

Excerpt from *Terminal Landscape*
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The drawings on the following page were used in a section of the media installation, *Terminal Landscape*. The installation used as its subject matter those events that reach us through the mass media and become the kaleidoscopic backdrop to our lives. I wanted to suggest that our relationship to the media was interactive rather than passive and spectacular: that we usurp images and stories from all of the sources available to us, including the media, claiming them as our own, using them to fashion our dreams and fantasies.

In the installation, the section with the drawings was sandwiched between a sequence showing the aerial shot of OJ Simpson's white Bronco and some particularly poignant news footage from the Oklahoma bombing, which was shown in reverse under an aria from The Verdi Requiem. I had asked students in an advanced class at the San Francisco Art Institute where I was teaching to make one drawing each in response to a written description that I gave them of a photograph from the New York Times – one that I had found troubling and provocative. They were not shown the photograph. They had only my written description from which to work. From the twelve drawings produced, I choose eight and turned them into slides. In the installation the slides were projected while a voice recited the description I had given the students. As the voice concluded, the source image from the newspaper slowly dissolved in and remained for several seconds, in silence, before dissolving into the next and final sequence of the installation.

Here is the description:

They seem barely contained within the frame of the photograph: this group of determined black men—eyes forward, muscles strained—marching from our right to our left with their steel machetes raised defiantly into the air. The camera is close—too close: sweating faces fill the picture and the blades of their weapons are held aloft like metallic exclamation points in the sky. Their clothing, not military issue but various styles of the short-sleeved shirt, is punctuated by an occasional baseball cap. The man closest to us radiates a seething ferocity from the center of the photo. Seen from the chest up, his massive shoulders bulge beneath a white t-shirt and his thick neck, full face, and forehead glisten in the sweltering heat of the mid-day sun. Unlike the other men, whose eyes are directed in front of them, his are shifted to his left, even as he faces forward, creating the impression that he is scrutinizing us out of the corner of his eyes.

The figures of the men fill so much of the frame that little of the surrounding background is visible. What can be seen confirms the impression of a sultry, tropical location. In the far distance, between the heads of some of the men, is an irregular, horizontal band of gray, suggesting low mountains, covered with vegetation. On the left side of the photo, in the middle distance, is a lone palm tree whose trunk, capped with fronds, juts into the sky at an angle that is parallel to the machete blades. The tree mimics the machetes (or is it the other way around?), both mocking and accentuating the intensity of the scene. Two additional bits of vegetation are barely noticeable as they emerge from behind a couple of the men's heads, appearing to grow from the tops of their crania.

In the background, on the far right side of the photograph and mostly obscured by the men in the foreground, is a domed mansion that glows on the page like a white shell on a beach. Between and behind upheld machetes, hands, and arms we see parts of the dome and a section of a portico with its classical pediment, supported by slender Ionic columns, only two of which are fully visible. Rising from the peak of the pediment we see the thin gray line of a pole, crowned by a wind blown flag, whose markings are unreadable in the distance.

Here are their drawings:



And here is the original New York Times photograph:

