

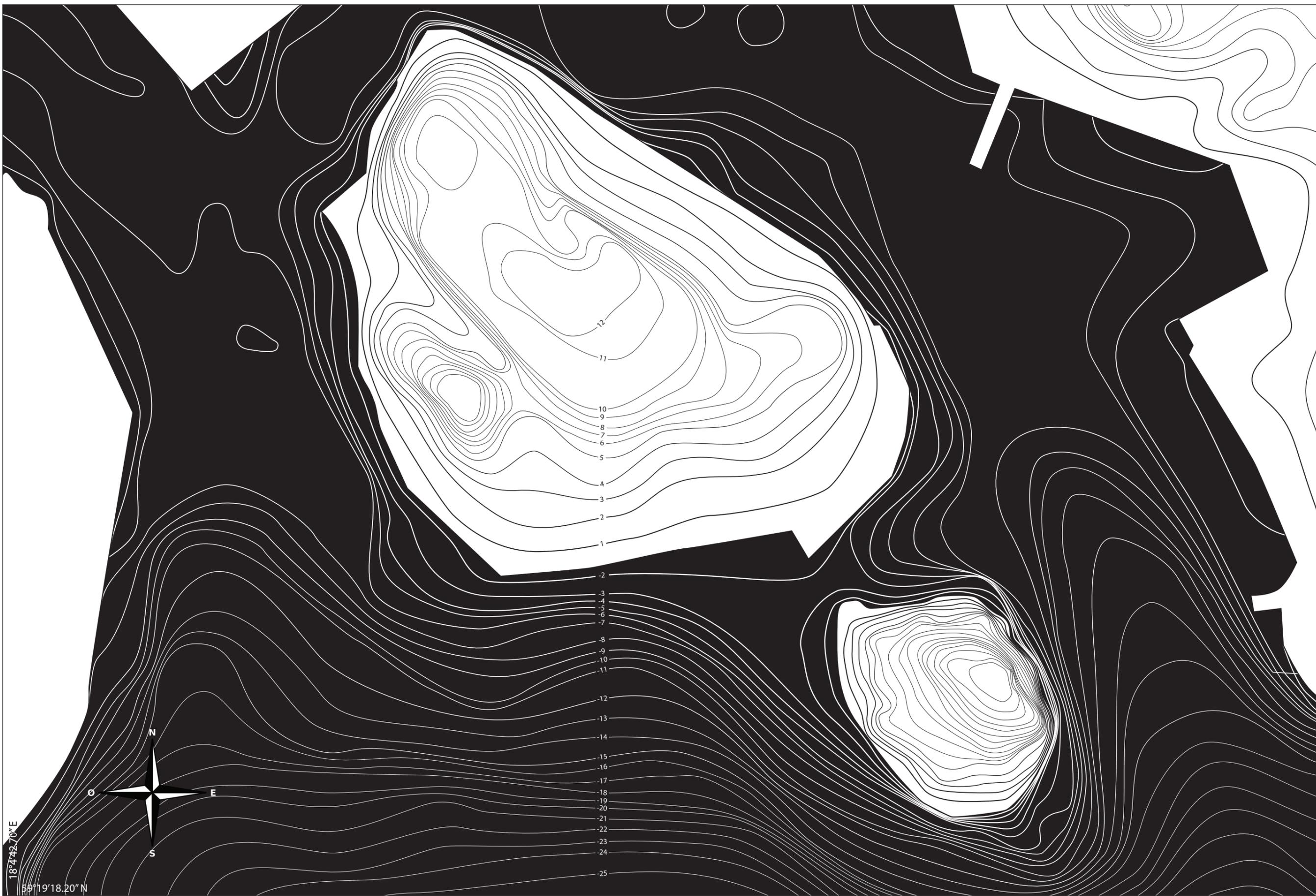
GALLERY MEJAN,
EXERCISPLAN 3, STOCKHOLM

SITE SENSITIVE ACTS

OPENING WEDNESDAY 29 JUNE,
FROM 5 TO 9 PM

MALIN PETTERSSON ÖBERG

SOFIA TÖRNBLAD



30 JUNE - 3 JULY 2011,
THU-FRI 12 - 6 PM, SAT-SUN 12 - 5 PM

MARKO BANDOBRANSKI

HIROKO TSUCHIMOTO

VYGANDAS ŠIMBELIS

TOMAS STARK

YOUR PLACE OR MINE?

Warning, trivial observation: most actions take place somewhere or other. Some specific place must serve as the site of our being, staying, going, traveling to/from, must we be, stay, go, or travel to/from. Doing anything at all implies a place; without placement, action becomes unthinkable. Now, the opposite is a more complicated condition: places, considered as meaningful realities in these human lives of ours, are unthinkable without us and our actions; they come into existence only when there's been human interference.

Your place? The dependency, then, is reciprocal. The place in itself (those surfaces and shapes of natural or architectural forms) (if there is a such thing) (i.e. a *das Ding an sich*) is mute and empty until we charge it – invest it with meaning – either by physical action on the spot, or in the mind. Even more intriguing is the idea that the place will multiply as new individuals establish a relationship with it: since the memories and attitudes that we have invested in it are so different, your place is identical with mine only in such insignificant aspects as its coordinates on the map and its name. The place is not one, but a potentially inevitable number of places, as many as there are humans who think about it, remember it, own it and feel it. A place is neither in the plural nor in the singular; neither owned nor free. Anyone can claim a felt ownership of a nation, an abandoned public pool, or a Paris sidewalk café.

The work of [Sofia Törnblad](#) gives away an interest in hypnosis, dreams, the spiritual, collective endeavors, surrealism, nature, anthropology and ritual. In *Dream Catching*, it's early autumn in the forest and a group of performers silently collaborate on producing a web made of stitches so oversized they seem cartoonish. In her *Stringship* (the title might allude to both hardship, kinship, and friendship), another landscape is being provided with a web as it's wrapped in unnaturally colored neon bands. The bright threads draw lines that crisscross the open space, effectively superimposing the diagonal lines drawn by the rays of sun and the vertical ones by the trees.

Somewhat similar, [Vygandas Simbelis](#) idiosyncratically marks a zone – only this time in an urban environment and devoid of Törnblad's human protagonists; in *Oslo Sound* an antenna-like device plays the lead. The device, whose little head

registers radiation, is taken for a walk around the Norwegian capital and speaks up whenever it meets electromagnetic impulses in cash machines or cell phones, and a robotic conversation takes place as they speak each other's tongue of whimpering, tapping and clicking. Again, places have been charged, but in a literal way.

It was the radical Lettrist and Situationist International groups who initiated the practice later known as psychogeography, "re-mapping" cities in an act of anti-capitalist, consumer-conscious criticism. Before them was Baudelaire's *flâneur*, also subtly attempting to redefine an existing urban landscape by placing himself in it, walking it, inhabiting it, in determined new ways. Many have followed, carrying out pedestrian explorations in city settings; or in rural equivalents where the occult plays a part, searching for latent alternative geographies drawn for example in ley lines.

Around the time of the first ideas of psychogeography, in the early fifties, a travel guide of Paris was authored (though with little connection to said ideas and assumingly aimed at far less radical readers). In [Malin Pettersson Öberg's](#) *Paris – An Orbit Portrait*, the travel guide's recommendations and general Paris musings are read out loud over images of the same city. The connotation of something "old-fashioned" transmitted by the use of black-and-white images, and the timeless architecture in its subject matter, however delays the viewer's realization of the decades that set the images apart from the words being read; you might not understand right away that these are in fact recent photos taken by the artist. Once the anachronism is discovered, the divergence between the two temporal modes is disturbing. What city am I being introduced to? The Paris of 1953 or 2011? The place of the male, deceased travel guide author or that of the contemporary, female artist?

The two-voice pattern is repeated in [Hiroko Tsuchimoto's](#) *Transcape*. Accompanying travel footage from Tanzania and Sweden, and combined with subtitles in Japanese lettering (which to most Swedish viewers function merely as enigmatic, beautiful drawings), a thin voice reads tentatively from two different sources. She alternates between what's said to be the artist's own diary, and the popular Haruki Murakami novel *Norwegian Wood* (hardly by accident, another geographical reference). Again: whose story am I being told? Whose life, the diaristic one of the artist or the fictive one of a literary character? In the past, Tsuchimoto has worked

mostly with performance and textile, and makes a brave new leap by moving into video; the vulnerability inherent in taking that risk, underscored by the frail Japanese voice reading patiently in broken Swedish, then broken English, lends the work its nerve.

Abandoned places have a strange and powerful effect on us. Their appeal is paramount to [Marko Bandobranski](#) and [Tomas Stark](#), who collaborate under the name of [Gomfilm](#), and comes across in their generous selection of four videos and one video sculpture, or "digital totem". The video *Tandoori Fun Park* is a close study of the Vanadisbadet, a public pool in Stockholm closed since 2007. In the film the colors of the park and architecture are warped almost to the point of causing nausea, like in damaged photographic prints. A cross turned upside-down and inserted into the title credits turns out to be a figure from the tiles of the emptied swimming pool, but still doubles as a diabolical sign. Blood-colored water washes down dried-up chutes. The place is inhabited only by a rainbow, strangely determined little clouds, and the red fluid, elements that reappear in other works: in P.O.E., it's the sky above a Croatian island that turns red, in *Sensation Guardian Happy Home*, clouds haunt a textile factory near New York.

Yours, mine, theirs, ours. In "Site-Sensitive Acts" every artist has effectively invested some place with their very own human flavor, a heartbeat, blood, mucus, whatever, fictional additions, and geist – and thus activated the notion of *your place and mine*. The ground hardly even exists if it's never been traced by somebody, stepped on, felt by naked toes, or spit on. Thought about, read to, dreamt of; televised and longed for; cared for, or abandoned and revisited.

Johanne Nordby Wernø, writer and critic