

INCENDIARY TRACES

Call for Submissions

Landscapes—the spaces we live in—are framed pictorially. Landscape images produce compelling myths and wield political power. In international relations they can highlight or fabricate virtues and erase the appearance of violence. In this way, are landscape images a kind of psy-ops—a weapon? Can picturing landscapes also be a political intervention?

Consider the palm tree-dotted landscape. Most Los Angeles palm trees are non-native species, imported to Los Angeles. Symbolically, they can bring home connections between L.A. and political “hot spots” in the places these trees originate.

“**Incendiary Traces**” is a new archive of images around the concept of weaponized landscape aesthetics. It will be made by, and serve, investigators of landscape and politics.

We are seeking submissions to this archive in the form of depictions of palm tree-dotted places with whom the U.S. has conflicted relationships, or where U.S. interventions (military, economic, cultural, etc.) have affected the social and political landscapes as well as the lived environment. (See list of L.A. palm trees and their origins, below). These images will be used to develop an exhibition and publication, and to initiate a public dialog. Images seeding the archive can be seen online here.

Images you submit to the archive—drawings, maps, plans, photographs, tracings, etc.—might engage these questions in a variety of ways. For example:

- Drawings of a palm tree-dotted neighborhood under siege
- Architectural plans involving palm trees and military barriers
- Musical scores composed by tracing musical notes over a photograph of a palm tree-dotted war zone
- Photographs of a person drinking tea near a palm tree-lined car bomb site
- Scan of a napkin picked up at a palm tree-decorated restaurant in a contested area
- Photographs of a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement vehicle parked at a convenience store with a palm tree outside of it in a desert town
- Development plans for a palm-lined avenue where U.S. economic interests have affected plans for gentrification

Architects, designers, artists, writers, historians, theorists and activists who live in, or immigrated to Los Angeles from palm tree-dotted places with whom the U.S. has been at war or currently has conflicted or contested relationships are invited to participate in this project. Please **submit** relevant images or inquiries to: incendiarytraces@gmail.com **by March 13**. If it's after March 13 please send them anyway; it's likely the project will continue beyond that deadline. Please be in touch if you have questions.

Background

In traditional landscape paintings the land is usually depicted with few or no people. In 1991, CNN broadcast blurry green night scope footage of the U.S. bombing of Baghdad that married the aesthetics of traditional landscape painting with the theater of contemporary remote war. The glowing lights of anti-aircraft fire in the night sky dominate the frame. Below, the city is dark, its inhabitants imperceptible. Landscape aesthetics are a kind of psychological weapon here, applied to blur and soften violence.

In the months leading up to the 2003 U.S. “Shock and Awe” bombing of Baghdad, I scrutinized CNN’s 1991 landscapes in anticipation of seeing a new version with the impending attack. Looking at the dark city, I noticed for the first time palm trees and low-lying stucco buildings that looked unsettlingly like my neighborhood in Los Angeles. It seemed that this landscape is that landscape. This home is that home. This could be here.

So, could our otherwise celebrated palm tree-dotted landscape be reverse engineered to bring home connections between Los Angeles and countries with whom we have political conflict? This project seeks to use the act of (re)picturing as a tool for connecting to remote sites of conflict—to bring the there here.

INGENIARY TRACES

Call for Submissions

The following questions form the foundation of this project. Ideally, images you send would engage these or related questions in some way, however abstractly or concretely:

- What socio-economic and political conditions shape the framing of our landscape?
- How does pictorial landscape form/frame national identity?
- Can picturing landscape be a political act?
- Can it be a political intervention?
- Can landscape pictures be weapons?
- Can other celebrated landscape conventions be reverse engineered to bring home connections between the U.S. and countries with whom it has political conflict?

Los Angeles Palm Trees and Their Origins

Washingtonia robusta (Mexican Fan Palm): Native to western Sonora, Mexico

Phoenix dactylifera (Date Palm): Persian Gulf

Syagrus romanzoffiana (Queen Palm): Southern Brazil to Argentina

Chamaerops humilis (Mediterranean Fan Palm): Western Mediterranean region—South of France, North Africa/Atlas mountains/Morocco, Malaga, Spain, off the Italian coast

Trachycarpus fortunei (Windmill Palm): Central China (Hubei southwards), south to northern Burma

Rhapis excelsa (Lady Palm): Southern China, Taiwan, Thailand, southern Japan

Phoenix roebelenii (Pygmy Date Palm or Miniature Date Palm): Southeastern Asia from southwestern China (Yunnan Province), northern Laos and northern Vietnam (in Dien Bien Province, Ha Giang Province, Cao Bang Province, Lang Son Province)

Charnaedorea spp. (Canelilla, Guaya, Guaita, Molinillo, Pacaya, Pacayita, Palmilla, Sangapilla, Tepejilote, Xaté): Mexico to Brazil and Bolivia

Jubaea chilensis (Chilean Wine Palm or Palma de Coquitos): Chile

Brahea aculeata (Palmilla): Mexico

Brahea dulcis (Rock Palm or Palma de Sombrero (EIS) or Suyate (Hon) or Capulin (Mex)): Mexico to El Salvador and Nicaragua

Sabal uresana (Palma Blanca or Sonoran Palmetto): Foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental in northwestern Mexico (states of Chihuahua and Sonora)