

A World of Beauty and Grit

# ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER

BY FLORENCIA MARTIN, PRODUCTION DESIGNER

*One Battle After Another* is the story of a father, ex-revolutionary Bob, on a quest to find and bring home his daughter, Willa. His journey begins sixteen years prior as a revolutionary, jumping to the redwoods, then follows him through fractured urban cities and rural sanctuaries, culminating in the wide-open desert. At its core, it is a family story—but also about what happens when you step outside the safety of your world and confront the enormity of the one around you, where past and present collide.

Our guiding principle with director Paul Thomas Anderson was the present. Every decision was grounded in the immediacy of the characters' lives: Where are they going? How did they get here? Research came from books, documentaries,

videos, oral histories and field work with local communities and experts. The goal was not to impose a design, but to let the world—in all its texture and imperfection—shape the story.

Cold-scouting began in 2022 in Eureka and, over two and a half years, built the film from the redwoods to the borderlands—a tapestry of California. Producer and first AD Adam Somner guided us through a schedule and logistics that ran through nine city hubs and two states. I had the privilege of collaborating with Supervising Art Director Andrew Max Cahn, who led the Los Angeles team, budget and schedule with steadfast support. The other half of the department traveled with me or worked ahead, jumping to upcoming cities. Making the film

**A.** FRENCH 75'S RAID ON THE DETENTION CENTER. PRODUCTION STILL.



often felt like its title—one battle after another—requiring persistence, problem-solving and trust across every team.

### Otay Mesa - Opening

The film opens at a detention camp built from the ground up along the border wall in Otay Mesa, CA, directly beneath the truck-entrance overpass from Mexico into the U.S. The constant rumble of semis became part of the background and character of the set. Grounded in contemporary and historical references, the Art Department studied imagery of temporary detention facilities—chain-link fencing, astro turf, metallic blankets, trailers and generators—to capture impermanence.

The production changed course, and a new plan for the opening was developed overnight as we completed night shoots in El Paso. Andrew Cahn and Art Director AJ Cisneros, with Set Designer Chris Cortner, turned my sketches into a full plan overnight. When we arrived for the first scout, construction was set to begin the next morning. It felt like running a covert operation: marking out the camp with cones and stake poles and

walking through the plan with department heads on the ground.

The site was laid out around the blocking of the French 75's raid, featuring a back entrance along the border that led to long tented corridors housing officers' quarters, and a long street entrance that led to multiple gate pens and temporary tents. Lockjaw's trailer sat at the center, the most secure location per the film's military advisors. Set decorator Anthony Carlino sourced tents and trailers on an impossible timeline, while the art team secured fencing and built custom doors and gates from reference photos. The camp was lit practically, using the same portable floodlights found in real detention centers, powered by generators that became part of the set. All explosions were staged practically by SFX supervisor Jeremy Hays, allowing live rocket arcs as the camera pulled back to reveal the semi-truck loaded with liberated detainees.

### French 75 Unrest

Sacramento, Stockton, Los Angeles and Tracy blended into the film's "any city USA." These inland cities provided the courthouses, banks,

**B.** DETENTION CENTER OVERPASS AT OTAY MESA. PRODUCTION STILL.







1G networks—based on research into tools revolutionaries could use to avoid tracking. Each device was wired for live recording so actors could perform conversations in real time. The result was a contemporary world stitched from fading analog parts. The process involved months of collaboration with real ham radio operators, who also operated the live radio heard in the final scene and aided the crew in teaching the actors.

### Bob's House

Bob's home, deep among the redwoods, was designed as a collage of half-finished projects and solitary hobbies—rock collections, musical instruments, rusted car parts and a sofa molded to his shape. Over a dozen properties were scouted, most marked with “No Trespassing” signs, before finding this one through a Facebook post from the local film commissioner. The small footprint fit the story: Bob and Willa's lives overflowing a house too small to contain them.

and streets that became the backdrop for the revolutionary acts of the French 75. With support from local families and city officials—and through months of conversations led by the locations team—we filmed in an operational multi-generational bank, shut down downtown blocks and staged controlled explosions at a shuttered bank in Sacramento.

Working closely with Leonardo DiCaprio (Bob) and Paul, we explored Bob's evolution from revolutionary to cautious hermit, lost in conspiracy theories and self-help books. We built Willa's room as a crude add-on, with badly plastered walls and a tarp-covered roof. A custom stained-glass in the front door referenced those common throughout Humboldt.

Art Director May Mitchell and Assistant Art Director Olivia Ferguson led construction through relentless rain for all the Eureka sets. They also enlisted local high school students to recreate their homecoming posters over a weekend pizza party to use on set.

All the chase sequences were informed by real crash videos we studied on YouTube, focusing on how ordinary accidents unfold. Working with picture car coordinator Rick Collins, we chose nondescript, aged cars—believable vehicles for characters who needed to hide in plain sight.

Technology across the film mixed old and new elements—ham radios, payphones,

**A.** THE DOG POUND. PRODUCTION STILL.

**B.** BOB'S HOUSE. SET PHOTO WITH SKETCHED ADD-ON OF WILLA'S BEDROOM BY FLORENCIA MARTIN.

**B.** BOB'S HOUSE, ENTRANCE. SET PHOTO.







The interiors were filled with artifacts from the characters' lives. Paul and Anthony's kids contributed artwork; Chase Infiniti (Willa) lent her childhood photos. Graphic Artist Kerry Hyatt created fictional school certificates and Sensei's karate calendar, which Chase annotated herself after cooking her character's quinoa casserole on set—helping her inhabit her space. Property master Matt Cavaliero layered the house with paraphernalia and lighters, while Anderson's own phone was wired for the live call—later destroyed in Bob's frantic phone scene.

### Bob's Escape

When the front door explodes practically (and reappears patched up at the end), Bob escapes through his handmade tunnel hidden under his bed—a now forgotten route leading to an

outhouse in a junkyard of moss-covered toy cars discovered while scouting. The 60-foot tunnel, built on stage, was carved from foam blocks on a raised platform deck. A custom mud plaster was applied, with roots and debris added by greens foreman Charlie Jaramillo, inspired by real hand-dug cartel passages in Mexico.

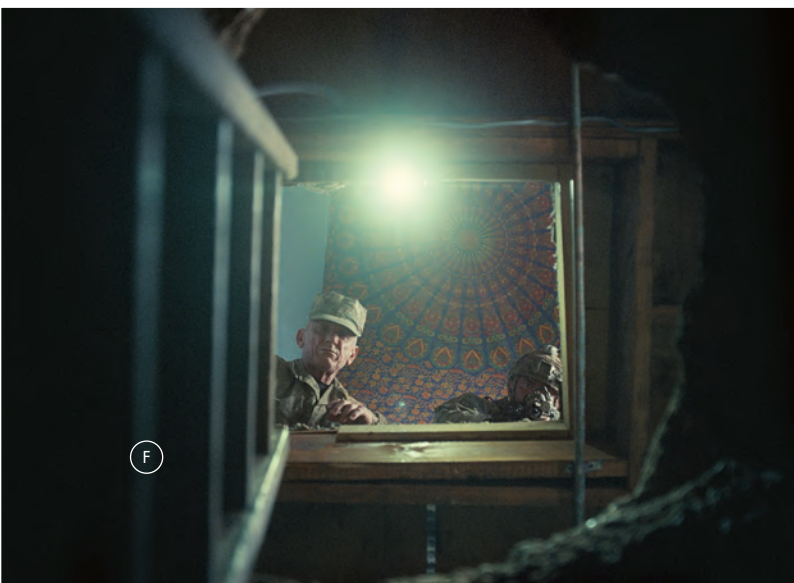
The outhouse concept came from scouting in Humboldt, where redwood stumps were often converted into showers or bathrooms. May Mitchell sourced a fallen tree from a local artist, which construction hollowed and lowered into place with a buried tank for Bob's emergence. Rain, mud and Charlie's detail work naturally aged the set until it blended seamlessly into the woods.

**D.** BOB'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. SET PHOTO.

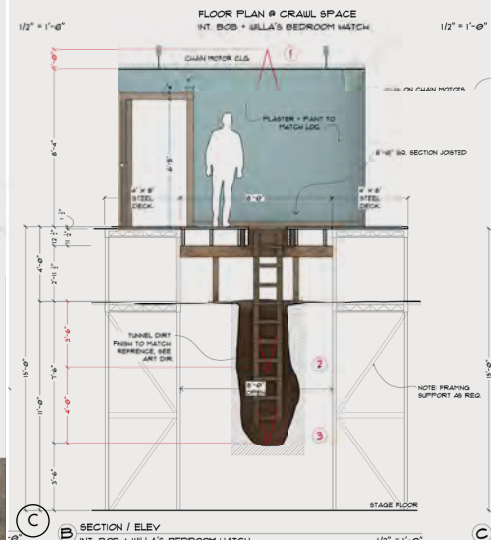
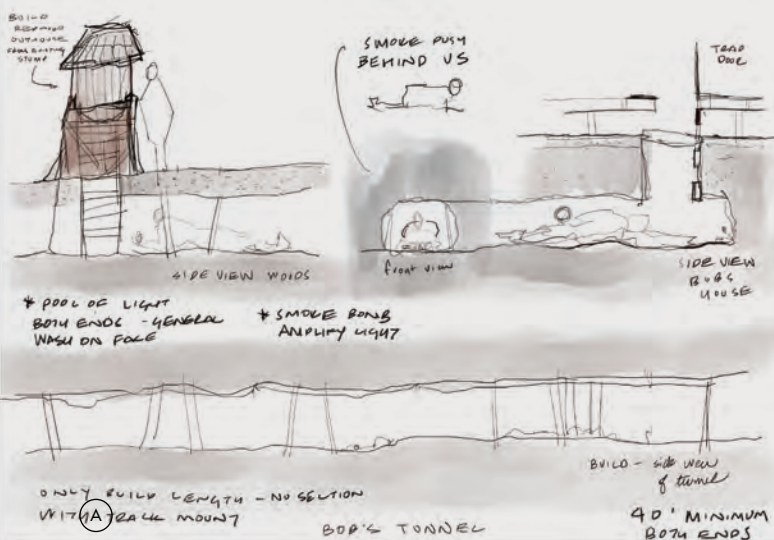
**E.** BOB'S HOUSE, FRONT DOOR. SET PHOTO.

**F.** BOB'S HOUSE. ESCAPE TUNNEL ENTRANCE. PRODUCTION STILL.

**G.** BOB'S HOUSE. ESCAPE TUNNEL OUTHOUSE EXIT. SET PHOTO.







**A.** BOB'S HOUSE ESCAPE TUNNEL. SKETCH BY FLORENCIA MARTIN.

**B.** BOB'S HOUSE ESCAPE EXIT. RENDERED MODEL AND SECTION BY SET DESIGNER CHRIS CORTNER.

**C.** BOB'S HOUSE ESCAPE TUNNEL ENTRANCE. SECTION OF STAGE SET BY SET DESIGNER CHRIS CORTNER.

**D.** ESCAPE TUNNEL SET ONSTAGE. SET PHOTO.

**E.** BOB'S HOUSE ESCAPE TUNNEL EXIT. REDWOOD OUTHOUSE BUILT ON LOCATION. SET PHOTO

**F.** SENSEI'S DOJO. ILLUSTRATION BY JOANNA BUSH.



## Sensei's World - El Paso

In downtown Baktan Cross, Bob seeks out his ally Sensei Sergio St. Carlos (Benicio Del Toro), Willa's karate teacher. We built the dojo inside an abandoned storefront in El Paso, constructing it from scratch with mirrors, mats, a weapons room and exposed insulation. Street-facing windows allowed the unrest outside to play directly into frame. Kerry Hyatt designed vinyls that integrated with leftover signage from the existing store, keeping the real texture and story to the glass.

The karate tiger was Sensei's central image, lent to us by a dojo in Eureka which inspired much of the layout and also the source for the tiger motif present in a custom painting commissioned by Carlino later in the apartment.

The first El Paso location we walked into was Genesis Perfumery, which became the anchor for Sensei's world. I loved the idea that his apartment was above the shop. The gutted second floor allowed the crew to build the apartment overhead and create a continuous 360° labyrinth beginning on the street, winding through Sensei's sanctuary and apartment, backrooms to rooftops, and ending with Bob's fall through the tree.

Local experts—key location assistant Jacob Cena and architect Bill Helm—coordinated engineering and helped secure over one hundred El Paso locations led by Art Director AJ Cisneros. Materials were craned through a single window by the LA construction team. It was true joy to work







alongside the El Paso community, which opened their doors to us, helping us secure locations, dressing, and through their stories enriched our world.

Sensei's apartment drew from immigrant housing in El Paso's Segundo Barrio. The Art Department collaged architectural references to create six connected units and a hallway. The apartment was designed to feel patched together over decades: exposed framing and lathe and plaster, mismatched tiles, hand-laid wood floors and crooked molding. AJ Cisneros and the team built everything to embrace imperfection. Anthony and the set decoration department filled the rooms with real local objects, alters and ensured everything was practical, including the trap door which was lined up with the existing trap door leading to the neighboring Bolsa Coketa. During rehearsal, Sensei grabbed a Modelo from the working fridge—a spontaneous detail that stayed in the final cut.

### The Dog Pound

The "Dog Pound" sequence at Mira Loma Detention Center began in a detention pen built inside the empty cafeteria, leading to MKU officers' quarters on the recreational field. Custom-made wooden gangplanks connected the fences, guiding the action deeper into the camp before reaching Lockjaw's office. Andrew Cahn oversaw the build, including the holding-cell builds, giving the temporary structures a sense of permanence with plywood-mounted TV screens with cartoons and detention signage. The U-shaped officer tents on the basketball court emphasized the temporary nature of the sets.

### CAC Bunker

The CAC meeting room was one of the most intricate sets—an underground world inspired by Cold War bunkers and secret clubhouses, lit entirely by artificial light. The sequence begins in a stately home in Sacramento, where a concealed basement mural door opens into a serpentine

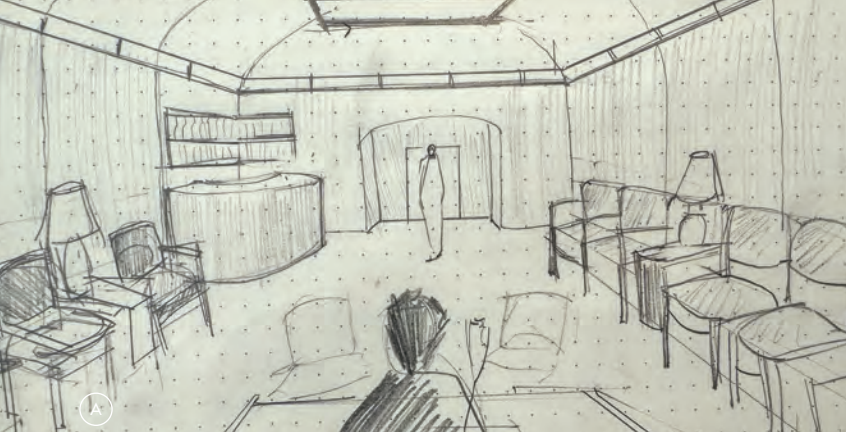
**G.** SENSEI'S DOJO.  
PRODUCTION STILL.

**H.** SENSEI'S DOJO. SET  
PHOTO.

**I.** SENSEI'S APARTMENT.  
SET PHOTO.

**J.** SENSEI'S APARTMENT.  
PRODUCTION STILL.





**A.** CAC BUNKER. SET SKETCH.

**B.** CAC BUNKER. ILLUSTRATION BY JOANNA BUSH.

**C.** CAC BUNKER. SET PHOTO.

**D.** PORTABLE DNA TEST DEVICE. SKETCH BY FLORENCIA MARTIN.

**E.** PORTABLE DNA DEVICE. ILLUSTRATION. RENDERED MODEL BY CHRIS CORTNER. SCREEN SKETCH BY FLORENCIA MARTIN.

tunnel found in Stockton, leading to the meeting space built on stage at LA North Studios.

Scenic Artists at Trio hand-painted a diorama mural of the American West, adapted from Joanna Bush's illustration. After multiple samples, we found the right mix of muted color, texture, and patina to evoke a sense of dank age and claustrophobia. Small Christmas details were incorporated, a custom-carved wooden Saint Nick is hidden in the keystone of the arch, and Christmas porcelain cups sourced by Anthony.

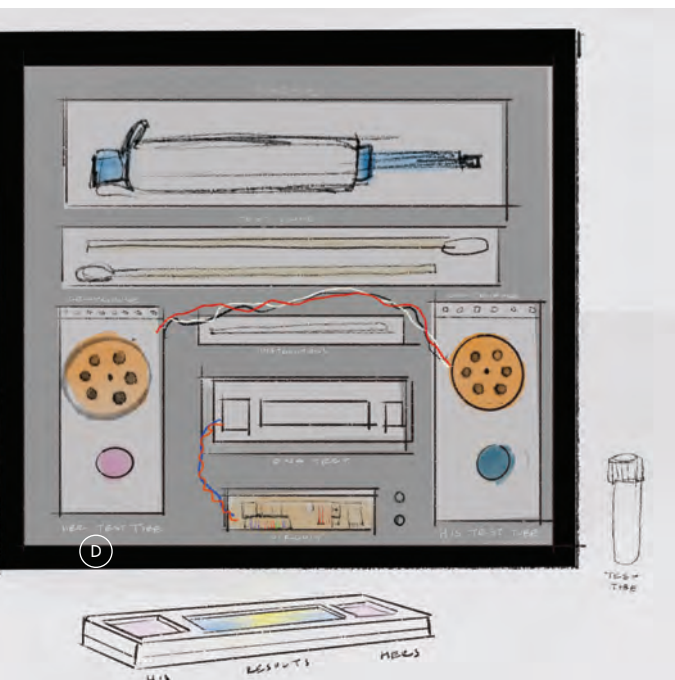
Chris Cortner grounded the design in practical architecture, referencing a Midwestern basement-renovation company to inform vents, moldings and the ceiling recess, giving realistic, utilitarian details. Anthony layered the diorama with his favorite dressing, taxidermy and furniture replicated from a Pullman car chair, creating a repetitive, institutional rhythm.



### The Sisters of the Brave Beaver

In the fictional Chupacabra Hills, Willa is taken to the Sisters of the Brave Beaver—a revolutionary sanctuary-turned-hemp farm, inspired by the real “weed-growing nuns,” the Sisters of the Valley. We scouted several missions along the Camino Real trail after Paul shared a painting of a weathered mission in the hills. Most were too well-restored; La Purisima Mission in Lompoc had the stripped-back realism we needed.

We imagined the Sisters as a group adapting out of necessity, shifting from offering shelter to cultivating hemp to survive. May and Anthony worked closely with the Sisters of the Valley and a local hemp producer to add authenticity—grow rooms, drying racks, and processing equipment—much of which was pared back in the final cut but informed the design and space for the actors.







The chapel scene reveals what Lockjaw has been carrying: a portable DNA testing device. We researched real field-testing tools capable of instant readings and designed our own version. I sketched the concept of the machine and test results—a watercolor of tension, which Chris Cortner modeled. Property master Robbie Duncan, working with ISS, fabricated a fully functioning unit from custom-molded components. Executing it practically allowed the actors to play the tension in real time, with live on-screen results.

### The Desert - Anza-Borrego and Beyond

The desert finale was one of our most complex undertakings. Supervising location manager Michael Glaser introduced us to Anza-Borrego and Ocotillo Wells, when he found the 1776 camp near the California-Arizona border, separated by the Colorado River—the film’s only water element.

I studied the road architecture closely, working with Paul and director of photography Michael Bauman on time of day and direction. Scouting from Blythe on Highway 78 to Borrego Springs, we discovered what we called “the river of hills”—a ribbon of undulating dips that felt mythic and like a gift. The “Texas Dip,” two hours away, became the finale’s punctuation mark—a vast, open horizon where father and daughter reunite under the desert sun.

### Reflection

Inspired by each location and

story we uncovered, *One Battle After Another* was built and designed through discovery. I am deeply grateful to Paul Thomas Anderson for developing the film in this method—entrusting collaboration, exploration, and process guided by his extraordinary script and cast.

The community not only informed us but also became part of the film itself: the high school vice principal, students, ex-military, store owners, church workers, “weed sisters,” crew and locals—many of whom appeared on screen or helped in the world-building of each chapter.

We built each world piece by piece, weaving real people and places into a singular tapestry that ultimately reflects the one around us and grounds these characters. Building this alongside an extraordinary team and watching it grow into something deeply human remains one of the most meaningful experiences of my career. It was an honor to help create a world that holds both the beauty and the grit of the one we live in today. **ADG**

Florencia Martin,  
Production Designer  
Andrew Max Cahn,  
Supervising Art Director  
AJ Cisneros, May Mitchell,  
Art Directors  
Olivia Ferguson,  
Assistant Art Director  
Chris Cortner,  
Set Designer  
Joanna Bush,  
Illustrator  
Kerry Hyatt, Hilary Ament,  
Graphic Artists  
Anthony Carlino,  
Set Decorator

**F.** SISTERS OF THE BRAVE BEAVER SIGN. GRAPHIC LAYOUT.

**G.** SISTERS OF THE BRAVE BEAVER ENTRANCE. ILLUSTRATION BY JOANNA BUSH.

**H.** RIVER OF HILLS HIGHWAY. SET PHOTO.

