



46 Renacimientos

THE BUILDINGS COME BACK TO LIFE

COCOTREN Art Exhibition

Visual Art Exhibit
“46 RENACIMIENTOS”
by Architectural Artist
Alvaro Alvarez

DOSSIER

46 SCULPTURAL PAINTINGS



Alvaro Andres Alvarez Bustamante
Architectural Artist Alvaro Alvarez
Info@Alvaro-Alvarez.com
Alvaro-Alvarez.com

Instagram: art_alvaroalvarez
linkedin.com/company/alvaroalvarez
facebook.com/ArtAlvaroAlvarez
TikTok: Art_AlvaroAlvarez

High-Resolution Images Available at [46Revivals.com](https://www.46revivals.com)



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ARTIST PROFILE / BIO:

Architectural Artist Alvaro Alvarez is a visual artist from the border of San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico. He completed his Bachelor of Architecture studies at Cornell University (Ithaca, New York, 2015) and was awarded a Certification in World Art History from the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington D.C. (2020-2021). His creative work is deeply inspired by architecture, the artist's passion since childhood, and significantly influenced by the flow of people, products, and energies across the border between Baja California and the United States.

At Cornell University, he studied under architects Dagmar Richter, Yehre Suh, and Andrew Lucia; completing his dissertation in architecture with his project "*Hotel of Memory*," (thesis, 2015) which he presented at the Salk Institute to the Academic Neurosciences for Architecture (ANFA, La Jolla, California, 2016); he has been a member ANFA since then. He studied museum architecture in Western Europe during the summer of 2013 under the tutelage of the German architect Werner Goehner, resulting in the publication of Alvarez' research "*Museum of Memory*," which was also presented at the Salk Institute to the Academy of Sciences Neurosciences for Architecture (ANFA, La Jolla, California, 2014). In Rome, Italy he studied Art and Drawing under the British artist Pola Wickham, creating his piece "*Abstract Pieces*," which was exhibited at the Palazzo Lazzaroni in Rome (Cornell University, 2013).

He has been a Guest Lecturer at Cornell University (Design Development, 2017 and 2018; Professional Training, 2017 and 2021), the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Invited Critic, 2016), and an invited presenter at the California Senate Education Committee (SABE 2008, SABLE 2009). His architectural work "*Structural Model of the London Aquatic Centre*" was published in the book "*Model Perspectives: Structure, Architecture and Culture*" (Cruvellier, Sandaker, Dimcheff 2017), and his architectural research of the COCOTREN "*46 Miscarriages in 6 Years: Suspended Constructions in Baja California*" was published in Medium Design Review (Cornell University, 2016).





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ARTIST PROFILE / BIO:

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Alvaro Alvarez practiced architecture professionally in New York City working alongside American architect David Rockwell in New York City, responsible as Project Architect for designing and building the *15 Hudson Yards* tower in the East side of Manhattan (2014 – 2019), while simultaneously performing as the Project Manager of The *Kanai EDITION Hotel* in Riviera Maya, Mexico working alongside Ian Schrager (2016-2019), awarding his projects with the awards “Building of the Year: 15 Hudson Yards” (6sqft, 2020), and “Finalist SBID Awards: 15 Hudson Yards” (SBID, 2021).

Throughout his artistic career he has created more than 300 sculptural and pictorial works, formalizing his art practice as “Architectural Artist Alvaro Alvarez” in San Ysidro, California (2020), through which he exhibited his work “COVID Sketchers” at the Balboa Park in San Diego, California (*Iyasi / Healing – Khommarath, Owen, Carroll, Campbell, Silva, Alvarez, 2021*), and presented his painting “Two Color Party” at the Oceanside Museum of Art (25th Anniversary Auction, 2022). His series “*Imperfect Boundaries*,” which narrates the relationship between internal and external limits, such as the physical ones that separate/unite Tijuana and San Diego, was exhibited at the Catarsis Festival (Tijuana, 2022) where he painted live alongside Mexican artists Mariette Carrillo, Dante Gabriel, and Superalto.

His work in this series was also exhibited at PHES Gallery as part of “*Boundaries and Connections*,” alongside artists Kaori Fukuyama and Kline Swonger (Carlsbad, California, 2022). Currently, this series is on display at the San Diego International Airport, California as part of its exhibition “*A Necessary Departure*,” which presents ten works by the artist during a 15 month-long Arts Program, along with the work of 16 other international artists. Alvaro Alvarez was a panel judge to review and select the works that will be installed and displayed at the airport’s next exhibition, “*Espacios & Lines*” (2024). Alvarez continues to expand his artistic knowledge and is a student of the renowned San Diego artists Pia Stern (2020 - present). In his cross-border community, he is also the chairperson of the Art and Architecture Council at Bustamante Business Center (2013-present), and has founded the international organization ArteCOCOTREN, which provides resources for Baja California artists (2023 - Present), sharing their work in California, New York, and abroad.





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WHAT IS THE COCOTREN?

The COCOTREN, an acronym for Coastal Corridor of Tijuana Rosarito Ensenada, is a stretch of transpeninsular highway that connects these three cities along the coast of Baja California, extending over 90 miles from the Border to the La Bufadora marine geyser. Located along the stretch of this road artery is what was to be the largest real estate development in the state's history, as multiple large-scale buildings began their construction in the mid-2000's, offering more than 12,500 residential units, 60,000 jobs, and \$3 billion US dollars in sales.

For Americans North of the border wall, the COCOTREN was proposed as an affordable option for oceanfront high-end living, encouraging them to spend their life savings, going into debt while putting down deposits. In unison, Mexican citizens South of the same border wall hoped that the construction of these magnificent projects would be a source of pride and employment, betting that the wealth being invested would flow throughout the coast while simultaneously positioning Baja as an investment and luxury destination.

However, on September 15, 2008, Lehman Brothers in New York City announced its bankruptcy, triggering an international financial collapse and contributing to the interruption of the forty-six COCOTREN projects, of which 55% were already in the construction phase. This was a real estate death sentence, as construction was suspended, sales offices closed, and too many people lost their jobs, leaving only the structural vestiges on the construction sites, known vernacularly as "skeletons."

At first, no one believed it possible that these enormous buildings would be abandoned half-way through construction - it was imagined "someone" would do "something" eventually. Instead, their empty concrete shells on the beach were eventually accepted as the new normal. For Baja Californians, it became a demoralizing symbol representing collective failure, an antonym to their original intention of being monuments to advancement. For years they were frozen in time, floating in limbo just as a directionless human soul does after a confusing death.

Our region had no real plan to mitigate these inanimate buildings – just a disorienting feeling of inoperative faith. Over the last decade and a half, the presence of these abandoned structures on the beach has turned them into imperceptible spirits, whose existence we continue to ignore as a coping mechanism. Having aborted the forty-six developments in their various construction phases is like blowing out a candle before it burns out, with the wax remaining frozen in time waiting for someone to reignite it.

Today, exactly 15 years after the interruption of the COCOTREN, the candle is burning once again. In 2023 we celebrate that all these projects have been revived, giving them a second opportunity to be re-developed through significant sales and negotiations. Since 2013, Baja California real estate pioneer Luis Bustamante has performed chest compressions on the bodies of these developments, relentlessly attempting to resuscitate them; never losing faith that one day they would breathe again. This Day of the Dead, we celebrate that all forty-six have come back to life in one way or another: whether being sold to new investors, demolished to make way for something new, or resuming construction precisely where it was paused.



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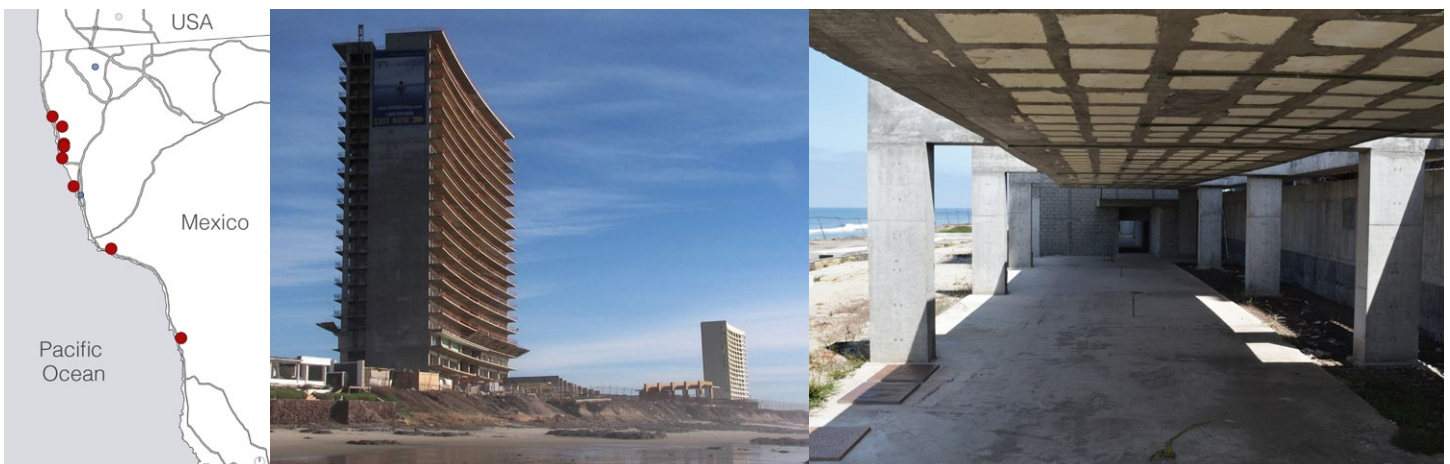
WHAT IS THE COCOTREN?

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Out of this revival emerges “46 Renacimientos,” a sculptural intervention that consists of forty-six works of art made by the border architectural artist, Alvaro Alvarez; all pieces presented under a single roof so that COCOTREN can be understood by the surrounding community, and also by anyone else who was affected by their economic demise. Alvaro Alvarez was part of the original diagnosis of this phenomenon in 2013, when he worked with his grandfather, Luis Bustamante, and cataloged each of these properties, consolidating all of the available information on each of them.

By creating forty-six altars, we can begin the process of collective healing, as well as celebrating a second life. Instead of just driving next to the properties along the Federal Highway 1 of the COCOTREN, they can now be appreciated in a respectful environment, simulating a ritual of spiritual rest, acceptance, and celebration of the strength that this rebirth gives all of us. All forty-six altars are presented horizontally on tables or pedestals, similar to a coffin maquette, creating a subconscious connection with our own mortality by personifying these architectural projects with a human scale.

Each project has its own story; which means that each of the altars can be a passageway or a destination in itself, housing an architectural soul in search of a landing stage before a greater transition. Through this spiritual journey, we can finally offer the COCOTREN projects a much-deserved resolution. As the tradition of Day of the Dead in November teaches us: life and death both have their limits, and for more than a decade these forty-six constructions remained in a limbo between those borders. Today, through these 46 *Renacimientos*, we can guide their spirits towards rest and rebirth.





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WHAT IS 46 RENACIMIENTOS?

Unlike the prolonged, silent death experienced by the COCOTREN properties since 2008, this celebration of *46 Renacimientos* will be striking and thoroughly documented. Every time a society such as ours undergoes a positive transformation, it is detrimental to dismiss it as a quotidian banality. Instead, it is very important to create a cultural record that captures this architectural uprising, telling our story with excitement through the universal language of art.

46 Renacimientos aspires to contribute towards that cultural record, engaging the neighbors and residents of Baja California in a serious conversation by inquiring: Why did we accept the abandonment of these forty-six projects as our new reality? What do these empty shells mean to us now? Drivers on the Tijuana-Ensenada scenic highway, considered the most beautiful in Mexico, usually just pass by these forgotten buildings, leaving them behind in the rearview mirror. Only the neighbors and commuters see them daily. By creating these altars to the COCOTREN, we can slow down and carefully observe each work, understanding them both independently and as part of an architectural ensemble. *46 Renacimientos* attempts to provide dignity and respect to these forty-six developments, so that they are no longer just skeletons on the beach.

The art pieces in *46 Renacimientos* were made using previously abandoned materials (wood, metal, paper) similarly discarded in a San Ysidro warehouse. These are now offered a new usage, minimizing environmental impact. Through the assemblage of these materials, *46 Renacimientos* connect us with our Mexican tradition of "cartonería" as a manufacturing method. By using this ancestral technique, also known as Papier-mâché, the layers of paper glued on top of each other connect the different pieces underneath each sculpture.

The relationship between the light and darkness created by the material planes of each sculpture is itself what provides the color: a thick dark layer tattoos the shell beneath the paper, in the same way that a sheet delicately covers a carcass. The black reflection of the heavy gesso along with the thinness of the ink organize the remains that live below the surface through pictorial coordinates. Each of the forty-six altars has been created with this monochrome uniform to unify and strengthen their collective message, without compromising the original personality of each three-dimensional work.

Architecture plays the leading role in this chronicle due to how its rigor and processes create a physical manifestation of the soul and spirit of both the properties on the coast and the altars that represent them. Concurrently, texture also has a very important function in this visual narrative, since it is the skin of the architectural spirit being represented. The geographical relief of each altar creates its own landscape on top of each wooden board, using black painted on stretched, folded, and pinched paper, confluencing the softness and fluidity of the paper covering the plastic pieces with the more defined features of the hardware and metal components underneath. All of this contributes to the topographic constitution of each sculpture.



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BAJA CALIFORNIA CONTEXT:

Alvaro Alvarez began his investigation of these projects ten years prior to *46 Renacimientos*, with a study titled "*46 Miscarriages in 6 Years: Suspended Constructions in Baja California*," where the physical and spiritual consequences of abandoning forty-six works due to the 2008 recession were analyzed. This research was subsequently published by Cornell University in New York, through its Medium Design Review editorial in 2014. *46 Renacimientos* is a visual continuation of that story, fifteen years after the recession. Following its original analysis, *46 Renacimientos* focuses on the themes of Mexican Spirituality, the economic crisis of 2008, and collective mourning; all manifested artistically through an architectural language using various materials.

Living in the border region offers a specialized lens to understand the energy that flows between Tijuana and San Diego. These *46 Renacimientos*, sculptural sanctuaries for the forty-six COCOTREN developments, behave as a type of "garita," where the spirits that cross from one world to the other are processed, just as happens here in Tijuana as customs agents regulate the exchange of goods and people through the San Ysidro, Chaparral, or Otay checkpoints. New products (cars, furniture, etc.) are manufactured in Tijuana, sold to companies in California, used by Americans, and ultimately these same products are returned once again to Mexico for a second purpose (almost always different from their original function). Similarly, *46 Renacimientos* interprets the COCOTREN real estate projects as entities living on the edge of a border between life and death, yearning to "cross over" towards reincarnation.

The bond between the altars and the United States border with Mexico unfolds beyond metaphors, however, as these forty-six developments were originally being built for our most important consumers: Americans in California looking for a second home on our beaches, wanting to retire or just live by the sea at an affordable price. Money flowed strongly towards the South between 2000 and 2008 from San Diego to Baja California; yet nothing returned North after the housing recession.





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BAJA CALIFORNIA CONTEXT:

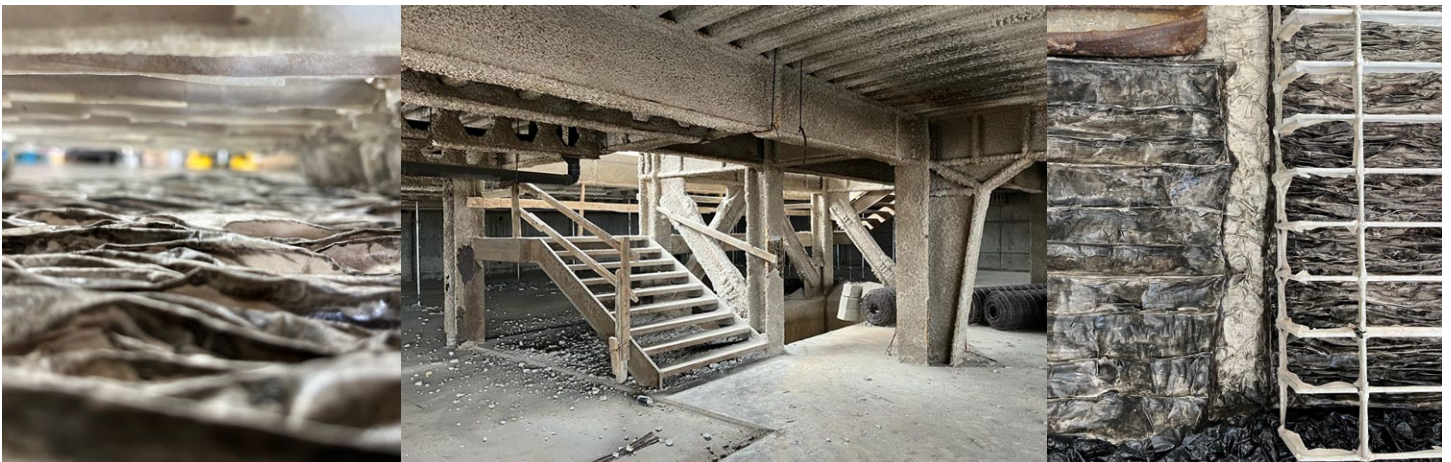
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By sharing what happened at COCOTREN, we are validating its existence as a difficult part of our history, and through art, we give its architectural spirit a home and an opening to revive. Altars are a special part of our Mexican culture; from hyper-ornamented temples inside chapels, to simple homemade installations consisting of just a photo and a candle. These are cared for year-round and highly decorated during the Day of all Saints and Day of the Dead holidays. By using familiar manufacturing methods, *46 Renacimientos* not only recounts the COCOTREN events, previously forgotten-in-plain-sight, but also provides the world outside of Mexico with an insight of the mechanisms that machinate our traditions; mixing the use of common objects with the intuitiveness of improvisation to tell stories.

The inaugural exhibition of *46 Renacimientos* will be held at a ceremony in Plaza del Mar, which is one of the forty-six interrupted projects of the COCOTREN - its pyramid behaving as a symbol that negotiates the dialogue between the piece of art, and the architecture that it surrounds.

INVITATION & MORE DETAILS:

Everyone is welcomed to witness this inaugural ceremony on the Day of the Dead; It is being orchestrated as an act of love in honor of the COCOTREN, Baja California, and our border region. Following this one-day exhibition on November 2, *46 Renacimientos* will be presented in Tijuana and San Diego, parallel to the World Design Capital festival in 2024, with subsequent exhibitions in New York, Rome, and Madrid. The story of *46 Renacimientos* and the COCOTREN will also be shared through the publication of a book, and the film production of a documentary.





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46 RENACIMIENTOS IN ROSARITO, BAJA CALIFORNIA

November 2, 2023

Ephemeral Exhibition & Day of the Dead Ceremony

