

Steinhauer, Jillian, "Artist's 100-Year Project Will Grow Books from Saplings," *Hyperallergic*, August 6, 2014. Accessed online: <http://hyperallergic.com/141979/artists-100-year-project-will-grow-books-from-saplings/>

Artist's 100-Year Project Will Grow Books from Saplings

By Jillian Steinhauer



Katie Paterson, "Future Library" (2014–2114), commissioned by Bjorvika Utvikling and produced by Situations

It takes a certain measure of both hubris and selflessness to create an artwork that won't be completed until long after your death. Scottish artist Katie Paterson's "Future Library" begins this year and will come to fruition in 100. Today, it's comprised of 1,000 saplings; in 2114, it will be an anthology of books.

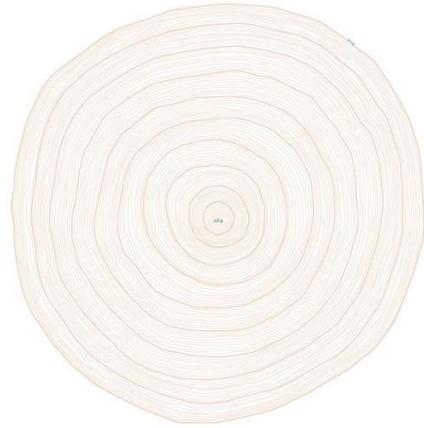
The plan for "Future Library" is this: Oslo has given Paterson a plot of land in a forest outside a city called Normarka. There, she and her team have planted 1,000 trees, which will grow for the next 100 years. In the meantime, Paterson and a group called the Future Library Trust, which rotates every 10 years and currently consists of publishers, editors, and others (including Ion Trewin, literary director of the Man Booker Prize), will select an author a year to write a text of any kind for "Future Library." The texts will be held as manuscripts in a special room in the Oslo New Library; Paterson is designing and building that room from the trees that were cut down to make way for the "Future Library" forest. People will be able to visit and see author names and text titles, but none of the manuscripts will be available for reading — until 2114, when the "Future Library" trees will be cut down and turned into paper on which the manuscripts will be printed and published.

That may sound like a conceptual and logistical thicket, but it's fairly in keeping with, if more elaborate than, Paterson's past artistic endeavors — which include shipping a fragment of the moon commercially around the globe and chiseling a grain of sand from the Sahara Desert down to 0.00005mm before reburying it there.



JAMES COHAN GALLERY

“Some of my works stay as pure concepts,” wrote Paterson in an email to Hyperallergic. “Many are on the brink between the possible and the impossible. However, for other works, the materiality or the embodied experience of the artwork is key. ‘Future Library’ is a living, breathing, organic artwork, unfolding over 100 years. It will live and breathe through the material growth of the trees — I imagine the tree rings as chapters in a book. The unwritten words, year by year, activated, materialized. The visitor’s experience of being in the forest, changing over decades, being aware of the slow growth of the trees containing the writers’ ideas like an unseen energy — that’s something that has to come into being.” But is it coming into being at an environmental cost? I asked Paterson about the potential concerns of clearing a section of forest with the aim of planting new trees, only to eventually cut those down too.



“The ethos of the artwork revolves around slow time, care, awareness, longevity,” she explained. “The trees were cut from the forest as part of the natural planting process to sustain the regeneration of the forest. We have been gifted the forest by the City of Oslo are working with the Norwegian Forestry to tend the forest for 100 years. The wood from the felled trees is being used in the construction of the special room in the New City Library that will hold the manuscripts. The

wood is also being pulped to make the certificates for ‘Future Library.’ ‘Future Library’ has nature, the environment at its core — and involves ecology, the interconnectedness of things, those living now and still to come. It questions the present tendency to think in short bursts of time, making decisions only for us living now.”

Indeed, one of the most intriguing aspects of “Future Library” is the time period over which it unfolds: long enough that we know we won’t be alive to see it, but short enough that someone we meet could. “The timescale is 100 years, not vast in cosmic terms,” Paterson said. “However, in many ways the human timescale of 100 years is more confronting. It is beyond many of our current lifespans, but close enough to come face to face with it, to comprehend and relativize.”



JAMES COHAN GALLERY

Paterson's stretched view of time is not only at the core of her own work, it was a motivating force for the commissioning of "Future Library." The work is part of an endeavor called Slow Space Bjørvika, organized by the company Bjørvika Utvikling and British art production group Situations in Oslo's former container port area (also home to its famous opera house). Four public art projects have been commissioned and will unfold there over several years (or in Paterson's case, many), including a public oven and grain field spearheaded by Futurefarmers. Of course, a major risk of long-term public projects like these is that they'll fall apart when their creators let go, unlike a sculpture, which is finite and easily maintained. Yet the trust they require is also what defines their publicness in a different and exhilarating way.