

When I was ten years old a sperm whale stranded near my hometown on one of the Wadden islands. I regularly visited the spot where once that heavy, dead weight laid, during all weather conditions, always at night. Only here could I be fully aware of the natural cycles and the universe, be fully alone and barely notice human disturbances. I considered this a firm and stable place, a point from which to gain perspective. Until it was turned into a construction site. There were mountains of rubble, big machinery and the ground had turned into quicksand. This operation took place to heighten the dyke and prepare for rising sea levels. It lasted for two years and after all the machinery had gone a large part of the beach had fallen into the sea. For another long period a Russian ship went back and forth day and night to pick up sand from the seabed and throw it in front of the shore to restore the loss. I started to focus on the ground itself, its behaviour, its history, its future. How it is being protected momentarily, over and over again, while being simultaneously exploited.

I attempted to gain control over sand in different ways, to understand the ground that as a child I had considered to be powerful enough to grant me a whale when I had wished to see one. I used nourishment sand that had been taken from the bottom of the North Sea, sand used to repair. I eroded this sand into pigment to give it a future form. I also bound the sand with iron oxide, a process similar to how objects that rust in the sea bind the surrounding sand. I used elements related to natural erosion, such as a key from the village Sier that disappeared around 1730 underneath the sand and sea. But also a contemporary element such as a NAM gas drilling location that has not been used since the 1960s and is currently standing on the disappearing edge of the dunes, about to be taken by the sea, its contaminated soil included.

I wanted to force the sand into the regular cycles of the universe, its quiet spaces of recurrence. I made paint from it and built an hourglass that should run in synchrony with the tide, combining the different temporal experiences of the outside and inside. But the more I tried to control the sand, the more it resisted. I kept track of its behaviour and all these measurements began to appear analogous to the activities taking place in the area: the most recent sand nourishment is an experimental one, its main function is to observe how the sand behaves, where it will go. Former predictions of soil subsidence due to gas extraction are based on assumptions that proved not to be correct - the ground ended up behaving in unpredicted ways. Uncertainty remains a key word for future projections. Uncertainty also remains a key word for how and if this sandclock will keep running.