



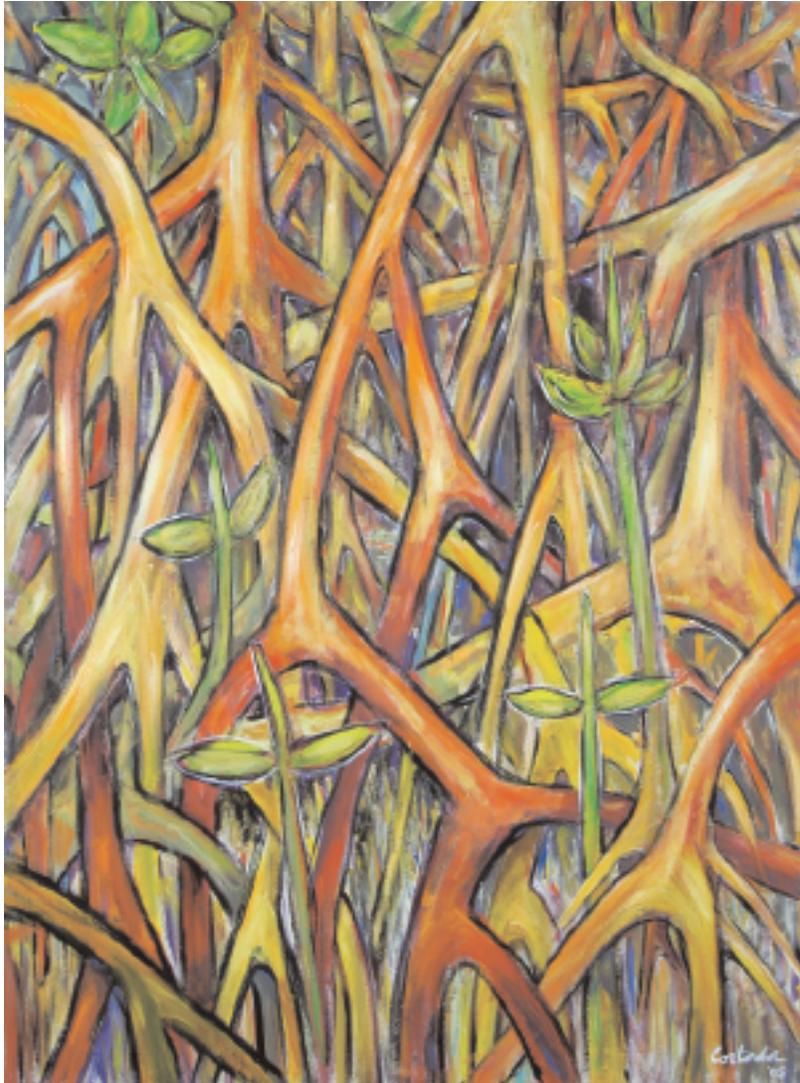
"MANGROVES"

BY XAVIER CORTADA

NORTH CAMPUS ART GALLERY • MIAMI DADE COLLEGE



Mangroves (A), oil on canvas, 36" x 48"



Roots 2, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 48"

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Xavier Cortada has exhibited his work in museums, galleries and cultural venues around the world. Cortada has also created art for the White House, the World Bank, The Florida Capitol, The Florida Supreme Court and the Miami Art Museum. In Miami, his commissioned work hangs in County Hall, the Juvenile Courthouse, and the Miami Children's Museum.

Cortada is well-known for his collaborative public art and has worked with groups across four continents to produce numerous large-scale murals and community art projects. Major projects include International AIDS Conference murals in Switzerland and South Africa, and peace murals in Northern Ireland and Cyprus. In Miami, hundreds of volunteers helped him paint the *Miami Mangrove Forest* on I-95 underpasses for Art Basel 2004. Recently, he created the *Painted Cuban Plane and Freedom Luggage Installation*, featuring a real Soviet airplane flown by its Cuban pilot to the United States.

He has served as Artistic Director of various projects sponsored by Miami-Dade Art in Public Places, including Master Peace (a school-based art project in Miami-Dade County Public Schools) and PATH (Public Art Transforming Housing for the Miami-Dade Housing Agency). Corporate commissions include Nike, Hershey's, Heineken, and HBO.

Cortada was born in Albany, New York in 1964 and was raised in Miami. He holds three degrees from the University of Miami – a Bachelor of Arts, Master of Public Administration and Juris Doctor. The Cuban-American artist's work and writings are preserved in the Xavier Cortada Collection of the University of Miami Libraries Cuban Heritage Collection. He has been honored with *Xavier Cortada Day* Proclamations by the City of Miami, Miami Beach, South Miami and Miami-Dade County.

The Miami artist has received numerous awards for his volunteer work, including the prestigious Millennium International Volunteer Award from the U.S. Department of State/USA Today (for his work in Spain, Portugal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Mauritius, Kenya, Tanzania, Colombia, Bolivia, Honduras and Guatemala) and the Florida International Volunteer Corps 1999 Outstanding Achievement Award (for his work in Costa Rica and Panama).

Cortada has also been the recipient of numerous grants from agencies such as the U.S. State Department, the State of Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, Miami-Dade Cultural Affairs Council, the Dade Community Foundation and the Metlife Foundation. In February 2000, Cortada was invited by the Vatican to participate in the Jubilee Day for Artists and meet Pope John Paul II.

For more information about the artist, please visit his website, www.cortada.com.

XAVIER CORTADA: “SEEING” IN TUNE WITH NATURE

an essay by Alfredo Triff

The Everglades is one of the most polluted and abused wetlands in America. Its soil has been dug up for limestone (to use in construction), flooded by the sugar industry’s chemical byproducts and guttered with sewer water. Poachers prey on alligators, turtles, rare birds and manatees. Lately, its green expanse has been trimmed down by South Florida’s multibillion-dollar real estate industry.

Mangrove swamps, which extend as far north as Tampa on the Gulf Coast, and to Daytona Beach on the Atlantic seaboard, are a crucial Everglades habitat. In this vegetation mass, fresh water meets salty water from the tidal flats; an impenetrable maze of woody vegetation grows amidst the tensions of flooding and salinity. The marsh remains a paradox of nature: mud and decaying matter with very little oxygen beneath, with a profusion of tangled aerial roots trapping that sediment in order to make for a tightly packed, beautiful forest.

Miami artist Xavier Cortada is captivated by this treasure of our flora. Last year, at OMNI Art, he showed *Miami Mangrove Forest*, an installation consisting of drawings, rows of beakers containing mangrove roots and a video. Again, the mangrove was the protagonist for a public mural underneath I-95 that he created for last year’s Art Basel, and another he was commissioned to create for Miami-Dade County Hall. Why the fascination?

Eco-art is a new term, its scope in direct response to an environmental crisis. In this context, artists have come up with different approaches. Some “reclaim” the environment, like Mel Chin’s use of living organisms to “cure” polluted sites. Others, like Augustine Lynas, “recycle” manufacturing byproducts with natural materials into “ephemera,” such as building giant sand sculptures on the beaches of Fire Island, New York. There are the “ritualists,” like Joseph Beuys, who lived for three days shut up with a coyote inside a New York gallery, or minimalist sculptor Richard Long, a kind of pilgrim traversing the earth, mapping its contours with his crossings and recrossings.

Though Cortada is not an Eco-artist per se, we can see his work as eliciting awareness through active contemplation. This style harks back to the landscape school of the 19th century. By showing Nature as a spectacle, those artists were among the first to warn of the danger of — as Thomas Cole put it — “the wilderness passing away and the necessity of saving and perpetuating its features.” But today, being “real” or “grand” can be self-deceiving, in the sense of using Nature’s beauty to hide its tragic destruction.

Cortada’s approach is more abstract and personal, but at the same time, as reverent. The mangrove’s resilience and adaptability can become a metaphor for South Florida’s exile reality. Immigrants flourish in adverse and diverse environments. They — as the aquatic tree — take root and flourish, its fruits given back to the rest of society.

As in the tradition of natural history, Cortada “records” biological events. He explores his natural milieu carefully and patiently, creating a rich and detailed range, from colored to monochromatic, to darker and mysterious. Slowly, we see a development in the art that begins to suggest a human dimension.

It is a slow progress, which aims to understand “how to see” and discover. From this repetition and contact, hopefully, Cortada suggests a deeper learning. “Seeing” in tune with Nature can bring forth the most meaningful metaphors.



Three Seedlings at Sea 2, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 48"



Three Seedlings (on Magenta), acrylic on canvas, 36" x 48"

Front cover: "Mangroves (on Blue)," acrylic on canvas, 36" x 48"

June 10 – October 7, 2005

MIAMI DADE COLLEGE DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Helen Aguirre Ferré, Chair; Hank Klein, Vice Chair

Armando J. Bucelo Jr., Carolina Calderín,

Denise Mincey-Mills, Peter W. Roulhac, César L. Alvarez

Eduardo J. Padrón, President, Miami Dade College

José A. Vicente, Campus President, North Campus



**Miami Dade
College**

North Campus

© Copyright 2005 by Xavier Cortada, North Campus Art Gallery.

North Campus Art Gallery, Miami Dade College
11380 N.W. 27 Avenue, Miami, FL 33167-3495

Miami Dade College is an equal access/equal opportunity institution in compliance with ADA and does not discriminate because of veteran, marital or disability status or on the basis of age, sex, race, national origin or religion. This information or portions of it can be made available in accessible formats. For this or for special accommodations call 305-237-1532 directly or through the Florida Relay Service TDD at 711.

The Miami Dade College Foundation supports the mission and values of Miami Dade College by encouraging gifts from a wide variety of sources, particularly in the areas of scholarship and program support. For more information on how you can contribute to the College, please call 305-237-8888.