

Meet the best new artists in Britain

We asked Richard Wentworth, Tacita Dean, Yinka Shonibare and Cornelia Parker to choose the young artist they find most promising – and tell us why

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Katie Paterson, 29,

with her 2008 work 'Light Bulb to Simulate Moonlight' at the Haunch of Venison gallery in London. Photograph: Richard Saker for the Observer

KATIE PATERSON chosen by CORNELIA PARKER

Katie Paterson is an astronomical artist – in the fullest sense of the word. The sky is not the limit for her. It is a beginning. Her champion Cornelia Parker describes her as someone who can "take you out of your realm ... she is so original, engaging and expansive – I fell in love with her and her work. She makes us realise how inconsequential we are in relation to the universe." Her work has involved plotting a map of 27,000 dead stars, bouncing Beethoven's *Moonlight* sonata off the moon in morse code and returning the results into a self-playing piano, making an electric light bulb that duplicates moonlight.

More recently, she has become a connoisseur of darkness. In her beautiful, playful, fastidious *The History of Darkness*, she has catalogued and dated darkness with the help of telescopes – including the Keck telescope in Hawaii – the most powerful telescope in the world that can look back 13.2 billion light years. Questions that tease us out of thought obsess her: "I like work on the brink of impossibility," she says. She loves immensity – and particularity. One of her works tells the story of a single grain of sand taken from the Sahara desert which, with the help of a nanotechnologist, was turned into the smallest grain imaginable ("I like the idea that it is a sculpture") and then released back into the desert. "The sand is smaller than a blood cell, as close to nothing as you can get but it still exists." Paterson's boyfriend photographed her, in black and white, returning the sand to the Sahara. "I suddenly felt so sad," she said. It was to do with scale – the immensity of the desert and her almost invisible enterprise.

Paterson, 29, laughs as she talks about her work – and acknowledges that it is finely balanced between seriousness and play. She is a romantic (with the romantic's understanding of futility) and with the patience, curiosity and technical persistence of a scientist. Scientists champion her work: she has recently become University College London's first artist in residence in the department of physics and astronomy. She grew up in the western highlands of Scotland and studied at Edinburgh and the Slade, where her MA involved recording a melting glacier – a work that launched her career but is likely to prove just the tip of the iceberg. **KK**