **1959** United States - Microchip is invented; **1960** Pacific Ocean - Trieste dives to the bottom of the Mariana Trench: 35,813 feet; **1961** Soviet Union - Yuri Gagarin is first man in space (launched from Baikonur); **1962** United States - Rachel Carson's Silent Springis published; **1963** United States - March on Washington for Civil Rights; **1964** United States - Beatlemania sweeps America; **1965** Cuba - Freedom Flights for Cuban refugees begin; **1966** India - Indira Gandhi elected first woman prime minister of India, the world's largest democracy; **1967** South Africa - First human heart transplant; **1968** Soviet Union - Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty signed in Moscow, London and Washington, D.C.; **1969** United States - The Eagle lands on the moon (launched from Cape Canaveral); **1970** Barbados - Ra II crosses Atlantic in 57 days; **1971** United States - Microprocessor is invented; **1972** China - Nixon visits China; **1973** Australia - Sydney Opera House is built; **1974** Ethiopia - Skeleton of "Lucy," our 3.2 million year old ancestor, is discovered; **1975** Mexico - United Nations convenes First World Conference on Women; **1976** United States - Viking I and II land on Mars (launched from Cape Canaveral); **1977** Somalia - Smallpox eradicated from Earth; **1978** England - First test tube baby born; **1979** United States - Ten independent living centers were founded across the US for persons with disabilities; **1980** Poland - Solidarity strikes across Poland; **1981** United States - IBM launches personal computer; **1982** England - Whale hunting moratorium enacted; **1983** Vatican City - Pope John Paul II retracts the ban on Galileo; **1984** United States - Apple Macintosh launched; **1985** Ethiopia - Live Aid concerts raise millions to reduce famine; **1986** Philippines - Corazon Aquino leads People Power to end Marcos regime in the Philippines; **1987** United States - Anti-depressant Prozac is introduced; **1988** Chile - Chile plebiscite ends dictatorship, ushers in democracy across South America; **1989** Germany - Berlin Wall is knocked down; **1990** English Channel - Tunnel links UK and Europe; **1991** Russia - Russia becomes "independent" as the Soviet Union collapses; **1992** Brazil - First Earth Summit's Rio Declaration has 153 countries focus on sustainable development; **1993** United States - World Wide Web browser is created, distributed; **1994** South Africa - Apartheid ends in South Africa, Mandela elected president; **1995** United States - Grey wolves return to the American West; **1996** Antarctica - NASA announces that the Antarctic's ALH 84001meteorite points to existence of life on Mars; **1997** Japan - Kyoto Protocol enacted; **1998** Malaysia - Petronas Towers topped at 1483 ft., the tallest building at that time; **1999** Egypt - Breitling Orbiter 3 hot air balloon sails non-stop around the world; **2000** Australia - Cathy Freeman, the Aboriginal runner, wins Olympic gold; **2001** Peru - A 4,000-year-old site yielded the remains of the oldest known city in the New World; **2002** Brazil - Brazil Soccer wins 5th World Cup; **2003** England - Human Genome Project completed; **2004** United States - Google, digital music, wireless technologies and blogs boomed; **2005** Spain - Spain ends all discrimination based on sexual orientation; **2006** Easter Island - Scientists discover new species



2007: THE BEGINNING OF A

150,000-YEAR JOURNEY

In 2007, National Science Foundation (NSF) Antarctic Artist and Writers Program awardee Xavier Cortada used polar ice to mark the passage of time. He initiated this process by planting a replica* of a mangrove seedling on the 3 km thick ice sheet that blankets the South Pole.

Embedded in the moving glacier, the "seedling" is now sliding downhill (10 meters every year) in the direction of the Weddell Sea, 1,400 km away. The "seedling" has thus begun its 150,000 year journey towards the seashore, where it can eventually (theoretically) set its roots.

The "150,000-year Journey" uses the terrain of the South Pole to address a sociological concern of the artist: the travails of an immigrant's journey – the displacement, the solitude, the struggle to simply integrate oneself into society.

In a more universal way, the "150,000-year Journey" explores humankind as it evolves through time.

It will take almost 150,000 years for this art piece to be completed. What will our world look like then? Will humans still be focused on race and ethnicity by the time this mangrove seedling lands in the sea? Will our world be dramatically different, will the polar caps have melted? How much will such melting shorten the journey?

Through the "150,000-year Journey," the artist also invites viewers to reflect on our role as humans on this planet. Juxtaposing Antarctic time frames with human time frames (see "The Markers" project where he explored important world events that have moved humanity forward during the previous 50 years) reaffirms the notion that we are simply custodians of the planet who should learn to live in harmony with nature.

* The seedling is a replica because exotic species can not be introduced into the continent. As such, the artist created an ice sculpture made using a mold made from an actual Miami mangrove seedling. Water from a deep South Pole well -that makes water by melting ice created back when Shakespeare was writing Hamlet- was poured into the mold, where it froze into ice.

Xavier Cortada, Miami's pioneer eco-artist, uses art's elasticity to work across disciplines to engage communities in problem solving. Particularly environmentally focused, his work intends to generate awareness and action around climate change, sea level rise, and biodiversity loss.

Over the past three decades, the Cuban-American artist has created art at the North and South poles and across 6 continents, including more than 150 public artworks, installations, collaborative murals and socially engaged projects. He has been commissioned to create art for CERN, the White House, the World Bank, the Florida Turnpike, Port Everglades, and Miami City Hall, among many other art, science, and government venues.

Cortada, who serves as the inaugural Artist-in-Residence for Miami-Dade County, received the Environmental Law Institute's 2021 National Wetlands Award and was included in the 2022 GRIST 50. Other accolades include: the Creative Capital Award (2022), the Home & Away Residency, Anderson Ranch, Aspen, Colorado (2022); New York Foundation for the Arts fiscally-sponsored artist (2008 and 2019); Rauschenberg Residency: Rising Waters Confab, Captiva, Florida (2015); and the National Science Foundation Antarctic Artists & Writers Program, South Pole (2006-2007).

The artist's work is in the permanent collections of the Perez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), the NSU Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale, the Whatcom Museum, the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum and the MDC Museum of Art + Design, among others.

Cortada, who was born in Albany, New York, grew up and lives in Miami, Florida. He received bachelors, masters and law degrees from the University of Miami, where he currently serves as professor of practice at the University of Miami Department of Art and Art History with secondary appointments in the School of Law and Miller School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics. His studio and socially engaged art practice are based at Miami's Pinecrest Gardens.

To learn more, visit www.cortada.com.

Cover image: Xavier Cortada, "The Markers: South Pole," 2007 (National Science Foundation Antarctic Artists and Writers Program).

CORTADA
Pinecrest Gardens
11000 Red Road
Pinecrest, FL 33156

www.cortada.com
@xcortada

©2022 Xavier Cortada