

## Future Library

## Han Kang hands over book to remain unseen until 2114

Novelist presented the Future Library manuscript wrapped in a ceremonial cloth as used in South Korean rites marking birth and death

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357



▲ 'Lullaby for a century-long sleep' ... Han Kang sits with her English translator Deborah Smith in Nordmarka forest, just outside Oslo, Norway. Photograph: Bjørnvika Utvikling by Kristin von Hirsch

Instead of launching her latest work in a bookshop surrounded by readers, the award-winning South Korean novelist Han Kang dragged a white cloth through a Norwegian forest before wrapping it around her manuscript, which she handed over to be locked away for 95 years.

Han is the fifth writer to have been chosen for Scottish artist Katie Paterson's Future Library art project, following novelists Margaret Atwood and David Mitchell. Paterson is asking one writer a year to contribute a manuscript on the themes of imagination and time. The manuscripts will be stored in a specially designed room lined with wood from the forest in the new Deichman Library, opening this year in Oslo. In 2114, 100 years after the project's launch, its curators will cut down the 1,000 Norwegian spruces that were planted in 2014, and print the texts - unseen by anyone until then - for the first time.

"No adult living today will ever know what is inside the boxes, other than that they are texts that will withstand the ravages of time," said the project's organisers.

Revealing the name of her manuscript as Dear Son, My Beloved, Han explained why she had walked to the patch of forest outside Oslo pulling the fabric behind her: in Korea, a white cloth is traditionally used as a gown for newborn babies, or as a mourning robe for funerals. "It was like a wedding of my manuscript with this forest. Or a lullaby for a century-long sleep, softly touching the earth all the way," she said. "So, this is time to say goodbye."



▲ Han leads a procession through Nordmarka forest. Photograph: Bjørnvika Utvikling by Kristin von Hirsch



The novelist, who won the Man Booker International prize for *The Vegetarian*, gave nothing else away about her work. "If it is possible to call prayer the moment when, in spite of all the uncertainty, we have to take just one step towards the light, in this moment I feel that perhaps this project is something close to a century-long prayer," she said of the Future Library.

Mitchell, delivering his manuscript, *From Me Flows What You Call Time*, in 2016, said he felt that Paterson's project offered a glimmer of hope. "Everything is telling us that we're doomed, but the Future Library is a candidate on the ballot paper for possible futures. It brings hope that we are more resilient than we think: that we will be here, that there will be trees, that there will be books, and readers, and civilisation."

For Atwood, whose manuscript is called *Scribbler Moon*, "there's something magical about it. It's like *Sleeping Beauty*. The texts are going to slumber for 100 years and then they'll wake up, come to life again. It's a fairytale length of time."

"I am sending a manuscript into time," she wrote, as she handed *Scribbler Moon* over in 2015. "Will any human beings be waiting there to receive it? Will there be a 'Norway'? Will there be a 'forest'? Will there be a 'library'? How strange it is to think of my own voice - silent by then for a long time - suddenly being awakened, after 100 years. What is the first thing that voice will say as a not-yet-embodied hand draws it out of its container and opens to the first page?"

Topics

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Han Kang / Fiction in translation / South Korea / Norway / Fiction / news