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The story behind artist Laddie John Dill's Main Beach laser light exhibit

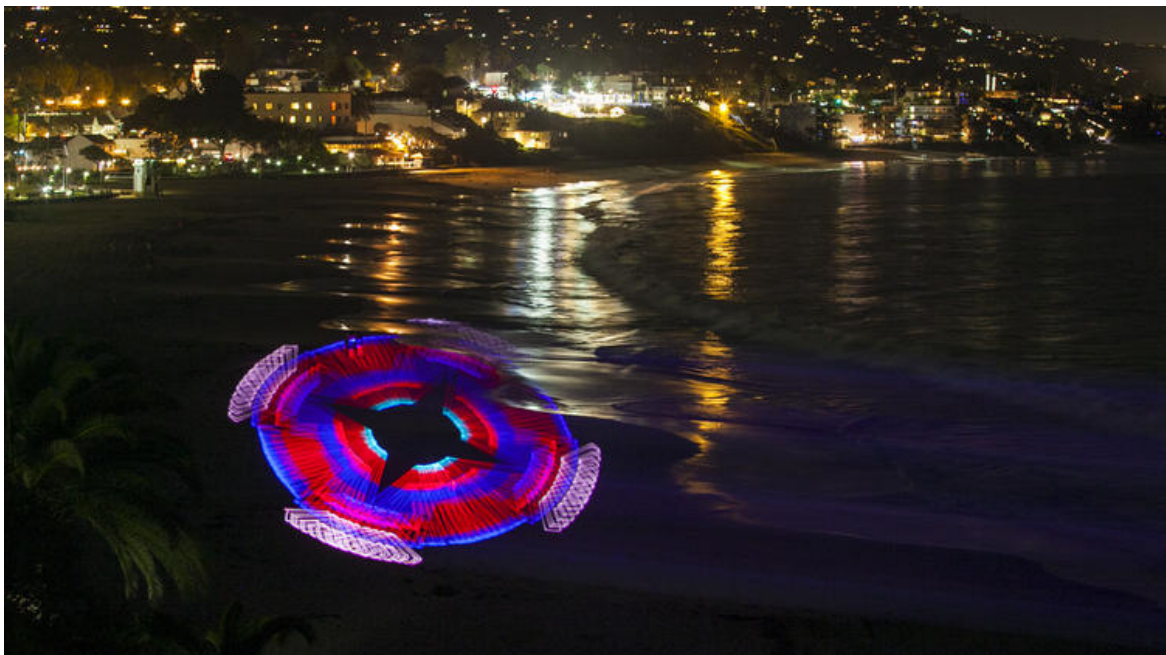


Laser lights project on the sand and water during a rehearsal of "Electric Light Blanket," a laser light exhibit for the Laguna Art Museum's Art & Nature conference and festival. (Scott Smeltzer / Coastline Pilot)

High above Main Beach, a series of red, blue and purple lasers danced on the sand in silence. The colors reflected in every direction imaginable, spanning miles of the coastline.

As artist Laddie John Dill tested the laser light exhibit on a recent Wednesday night, he was hoping mist would rise above the ocean near the shore. The haze would help make the laser beams all the more visible. "You see how the colors pick up on the edge?" Dill asked. "It'll be quite amazing."

Dill, a light and space artist who made the glass and argon-gas Light Sentences — pieces that appear as streaks in space — in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was commissioned by the Laguna Art Museum to create a live-performance art piece as part of the museum's annual Art & Nature program.



Laser lights project on the sand and water during a rehearsal of "Electric Light Blanket," a laser light exhibit for the Laguna Art Museum's Art & Nature conference and festival. (Scott Smeltzer / Coastline Pilot)

Just after sunset on Saturday, Dill plans to present "Electric Light Blanket," a show of light and laser effects. The performance piece will involve four hours of choreographed laser light sequences projected from the cliffs off Heisler Park down to the shore and surf of Laguna Beach's Main Beach.

The light works will begin with a dot that grows into a grid that eventually blankets the beach, a sight that will be visible from 25 to 30 miles away, Dill said. Chamber music will be played in the background. "You're just completely in those colors that appear down there," Dill said as he stood near the gazebo at Heisler Park overlooking the beach. "My interest is in the continuity of the performance. I just don't want a colorful light show. It's going to have an abstract storyline."



Laddie John Dill is the artist commissioned for the "Electric Light Blanket," a laser light exhibit for the Laguna Art Museum's Art & Nature conference and festival this November. (Scott Smeltzer / Coastline Pilot)

The concept struck Dill, a faculty member at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, a few months ago, and he discussed with a professor there how lasers could be projected onto water and sand. Dill then collaborated with Laserium, a manufacturer of laser projection systems for clients worldwide, including special effects for television and motion pictures, to produce a live-performance art piece.

There were challenges. The group had to meet with the city of Laguna Beach and file a report with the [Federal Aviation Administration](#) so that pilots could be alerted. Once the team earned approval from the city, the artists could begin choreographing the piece. Dill originally wanted to swim out in the ocean and place a prism on a rock to create a beam running through it. But the particular rock is federally protected as a refuge for seagulls.

Marinta Skupin, Laguna Art Museum curator of education, said the museum's annual Art & Nature festival was created three years ago to provide a festival of art and ideas for the community, develop connections between art and science and raise awareness of environmental issues.

"It's exceeded all our expectations and it's been very well-received," Skupin said of the festival, noting that museum officials expect 1,000 to 2,000 attendees.

"Laddie is such a renowned California artist, and it's

just a nice continuation to see an artist interpret nature in a contemporary way. "I think it's going to be spectacular and people will enjoy it."

Dill, based in Venice, Calif., graduated in 1968 from Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles and began producing electric light works out of custom-made, blown-glass tubes in a series of bright colors. He has exhibited in venues from Seoul, Paris and Helsinki to New York, Kansas City, Seattle and throughout California.

In addition to the laser light performance, the museum will host a panel discussion at 10 a.m. with artist Lita Albuquerque, who will present a screening of her Art & Nature performance piece on Main Beach last year.

A second discussion at 2 p.m. Saturday will feature four artists sharing their perspectives on the intersection of art and nature.

The event will close Sunday with a family festival of interactive art, information booths and face painting. Dill said he looks forward to showcasing the brilliant colors above the ocean so visitors can engage with the natural world.

"This is a contemporary statement, so it's not just 'oohs' and 'ahhs.' It's got intellectual input," Dill said. "We're super excited."