Internationally recognized as a pioneering work of Land art, Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76) is situated within a 40-acre plot in the Great Basin Desert in southwestern Utah. Composed of four concrete cylinders that are 18 feet in length and 9 feet in diameter, *Sun Tunnels* is arranged on the desert floor in an “X” pattern. During the summer and winter solstices, the four tunnels align with the angles of the rising and setting sun. Each tunnel has a different configuration of holes, corresponding to stars in the constellations Capricorn, Columbia, Draco, and Perseus. The small holes create negative spaces, allowing the sun to cast shadows inside the tunnels that trace the earth’s rotation.

Holt’s five-decade-long practice included work in art, architecture, and time-based media that involved singular mediations in the environment. After graduating with a degree in biology in 1960 from Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, she moved to New York City. Holt began composing concrete poetry as well as creating video, sound, and photographic work that aligned her interests in spatial consciousness.


The idea for *Sun Tunnels* became clear to me while I was in the desert watching the sun rising and setting, keeping the time of the earth. *Sun Tunnels* can exist only in that particular place—the work evolved out of its site,” said Holt in a personal essay on the work, which was published in *Artforum* in 1977. She began working on *Sun Tunnels* in 1973 while in Amarillo, Texas. As her ideas for the work developed, Holt began to search for a site in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. She was specifically looking for a flat desert surrounded by low mountains. The next year, Holt purchased the forty acres of land in the Great Basin Desert in Utah, where *Sun Tunnels* now exists, and worked with local contractors to construct the artwork. It was completed in 1976.

On the one hand, *Sun Tunnels* functions like an enormous sundial, creating a visible yet impermanent record of the passing of each day and year. On the other hand, the work operates like a camera dependent on natural light; its concrete tubes act as viewfinders that frame precise images. Finding the empty space of the desert disorienting, Holt devised *Sun Tunnels* as a means for directing vision within the vast landscape. “Through the tunnels, parts of the landscape are framed and come into focus,” she has explained. Moreover, at 9 feet in diameter, the cylinders are large enough to circumscribe even the tallest person. The ability to place oneself in *Sun Tunnels* was important to the artist, who wanted “to bring the vast space of the desert back to human scale.”

Holt’s film *Sun Tunnels* (1978) documents the immense scope of realizing the artwork, from a long shot of the open desert, to the casting of the concrete tunnels punctured with the constellation holes, to the positioning of the artwork in the landscape. The final sequences of the film capture the setting sun during the summer solstice, highlighting the performance of light and shadow patterns in the final installation.

Drawing on the most fundamental tools for mapping—the sun and stars—Holt’s project is a compass, locating itself and the viewer within the barren expanse of the region. Defined by both the landscape and the larger cosmos, *Sun Tunnels* sculpts the sun’s light through the interplay of land and sky, and celestial shifts from day to night.
### Directions to Sun Tunnels

**Sun Tunnels** is an approximate 4-hour drive from Salt Lake City.

1. **From Salt Lake City,** take I-80 west 150 miles, through Wendover, Utah, to Oasis, Nevada.
2. **Take Exit 378 for NV-233** (toward Oasis/Montello). **Take right onto NV-233 E/Montello Rd** (toward Montello).
3. **Continue east for 20 miles** (toward Montello). A gas station is located in Montello.
4. **Continue on NV-233** for 11 miles back into Utah, where the road becomes UT-30.
5. **About 8 miles past the state line is a sign** for Lucin, an empty town with no remaining buildings. **There are two gravel roads on the right. Take the first one** (Grouse Creek Road), the main road, south, for five miles toward Lucin.
6. **Stay on the main road (bearing right at the unmarked fork in the road just before crossing the train tracks).** Cross the railroad tracks and continue on the same road for 2 miles to Little Pigeon Road.
7. **Turn left onto Little Pigeon Road and proceed about 2 miles.** You can see **Sun Tunnels** in the distance. **Turn right following the gravel road for 0.75 mile to Sun Tunnels.**

### Tips for your visit

Dia is proud to be the owner and steward of Nancy Holt’s **Sun Tunnels**. We rely on your help to preserve the artwork for all of us now and for future generations.

- **Please leave Sun Tunnels and the natural environment exactly as you found it.** Visitors must “leave no trace” at the site. Carry out any waste with you. Do not tamper with the artwork, make fire pits, or trample vegetation. Please park at a reasonable distance from the site to protect the work.

- **There are no bathrooms, food, fresh water, nor fuel at the site.** The nearest locations with bathrooms, drinking water, and gas are in Montello, Nevada, which is approximately 45 minutes from Sun Tunnels. Visitors are advised to bring their own food and water and should be prepared in case of unpredictable weather or automobile occurrences. Phone reception may be unreliable.

- For general inquiries related to Sun Tunnels, contact suntunnels@diaart.org.