

AnOther

Magazine

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The calm is broken by the sound of a brief explosion and little discs of paper speckle the air

100 Billion Suns

Katie Paterson's
confetti rainbows

An early June morning in Venice seen from a hotel balcony. The famed skies above the ancient city are a radiant blue mixed up with ruffled lilac clouds, over the Grand Canal. For a moment though, the calm is broken by the sound of a brief explosion and little discs of paper speckle the air like a flock of frightened birds. The shot rings out again later that day, with a burst of coloured confetti by a ferry stop, and again in a near-empty church square. Over and over the confetti cannon leaves its mark: rainbow paper freckles on cobbled stones and murky canal water, like the aftermath of a street party. From the Giardini to Cannaregio, the sites build up haphazardly.

This special project, 100 Billion Suns, by artist Katie Paterson was created in conjunction with AnOther and Haunch of Venison gallery for the 54th Venice Biennale, earlier this year. Paterson is a young British artist with a growing reputation for works that use the most everyday materials to nimbly shift our awareness to the great mysteries of the universe. Here 3,216 pieces of confetti exploded from a handheld cannon at spontaneously chosen locations have been colour-coded by the artist to match

the vivid hues of the 3,216 gamma-ray bursts thought to have occurred to date.

These exceptional events are the brightest explosions known in the universe and can be seen up to 12 billion light years away. They're also phenomenally dangerous: one occurring in the Milky Way would be enough to wipe out life on Earth, although fortunately for us, they're also few and far between.

Paterson approaches the phenomena with a characteristically light touch. In other projects she's broadcast darkness from the furthest point of the known universe on US TV, transmitted the Moonlight Sonata as Morse code to the moon transforming what came back into a new score and created light-bulbs that supply a lifetime's worth of moonlight. With 100 Billion Suns she interrupts the flow of everyday life with a brief small bang, turning our attention from the bits of paper dissolving at our feet, to the awesome imponderables of the cosmos.

Words Skye Sherwin

Photography Martin John Callanan

Artwork courtesy of Haunch of Venison. View 100 Billion Suns on anothermag.com, and the full image gallery on katiepaterson.org