



# MARKING TIME





**Katie Paterson**

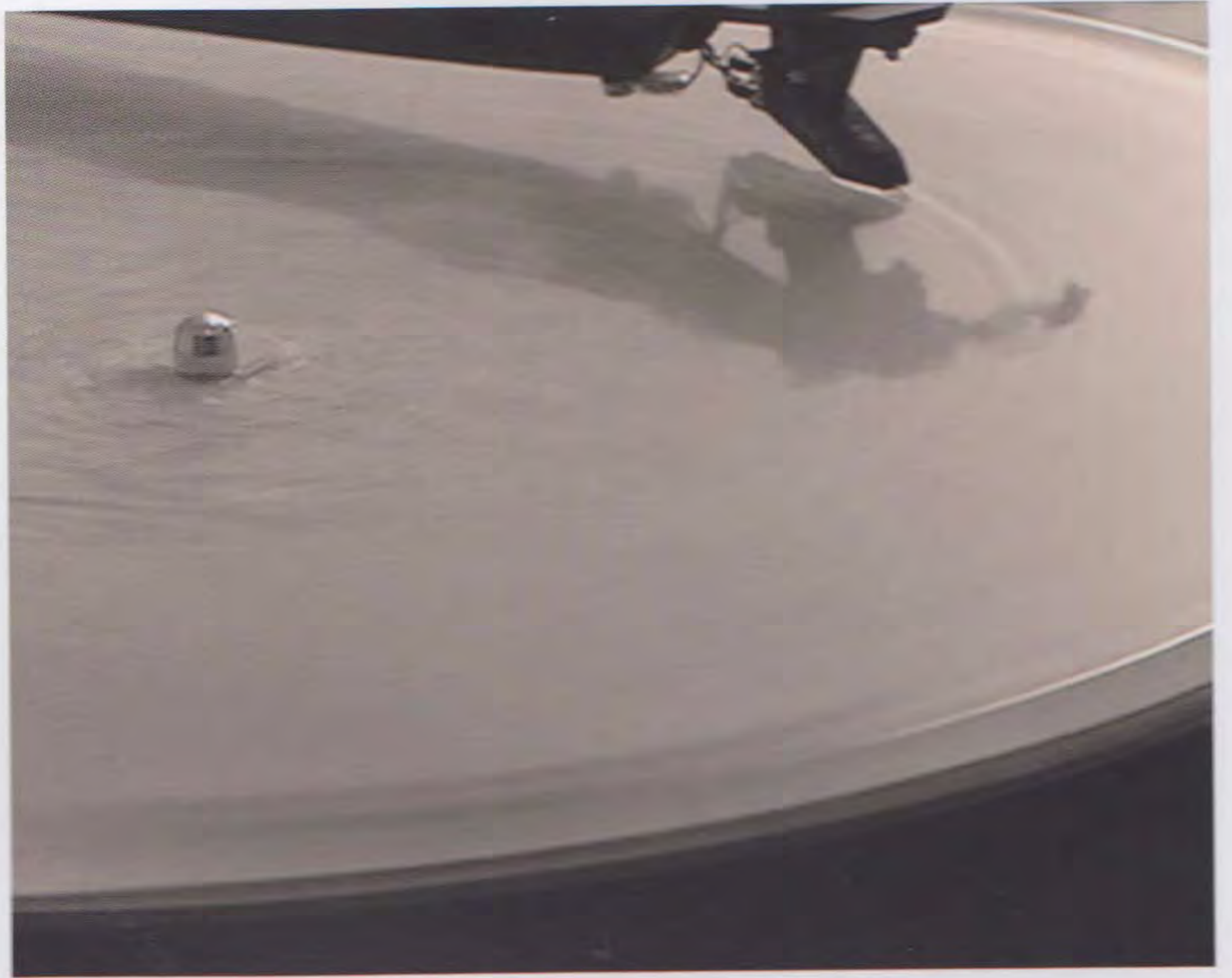
*Light bulb to Simulate Moonlight* (detail) 2008  
installation view, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, 2010  
289 light bulbs with halogen filament, frosted coloured shell,  
28W, 4500K  
Photograph: John McKenzie





KATIE  
PATERSON













**Katie Paterson**  
*Vatnajökull (the sound of)* 2007/2008  
hydrophone, mobile phone, DE500  
Photograph: Katie Paterson







**Katie Paterson**

*All the Dead Stars* 2009

top: installation view, Tate Britain, London, 2009; bottom:

installation view, Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm, 2009

laser etched anodised aluminium

Photographs: MJC © 2009



# KATIE PATERSON

SKYE SHERWIN

In Katie Paterson's *Langjökull, Snæfellsjökull, Solheimajökull* (2007), three record turn-tables spin round and round, with the regulating rhythm of a clock's cogs. Originally created while the artist was studying at London's Slade School of Fine Art and captured on digital film, for the first ten minutes or so, they play a liquid tune: the trickling chimes of the melting glaciers that give the work its name. It's a melody that takes us places, beyond the mechanised calculations of watch-driven human time, to the ancient, barren landscape of Iceland, where millennia-old glaciers are now visibly thawing. The mind traces the journey from massive frozen edifice towards the ocean's cold, dark depths as the flow of water, time and our memories and thoughts swim together.

As in many of Paterson's projects, space and time contract both with a technological aid and an imaginative leap. They transport us from the containable, unambiguous everyday world to the dizzying precipice of an insurmountable universe. Bringing us back to the present place and moment though is the click, fuzz and crackle of needles on records. Paterson's recordings are not vinyl pressings, but rather discs of ice, made with water she collected from Langjökull, Snæfellsjökull and Solheimajökull and froze using dub plates, dental casting materials and her home freezer. On the one hand, the glaciers' mass, melted and then compressed into these flat circles is a keen metaphor for the flatness over volume, the instantaneity that takes the place of journeys, in a technologically supercharged age typified by computer screen interfaces and the World Wide Web. Yet these records dissolve in real time before our eyes and restore our sense of physicality. The primeval glacier ice thaws right in front of us, until all we're left with is the scratch of the needle on the turn-table.

Like these analogue record players, or the boxy old TVs on which we watch them, the technology Paterson employs in her work is always ordinary



Katie Paterson  
*Langjökull, Snæfellsjökull, Solheimajökull* 2007  
3 digital films  
Photograph: Katie Paterson

and just a little out of date. *Light Bulb to Simulate Moonlight* (2008) is a set of yesteryear's incandescent light bulbs, created with the help of lighting company Osram to match the moon's nocturnal glow. Created in series, and displayed in a regimented grid of identical little blue globes, they speak of an orderly, unambiguous process from the measured lifespan of one bulb to the next. There are 289 bulbs in each set, and every bulb burns for 2000 hours - enough for a lifetime - and is in fact calculated to match the average human life expectancy, worldwide in the 21st century: 66 years.

If reducing something as magical and mysterious as moonlight to a humdrum electric light bulb confronts us with the paucity of the man-made world, the effect is amplified in relation to our existence through time. The bulb's light is uniform, quantifiable and predictable - the exact opposite, we might hope, to the inner emotional or intellectual undulations and outward glories, tragedies, pleasures or simple



foibles that colour a person's life. Both though are finite, destined to blink out of existence, never to shine again. As with the turn-tables, the incandescent bulbs' obsolescence becomes a 21st century *memento mori*, reminding us that all things must end: people, technology, even the moon.

Rather than the moon's poetic, inspirational radiance, another lunar-related work, *Earth-Moon-Earth (Moonlight Sonata Reflected from the Surface of the Moon)* (2007), sees Paterson evoking its secretive dark side. Here a self-playing grand piano runs through a version of Beethoven's much loved sonata, which Paterson has translated into Morse code, and, with the help of amateur radio enthusiasts known as 'moon bouncers', sent on a 2.5 second trip to the moon and back. Again, technology collapses space and concertinas how we think of time but it's our imaginative engagement with the composition's moon landing that takes us furthest. The returning radio transmission is translated back into music, but in the new version the melody stutters. It is full of unexpected pauses brought about by a collision of sound and matter. Interrupted by the rough, black craters of the lunar landscape, notes have gone missing, but who can say where?

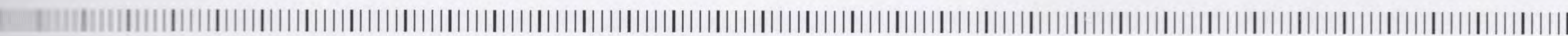
While recent projects have seen Paterson collaborate with top scientists and university research departments, her materials serve to remind us, not of humanity's sublime godlike power, but of its limits. To realise *100 Billion Suns* (2011) the artist enlisted the help of astronomers working at one of the world's largest observatories, atop the 4,200 meter high summit of Mauna Kea in Hawaii. Here astronomers were able to witness gamma ray bursts, explosions in far-off galaxies that date back more than 11 billion years, shortly after the Big Bang and long before the planet Earth came into existence. Yet gamma rays release as much energy in one fatal blast as our sun will in its entire 10 billion-year run. Though billions of light years away, they're the brightest known events in the universe, and their intense illumination is only now reaching us.

The immensity of this phenomenon in terms of space, time and our own planet's comparative insignificance, is almost too much to grasp. Yet Paterson's response is playfully, pointedly light-hearted. *100 Billion Suns* consists of 3,216 pieces of confetti, colour-coded to match the hue and quantity of the gamma ray bursts that are currently known to have occurred. For the duration of the *Marking Time* exhibition, these will go off with a brief bang, each day, via a handheld confetti canon, to gather in a corner of the gallery like fallen leaves. It's a scene redolent of a birthday party and the short, unconsidered afterlife of its throwaway decorations. Yet with a swift switch between the micro and the macro, from the candy-coloured paper specks at our feet we might be moved to reflect - not just on our own inevitable demise, or on the potential for mass extinction, which a gamma ray burst in our solar system would inevitably bring - but on the sheer marvel of our brief moment within the vast time-scale of the universe. Surely that's a reason to celebrate.





**Katie Paterson**  
*100 Billion Suns* 2011  
installation view, James Cohan Gallery, New York, 2011  
confetti cannon, 3261 pieces of paper  
Photograph: MJC © 2011







pages 162-165

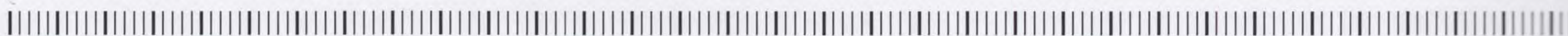
**Katie Paterson**

*100 Billion Suns* 2011

installation view, 54th Venice Biennial, 2011

confetti cannon, 3261 pieces of paper

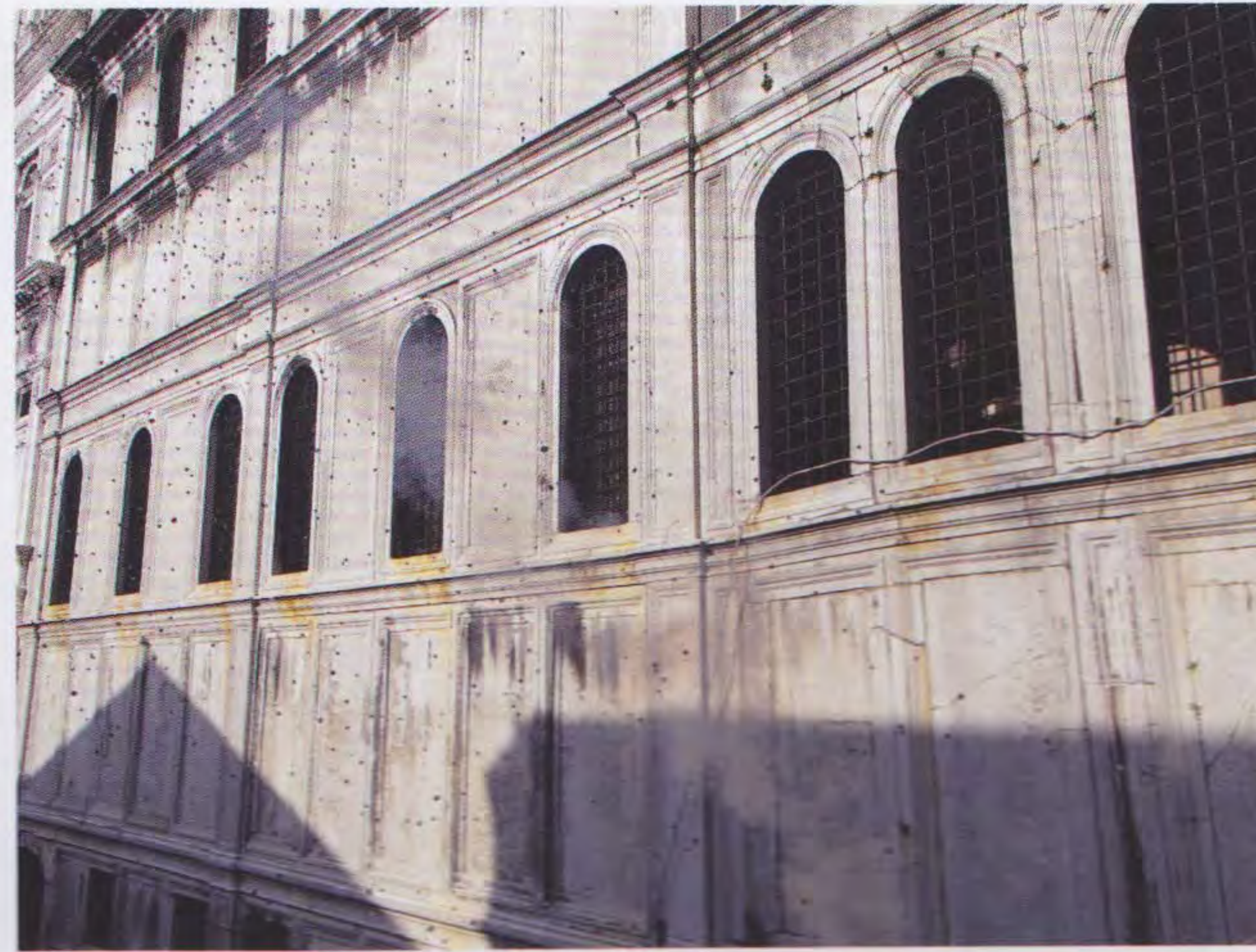
Photographs: MJC © 2011















**Katie Paterson**

*Light bulb to Simulate Moonlight* 2008

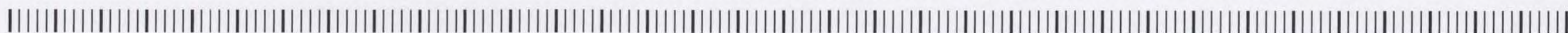
289 light bulbs with halogen filament, frosted coloured shell,  
28W, 4500K

page 166: installation view, Matthew Bown Gallery, Berlin, 2010

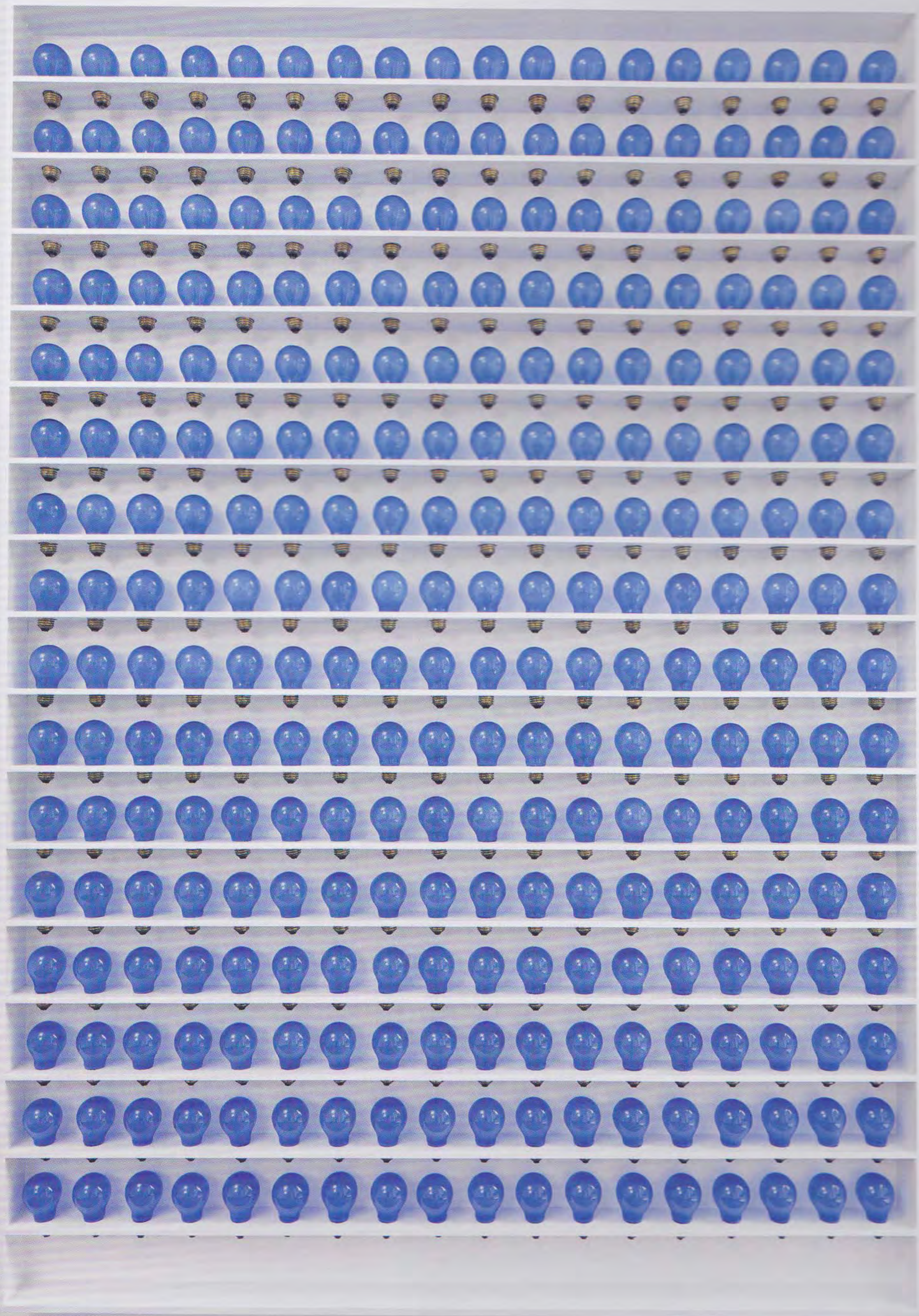
Photograph: MJC © 2010

page 167: installation view, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, 2010

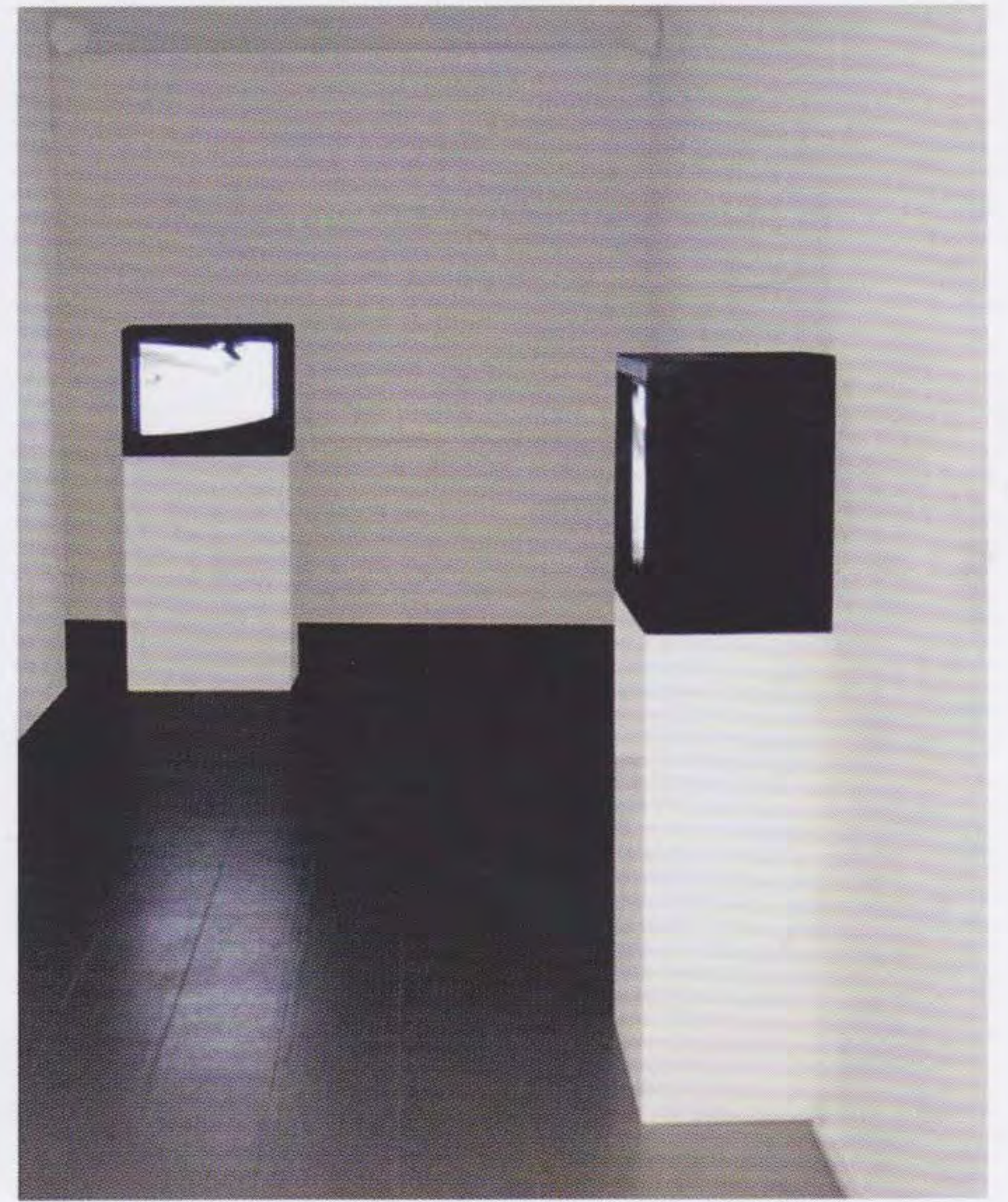
Photograph: John McKenzie











**Katie Paterson**

*Langjökull, Snæfellsjökull, Solheimajökull* 2007

3 digital films

Photograph: Katie Paterson

page 168: installation view, ROOM, London, 2008

