

## Katie Paterson Future Library

Oslo, Norway (2014–2114)



In the spring of 2014, a thousand saplings were planted in Nordmarka, the densely forested region north of Oslo. Some 3,500 miles away, writer Margaret Atwood agreed to write a text that would remain unread for one hundred years. Each subsequent year until 2114, a different writer will similarly contribute a text to the archive, held in a dedicated room in the city's new Deichmanske Bibliotek public library – although no one will be allowed to read them. Then, in 2114, the fully grown trees in Nordmarka will be cut down to provide the paper on which to print all hundred contributions together for the first time.

Commissioned as part of the 'Slow Space' programme of artworks for Oslo's former container port (along with Futurefarmers' Flatbread Society), Katie Paterson's project represents a profound shift in the conception of what constitutes a city's public art provision. Although its lifespan correlates to a conventional idea of permanence – one in which the artwork outlives its commissioners and maker – its primary physical manifestation is also deferred beyond the lifetime of its initial public.

The proposal arose from Paterson's consideration of the rings of a tree 'as chapters in a book, growing over time', and this circuitous, accumulative principle runs across all facets of the work. The authors in the first forty to sixty years (depending on their age) commit to contributing a text that they are unlikely to see published. As such, their contribution requires a leap of faith: faith not only in the Future Library Trust's capacity to sustain the project through a succession of selectors, but also in the ability of the custodians at the Deichmanske Bibliotek, currently being built on the harbour front, to overcome any unforeseen challenges. That said, as Atwood indicated on her announcement as the first author, there are some advantages: 'You don't have to be around for the part when it's a good review the publisher takes credit for it, and if it's a bad review it's all your fault.' But beyond 2060 or so, the writers may well live to see their work published with the other texts. There is to some extent a greater challenge considering the list of preceding authors, who, by the standard set with the appointment of Atwood, will be outstanding literary figures.

For visitors to Future Library at the Deichmanske Bibliotek (which will open in 2018), the work will remain tantalizingly out of reach – with the texts held within the walls of a room lined with wood from trees that were cleared to make way for the new saplings. Paterson

often employs this process of withholding in her work as an indication of the immensity of what lies beneath – whether a necklace made of small circular fossil beads, each modestly representing a major event in the evolution of life through a vast expanse of geological time, or a pitch-black map documenting the locations of just under 27,000 dead stars, all that have been observed and recorded by humankind.

As a conceptual work commissioned as part of a city's redevelopment, Future Library operates primarily as a promise. It bears similarities in this respect to Jem Finer's *Longplayer*, a thousand-year-long musical composition that began playing at midnight on 31 December 1999, and will continue without repetition until the last moment of 2999. Both works act on the collective consciousness as counterpoints to today's accelerating culture, while the establishment of an independent trust to sustain Future Library drew inspiration from *Longplayer*.

And yet, what distinguishes Paterson's from Finer's work is that its cumulative remaking is subject to an ever changing set of conditions that will be cast in sharper relief as the publication date approaches. The appointment of an author each year will be like an annual award reflecting trends in writing. The contributors' responses will also be conditioned by the circumstances of their time and by the current attitudes towards books, libraries and, for that matter, trees. The work may appear at first to be about long-term thinking, but as it unfolds, it turns on the ticking of a clock, a countdown of sorts until the next cycle of growth begins.



Above: Katie Paterson and Margaret Atwood, the first Future Library author, August 2014  
Following: front and back of the certificate of authenticity for one future owner of all hundred Future Library texts when they are published in 2114.  
Katie Paterson, Future Library, Oslo, Norway (2014–2114)



Future Library

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHENTICITY

Katie Paterson  
Future Library  
2014-2114

/1000

A forest in Norway is growing.  
In 100 years from now it will become an anthology of books.

Every year a writer is contributing a text that will be held in trust,  
unpublished, until 2114. This certificate entitles the owner to one complete  
set of the texts printed on the paper made from the trees after they are  
fully grown and cut down in 2114.