

A graphic star pattern is impressed as a relief on the sand at Laga Beach during low tide. As the tide rises, the pattern gradually disappears. The pattern is composed with fragments of truck tyres, mounted on a cylindrical steel template and attached to the beach cleaner's tractor. Following the lunar and tidal calendar, the pattern is remade across the beach at every possible low tide.

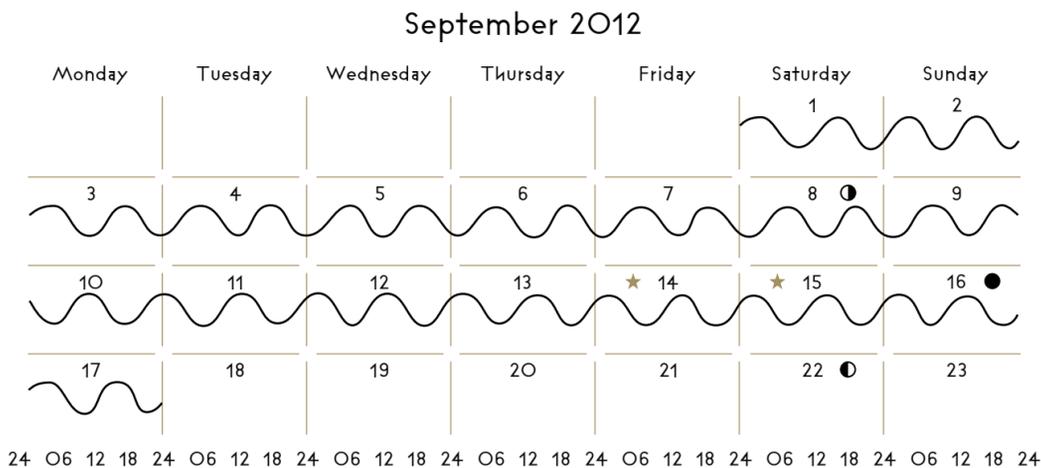
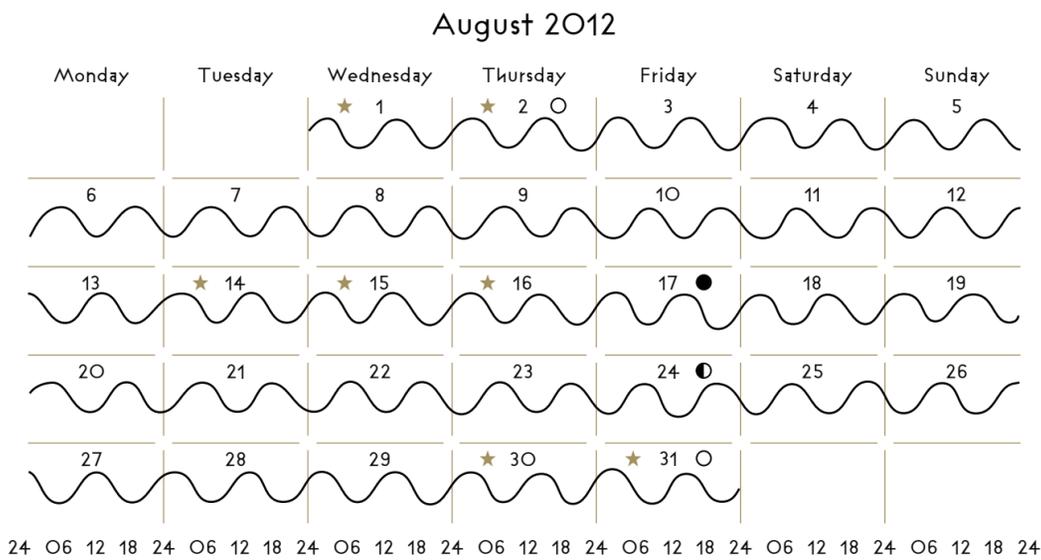
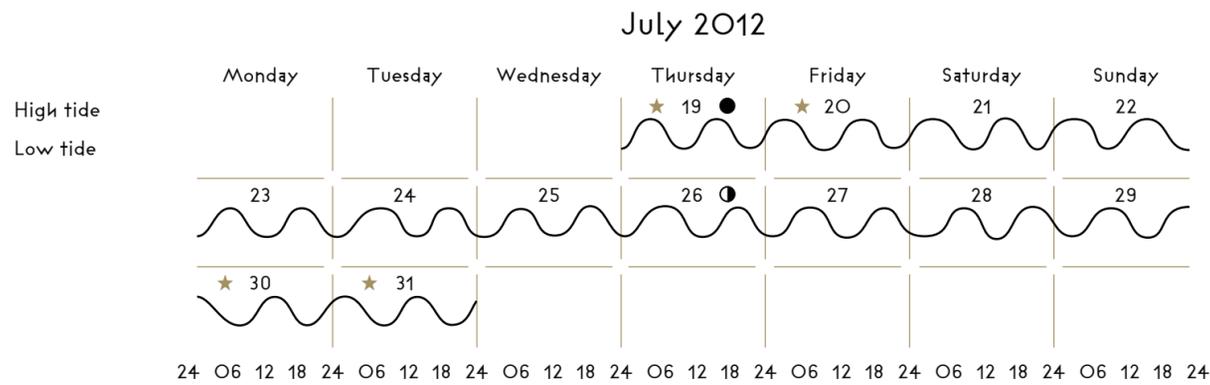
Gunilla Klingberg

A Sign In Space



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'A Sign In Space' was performed at Laga Beach, Ibarrangelua, on dates when the low tide was synchronized with the early morning working hours of the beach attendants, marked below with a star.



Gunilla Klingberg 'A Sign In Space'
Laga Beach, Ibarrangelua

'Sense & Sustainability'
The first edition of Urdaibai Art
Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve, Basque Country, Spain
July 21 to September 23 2012

Curated by Alberto Sánchez Balmisa
Organized by the Fundación 2012 Fundazioa
www.sentidoysostenibilidad.org

Ten site-specific installations developed by ten artists. Each artist developed works in different urban, industrial and natural spaces that critically investigate Urdaibai's physical territory and social, cultural and economic development, as well as more traditional concepts used for art in public spaces.

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www.gunillaklingberg.com
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Situated in the external zone of the Milky Way, the Sun takes about two hundred million years to make a complete revolution of the Galaxy. Right, that's how long it takes, not a day less, —Qfwfq said,— once, as I went past, I drew a sign at a point in space, just so I could find it again two hundred million years later, when we went by the next time around. What sort of sign? It's hard to explain because if I say sign to you, you immediately think of a something that can be distinguished from a something else, but nothing could be distinguished from anything there; you immediately think of a sign made with some implement or with your hands, and then when you take the implement or your hands away, the sign remains, but in those days there were no implements or even hands, or teeth, or noses, all things that came along afterwards, a long time afterwards.
— Italo Calvino, 'A Sign In Space', 'Cosmicomics'



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Throughout art history, our definitions of pairs of opposites, such as nature and culture, the landscape and the human being, have imprinted themselves onto our aesthetic theories and practices. In 'A Sign In Space' the changed relationship with nature is spelled out and makes visible the way the new global ecological situation has affected the manner in which we comprehend and describe the relationship between nature and culture, the artificial and the organic, art and landscape. In Klingberg's art there is an interest shared with Smithson and his contemporaries in the formal correspondences linking the larger structures of the universe and nature with art.

Nevertheless, in Klingberg's work nature is not an unsullied paradise that in its character is radically different from culture. Instead, a landscape such as Laga beach is imagined as a space invested with marks of culture, and always filtered through our historically and politically formed ideas about nature. Her work is acted out in dialog with geological space, the sand, the sea and the moon. And yet, at the same time, she is conversing with the political, human space of the beach workers, the surfers, and all the signs of wear and tear caused by the human hand. These different spaces also constitute different time strata, geological time and human time. 'A Sign In Space' marks out a place where, for a moment, we can pass between these different strata and think about how we can make them tick in time with each other, before the tide washes our patterns away.

Sara Arrhenius

Time Strata

The materials of Gunilla Klingberg's art are often appropriations of objects and surfaces from contemporary everyday life. She makes use of patterns, textures and shapes that we do not normally notice, since they have become such an integral part of our visual experience of urban space. They can be logotypes from low-cost supermarkets, cheap furniture from Ikea, or generic building components from hardware stores. But, when you look at her work more closely, you become aware of how these banal contemporary signs are mingled with symbols from religious and esoteric sources, such as the mandala, the star and the circle. She creates a universe where different systems of symbols meet and interfere with each other.

The same superimposition of contradictory schemes of signification provides the structure for her new work 'A Sign In Space', a new commission, made especially for the Urdabai Art biennial. The piece is a graphic star pattern made by truck tyres and imprinted in relief on the sand at Laga beach at low-tide. At high-tide the pattern slowly vanishes as the ocean rises. The printed pattern is made using a mechanical device, a manufactured steel cylinder with the graphic pattern as a matrix relief made out of truck tyres. The cylinder is attached to the beach cleaners' tractor, which drives up and down the beach in the morning, creating the pattern.

The pattern is remade again and again at low tide when the lunar calendar is synchronized with the laborers' work schedule. The stars in the pattern bring to mind celestial systems, as well as ancient hermetic symbols. They are also reminiscent of the stars in the flag of the European Union and, of course, of the stars of revolutions imagined or real.

The use of tyres and the mechanical, repetitive printing method also makes me think of Rauschenberg's tyre painting made in collaboration with John Cage. Driving over the paper with a car marked it with patterns without the aid of the subjectivity of the painting hand. In Klingberg's piece the labor of making the pattern is left to the workers, who, once the beach has been cleaned, drive the tractor back and forth until the starry pattern covers it.

The making of patterns in sand is found in a wide variety of art making. Tibetan monks create complicated sand patterns as part of religious ceremonies. During the eighteenth century, temporary sand paintings became the fashion within 'table-decking' art at Europe's royal courts. Today, it is a popular part of tourist culture at beaches all around the world. Not surprisingly there is already a design company specializing in producing adverts in sand made to be viewed from above. In 'A Sign In Space' all these diverse and contradictory traditions come together. As in many of Klingberg's works the mixing of different uses of images and symbols makes visible the way that meaning is translated and transformed via different times and cultures.

Klingberg's art is almost always large-scale. She has used materials such as linoleum flooring, wallpaper, wall posters, and also carpet and linoleum cut-outs, to create surfaces and space. Here, too, at the beach in Urdabai, making space and, in doing so, marking out territory, becomes an important aspect of the work. The stars embossed on the sand evoke associations with the cobblestones in public squares, making us aware of the beach as a public space where people gather and meet. Nevertheless, the tide makes this space very temporary. The patterned territory lasts for just as long as the tide waits to rise and wipe away the markings.

In her earlier pieces Klingberg has made reference to our myths about the cycles of the moon, and about how these cosmic movements influence our lives. In 'A Sign In Space' the movements of the moon take on a more pronounced role. The movements of the tide become the precondition for the existence of the work, since they control its presence and disappearance. The rising of the tide overwrites and erases human labor. Human labor is another aspect at play in the work, since the execution of the piece also follows the beach cleaners' working schedule.

This dependence on the lunar calendar makes time a vital feature of the piece. Fundamental to it is the way that different kinds of time both conflict and coexist. The everyday labor of the beach workers is economic time. The use of time regulated by the demands of the market and the need of the workers to earn a living constitutes one cycle. Another time stratum is regulated by the cosmic motion of the moon, which influences the movements of the tide. Great cosmic time ticks away in parallel with the little clock of human life, but in a different stratum.

Both in its method and motif 'A Sign In Space' continues the tradition of land art with special reference to Robert Smithson. In Smithson's work, art converses with the great time, the timespan of the universe, the geological movements of the earth, the slow evolution and extinction of organisms. Land art put forward an expansive idea of nature, both as a site and as a material for art. The nature that the land-art movement spoke with and through has now been altered by human intervention. Our current conception of the earth is that of a damaged planet threatened by human beings and dependent on human care in order to heal. In Klingberg's work the idea of returning to a paradisiacal original state has been overshadowed, and there is no pristine nature left to be sought out for human esthetic contemplation. Instead, the piece is played out on the beach in a nature reserve created by the human hand to protect a threatened biotope. It has become much harder to distinguish between the raw material — nature — and controlled, created culture.