

SOMETHING'S GOING ON IN NORWAY. IT INVOLVES THE GREATEST WRITERS OF OUR GENERATION, POETS YET TO BE BORN, AND A PROJECT LIKE NO OTHER. THE ONLY PROBLEM IS, NOBODY CAN SEE IT UNTIL 2114

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There's a dense forest just outside of Oslo that dominates the northern-most part of the city. Filled with towering Norway spruce, pine and birch, it's known as Nordmarka and people travel the world to hike and ski there. As of this month, however, it has a rather more lofty mission status: a story set to be 100 years in the telling.

This is the premise of Future Library: 100 trees are being planted. They'll then be cut down in 100 years and turned into paper – and on to that paper will go words that writers have written in the

present day. Some of the 3,000 books that result will be sold and some kept in Oslo's Deichman Library, which – like the trees planted in Nordmarka – is also slowly rising from the earth.

"I had a very clear vision for this many years ago, but at that point I could never have imagined it would go beyond the dreaming stage," says Katie Paterson, who came up the idea for Future Library. "The idea to grow trees to print books arose for me through making a connection with tree rings to chapters – the material nature of paper, pulp and

The Nordmarka Forest in Oslo. Here 100 trees will be planted to make 100 books in 100 years' time



books. And imagining the writer's thoughts infusing themselves and 'becoming' the trees. Almost as if they've absorbed the writer's words like air or water; the rings then become chapters, spaced out over the years to come."

Paterson is an artist from Glasgow who has exhibited everywhere from PKM in Seoul to the James Cohan Gallery in New York. But with this project she's also dipping her toes into the worlds of literature, architecture and even forestry. Art

For Atwood, "Future Library is a complex time capsule, and books by their very natures are time capsules – the time in which the reader reads is not the time in which the writer writes."

At least for now, the words of the writers will be collected and, from 2018, stored in Oslo's gleaming new public library, the Deichman – which is currently being built. Nobody will be allowed to look at the texts until publishing day. The Library will sit on the Waterfront of Norway's capital city, next to Oslo's acclaimed Opera House, which was designed by architects Snøhetta and opened in 2008. The Library is being built to a design by Atelier Oslo (with Lund Hagem Architects) and by housing Future Library it has niftily future-proofed itself. Technology may be rapidly changing, but these books – come what may – will be unveiled in 2114. A printing press is also

being installed in the Library for the books to be printed on.

"The whole idea of the Future Library as a project spanning 100 years into the future is beautiful. It strengthens the library as a building for the future," says architect Nils Ole Brandtzæg. He also explains how it will fit into the building: "The new Deichman Library consists of an open continuous space spanning through all floors. More specialised rooms or niches are all organised around three cores.

critic Zoe Pilger, from UK broadsheet *The Independent*, recently described her as operating like, "an enlightenment polymath".

But the really compelling point here is how it'll take 100 years for the books to finally be printed. "When I had the idea for Future Library I knew instantly it would outlive me and most of us alive today. It's important that I don't see it fully realised – it's a work conceived for an unknown, future generation," says Paterson.

"It will unfold over this generation and the next, and remarkably, I will spend my whole life crafting this artwork. Every decision I make now regarding Future Library I have to think of in 100-year time spans. How will the library room be looked at and experienced in 100 years? How will the materials react over the decades to come? What languages will people be speaking in 100 years? What kind of technologies will exist? What will the status of the printed book be? The writing process could be experimental for the author too, to write something they could never imagine being made public now." She jokes, "I wonder if anyone will submit just one word?"

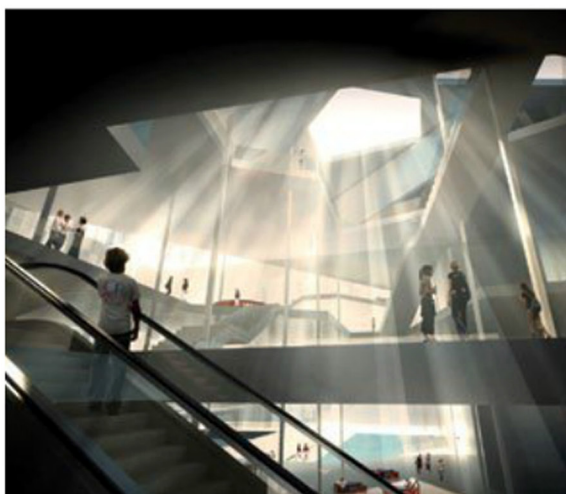
Every year between now and 2114 one author will be picked to submit a story. The final anthology will then contain all 100. The first writer to agree to take part is acclaimed Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood, who's most famous for her 1985 Booker Prize-nominated dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale* – which was dramatised by Harold Pinter for a movie version in 1990.

The idea is that these rooms may have a different atmosphere and materiality as a contrast to the more calm and continuous library space. Future Library will be placed inside one of these rooms, creating a special place on the fifth floor of the library. The idea is also that the fifth floor is the

Legendary author Margaret Atwood (below left), is the first to write and will hand over her new book this month



Oslo's Diechman Library will have a special room and printing press built to eventually create the books from Future Library in 2114



most quiet and contemplative floor – so, in that respect, we think that the Future Library room will fit together perfectly."

If culture is the greatest gift we can give to the generations to come, then surely Future Library is the most selfless gift of all – because it's something that we give to our children and grandchildren without actually ever experiencing it ourselves. Paterson agrees. "Future Library is an artwork that belongs not only to us and the City of Oslo now, but to these who are not yet born." Atwood sees the idea as a natural progression of the way that children bury time capsules. Her story is a memory of the present day for future generations, "I was a child who buried things in the backyard," she reveals. "So I consider my contribution a grown up version of the marbles, pennies, and bits of shell I interred way back in 1948."

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