



100 Billion Suns (Riva degli Schiavoni), 2012, Photo ©Katie Paterson, 2011.

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## KATIE PATERSON: 100 BILLIONS SUNS

With a scientific approach to art and a theme that revolves mainly around the cosmos, **Katie Paterson** is an artist who can make the viewer feel like they are visiting a planetarium just as much as an art gallery. The UK premiere of Paterson's "100 Billion Suns" opened at [Haunch of Venison](#)'s new gallery launch on March 9 in London and will be on view through next month. We had a chance to meet with the Scottish artist and discuss ideas of space and time, her map of all known dead stars, a telephone connected to the inside of a melting glacier, and her commission for the 2012 Olympics.

**WHITEWALL:** *Tell us more about the process for "100 Billion Suns." How did you go about selecting the different locations within Venice to set off each confetti cannon?*

**KATIE PATERSON:** What you see is quite subtle and quite minimal but there is usually a lot that is going on behind the scenes to create them. A lot of this has followed on from a few projects that I've made before. One of them is called "All The Dead Stars" and it is a map of every dead star that humans have observed since the beginning of humankind. It's this enormous big map etched with 27 thousand dots. Some of the dead stars in the map are gamma ray bursts, so I got interested in that. I heard that gamma ray bursts were the brightest explosions in the universe and when they explode they burn with the brightness of 100 billion suns combined. It lights up a whole a huge area of the universe.

For "100 Billion Suns" I collected thousands of images of gamma ray bursts, I colored-matched the center and I made this hand-held confetti cannon. It has 3,200 pieces of paper and they are color-matched to these specific events. I worked with various people in the scientific world while I was doing a residency last year at the University College of London's Astrophysics Department.

then in Venice I took on an original site visit and we walked literally across the entire city of Venice and I was marking on the map different sites that interested me. But when we did the real thing a week or so later, it changed a little bit because it became quite spontaneous.

**WW:** *How long was your research and information gathering process for "100 Billion Suns?"*

**KP:** This project wasn't quite so lengthy, I would say it took me maybe 6 months. But as an average time scale, most of the works I make I try to leave plenty of time. Because other than the time to make the work, I kind of like that the ideas can unfold and I learn so much. Every project is quite different so I like to absorb a lot of the research which then eventually lead into ideas in the future.

**WW:** *For your work "All the Dead Stars," you've undergone extensive research to gather information of the 27 thousand dead stars. "For The History of Darkness," you've said you will be archiving images for a considerably long amount of time because it is data recorded throughout a span of time with no real beginning or end. You*

*seem happy to take on such extensive projects. Would you say that you enjoy the information gathering process and as much as the process of creating the art?*

KP: Because each one is quite different, I suppose I like the newness of everything. It's like a whole new subject matter. When I started "All The Dead Stars" there were hundreds of people I had to contact to find out about these really specific types of supernovae. I enjoy a lot of it, the discussions I have with very different types of people from the art world and scientific worlds, and the process of making. But also, I get a lot of help because they are quite time consuming projects. I work on several different things at the same time, there are some things I get extra help with but there are lots of things that I do myself and enjoy the process.

*WW: Ideas of space and time, astrophysics and cosmology are widely viewed as completely separate entities than that of the art world. You seem to intertwine these two worlds naturally. What came first, your interest in art or astrophysics?*

KP: The worlds of arts and science haven't always been disparate. Long ago there were artists who were scientists and there are many artists now that are working that way and have been since the sixties and seventies. But to be honest, I'm not entirely sure where it has come from for me because I haven't always had this deep interest and I've not got any scientific background at all. So I think it has just been a natural interest in ideas about time, nature, and the cosmos. All of these are so interlinked and our place within the universe and connections with space are, too.

Something that was quite important to me was being in Iceland. I spent a long time in Iceland and suddenly there I got this sense of being on this planet and that we are a planet. Which hadn't really hit home before. It was the first time where I felt that we really are part of this enormous universe. So I started finding out more and more about it.

I was interested in art first. I've always been working in the arts and studying for a BA to begin with and then an MA. In one of the works in my degree show, "Vatnajökull (The Sound Of)," I put a microphone inside a Glacier in Iceland and people could dial the phone number and listen to the sound of the Glacier melting live from the phone. So it's not like I just work with ideas about space, I tend to work across a huge array of subjects. I suppose nature is at the core of it.

*WW: Are you currently still adding to your works "The Dying Star Letters" and "All the Dead Stars?"*

KP: Yes, every day I write the letters. Whenever I get an electric telegram that tells me as soon as a star dies. So, quickly as I can, I write the letter and post it from wherever I've been. I was in Texas last week so I was posting letters from Texas. For the map, I am thinking maybe in 10 years or so I might update it. They are finding supernovas at an incredible rate now so the map will probably be completely covered in 10 years.

*WW: Are you working on any new projects that you can share with us?*

KP: I can't say too much because they are just in the initial phases but I can say that I am working with meteorites. I've got a proposal for a work in the Frame and it's the idea to cast, melt, and re-cast a meteorite. I've also a residency in The Sanger Institute in Cambridge where they are researching the Human Genome, and then I've got a big commission for the Olympics on Exhibition Road, so I am just beginning to develop projects for that.

Something else we've got going on in here is at night when the gallery is shut, the gallery lights are going to be flashing in time with lightening storms happening live across the world. It's called "Street Light Storm." The first time I did this project was on a pier. So every time a lightening strike happens from the North Pole to North Africa, the lights will flash. At both Haunch of Venison galleries, the lights will be flashing from 6:00-11:00 every night, so do look out for that.

*TAGS: astronomy, Cosmos, Haunch of Venison, Katie Paterson, Venice*