

FLORIDA IS NATURE

By Xavier Cortada





Xavier Cortada, "(FLORIDA IS...) Radiant," archival ink on aluminum, 2015.

FLORIDA IS...

Primarily green with blue water, white sandy beaches, swamps, scrub, and hardwood hammocks. However, we must face the fact that Florida is not what Florida was.

We've drained the Everglades, dredged beaches, paved roads and planted monocultures where there was once wilderness. We've redistributed waterways, poisoned rivers, and infiltrated aquifers with salt water. We've watched politicians rise to power and deny the human impacts on the largest threat we now face: global climate change and sea level rise.

Through **Florida is Nature**, Xavier Cortada asks Floridians to define their state by its natural environment, not by the edifices and man-made encroachments that have displaced nature.

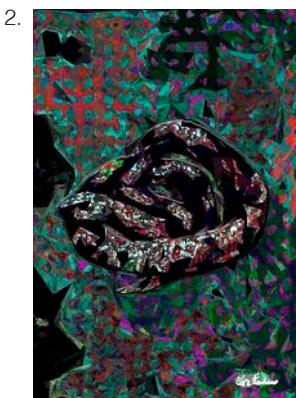
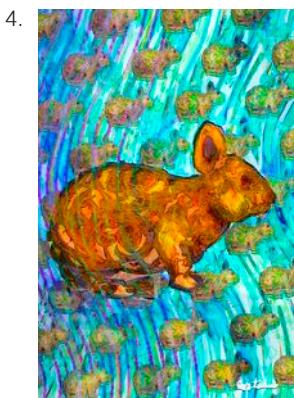
The participatory art project invites the community to consider the environment from their place within it, to cultivate their understanding of its beauty, and to share their interpretation through their voice as artists.

Cortada starts at the water's edge; leading with an exploration of diatoms collected from Biscayne Bay. Diatoms are single-celled organisms that live in the water and harness the power of the sun to convert carbon dioxide into oxygen.

Scientists can determine the past salinity of water by examining the glass shells of diatoms preserved in sedimentary core samples. Each diatom species has a unique salinity preference, therefore variations in water chemistry can be inferred from the species observed.

FLORIDA IS... Diatoms:

Flare (1), Glint (2), Glow (3), Luster (4), Sparkle (5), Radiant (6), Respendance (7), Sheer (8), Shimmer (9), Shine (10).



Endangered Animals: FLORIDA IS... Miami Blue Butterflies (1), Stock Island Tree Snails (2), Florida Bog Frogs (3), Lower Keys Rabbits (4), Key Deer (5), Burrowing Owls (6), Wood Stocks (7), Red Wolves (8), Gopher Tortoises (9), Red Cockaded Woodpeckers (10), Reticulated Flatwoods Salamanders (11), Eastern Indigo Snakes (12).



Xavier Cortada, "(FLORIDA IS...) Florida Panthers," archival ink on aluminum, 2015.

Biscayne Bay is also the inspiration for his work featuring mangroves, corals, and aquatic animals, while the images of local wildflowers, plants, and insects have origin in his childhood forays into his family backyard.

Some of Florida's most endangered animals, including the Florida panther, the wood stork, and the red wolf, find their way into Cortada's works, as if asking to be acknowledged one last time by the public before facing certain extinction.

Cortada's hope is that by bringing his engaged practice to Pinecrest Gardens, he can encourage others to explore and become curious about the natural world that captivated him as a child, raise awareness about environmental concerns, and establish a platform for community conversations and actions to protect Florida's nature.



About the Artist

Xavier Cortada's studio is located in **Pinecrest Gardens**, where he serves as artist-in-residence, oversees the **Hibiscus Gallery**, and implements his "**Florida is...Nature**" participatory art project.

Since 2011, Cortada has based his engaged art-science practice at **Florida International University**, with appointments in the School of Environment, Arts, and Society (**SEAS**), and the College of Communications, Architecture + The Arts (**CARTA**).

Cortada has worked with groups globally to produce numerous collaborative art projects, including environmental installations in the **North and South Pole**, peace murals in **Cyprus** and **Northern Ireland**, child welfare murals in **Bolivia** and **Panama**, AIDS murals in **Switzerland** and **South Africa** and eco-art projects in **Taiwan** and **Holland**.

Cortada has created art for the **White House**, **CERN**, the **World Bank**, the **Museum of Florida History**, the **Florida Botanical Gardens**, **Miami City Hall**, **Miami-Dade County Hall**, the **Frost Science Museum**, **Port Everglades**, and the **Florida Turnpike**.

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 **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.



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FLORIDA IS...

Largemouth Bass



Smalltooth Sawfish



Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles



Bottlenose Dolphin



Participate

“Florida is Nature” is an ongoing art project **Xavier Cortada** established at Pinecrest Gardens to showcase the natural beauty of his home state. As an elementary school student in Miami, Cortada would visit Pinecrest Gardens, then known as Parrot Jungle, to experience and learn about nature.

He now returns to this location as its artist-in-residence to explore the intersection of art and the environment and to establish a platform for community conservations and efforts to protect Florida’s ecosystem.

Hibiscus Gallery visitors are invited to tour the garden and find inspiration for art they create and upload online. The images and perspectives of participants will be shared on social media to encourage viewers to do their part to understand, protect, and live in-tune with nature.

www.floridaisnature.com

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Monthly Florida is Nature science art talks and community programs are presented by **Florida International University** (FIU) School of Environment, Arts and Society (**SEAS**), FIU College of Communications, Architecture + The Arts (**CARTA**), **FIU Libraries**, Digital Library of the Caribbean (**dLOC**), Participatory Art Projects, Inc. (**PAPI**), **Pinecrest Gardens**, and the **Village of Pinecrest**.





Xavier Cortada, "(FLORIDA IS...) Wildflowers" archival ink on aluminum, 2015.
FRONT: "(FLORIDA IS...) Wildflowers I Seed bombs"



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