

**HAT HAPPENS WHEN** one's comfortable surroundings become only discomfoting reminders of loss?

That's the question philosopher Glenn Albrecht began confronting a decade ago as he interviewed fellow Australians about changes rendering their local environments suddenly unrecognizable. In some areas, scenic vistas had become dusty, barren, coal-mined pits. In others, sustained drought had left once-arable farmland parched, setting off an eco-

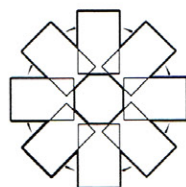
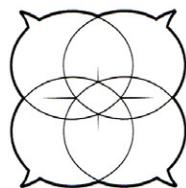
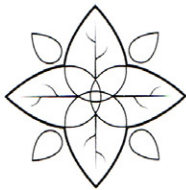
chain reaction affecting backyard gardens and birds that would no longer fly and sing overhead. Their disconsolate voices reminded Albrecht of those of indigenous peoples who had been forcibly removed from their native lands. But his interviewees had never left home.

Albrecht coined a term to describe this "dis-ease." He called it *solastalgia*, evoking a longing for what has disappeared from one's environment that goes beyond nostalgia to a sense of loss and distress for which there is little solace.

Solastalgia is an existential condition, not a medical one, but it has real mental-health implications. And we don't experience it only in our natural environment. The loss of traditions, languages, even cherished websites can profoundly affect our psyches. How do we respond to or, if we must, live with the loss? One way is to push back against it—or, as Albrecht would suggest, to push forward, to preserve a future as comforting as our present.

As demonstrated by the following individuals and their colleagues, this impulse can be acted on in realms as varied as ecology, the arts, and the web. Artist Katie Paterson's work hauntingly evokes the sounds of melting icebergs and anticipates the tactile needs of a paperless society. Linguist David Harrison travels the world to identify and revive languages rapidly approaching their final utterances. Internet pioneer Brewster Kahle acts on an ancient human instinct to preserve knowledge, in both the virtual and physical realms.

From the purely metaphorical to the stolidly practical and even the utopian—and sometimes all three at once—these 21st-century preservationists are securing a link between the past and the future, and showing the rest of us how to look on our changing world not with resignation but resilience.





**KEEPING TIME**  
Katie Paterson  
with wood from  
the forest where  
trees for her  
Future Library are  
being planted.



## **KATIE PATERSON:** SEEDING A FOREST OF THOUGHT

A YEAR AGO, 34-year-old Scottish conceptual artist Katie Paterson embarked on *Future Library*, a 100-year art project that she almost certainly won't see reach fruition. It's a long-term projection into the future—a hope, an expectation, that humans will still be here to greet, appreciate, and connect with the culture of the past that launched it.

For the project, 1,000 trees have been planted in a forest outside Oslo, Norway. A century hence, paper from those trees will be used to print 100 as-yet-unwritten books—which, by 2114, may have become rare objects.

"We'll be cultivating something every year," Paterson says of the project, which is perhaps best envisioned as a living time capsule that will re-create itself until its completion. Each year, a different author will contribute an original manuscript, which will remain unpublished until the paper is ready. The first contributor is Canadian novelist

Margaret Atwood.

Establishing a grove and a library of original, paper-based books for 22nd-century audiences may seem like taking the long view for an artist, but for Paterson, the timespan is actually fairly puny. Another recent work, *Fossil Necklace*, represents millions of years. At first glimpse, it is an elegant piece of jewelry composed of unusually diverse multicolored beads, some shimmering and others streaked with color, oddly milky, or with marbled interiors. But look again: The 180 beads are actually fossils she collected from all over the world, each representing a geological or

## TIMELESS WORKS



### KATIE PATERSON'S PROJECTS: 1)

A still from *Langjökull*, *Snæfellsjökull*, *Solheimajökull*, digital films (2007) depicting glacier-ice records played until they melted. **2)** *Second Moon* (2013), in which a small fragment of the Moon circled the Earth for a year, via air freight courier. **3)** *Light bulb to Simulate Moonlight* (2008), which included 289 bulbs, calculated to be enough to supply a lifetime of moonlight.

evolutionary phase, with its origin detailed in an accompanying diagram. "Every fossil was so exquisite," she says, each appearing to be a distinct planet or micro-universe. Using the chart, one can discover, say, a polished, fossilized bit of bison bone from Siberia, dated from the Pleistocene—the era when modern humans first appeared in that region.

Paterson is known for works evoking and linking time, space, and ecology through unexpected juxtapositions. Her 2007–08 installation, *Vatnajökull (the sound of)*, for instance, consisted of a white neon sign with a cell phone number which, when called from anywhere in the world, connected to an underwater mobile phone and amplifier submerged in an iceberg-laden glacial lagoon in Iceland. Anyone who dialed in could hear what a glacier in retreat sounds like—the crackly snaps, pops, and splashes of ice melting, breaking off, and crashing into the surrounding water.

Paterson lived in Iceland for seven months when she was 23, and she cites the island's continued impact on her work. "The wilderness, the light, a landscape embedded in time—you can see the strata and the time everywhere, from the layers of lava and the glaciers and the melty dimensions." That sensibility is reflected in another project, in which she recorded three separate glaciers, had the sounds pressed into records made of frozen melt water, and let the discs melt as they played on turntables.

For *Earth-Moon-Earth (Moonlight Sonata Reflected from the Surface of the Moon)*, she transformed the familiar tones of Beethoven's famous work into Morse code and bounced the result off the moon via radio waves. The audio that came back to Earth—translated back into music and

played by an automated grand piano—was mostly recognizable yet eerily off-kilter, the result of notes and chords altered and lost among the irregular craters of the moon in the process of transmission. In these and other pieces, she says, she connects "the vast and intangible with the everyday."

"Nature recycles itself constantly," Paterson says. Her artistic sensibility unnervingly combines wonder and awe with a stark recognition of being lost in the universe. "One thing might seem like a death to a human being, but it's a continuation of life in the universe from a more cosmic perspective."

The passage of time through nature and the universe is made present in all of Paterson's work, as is what's lost in the process, despite our efforts. "I'm taken with a Japanese phrase, *mono no aware*. It means something like a nostalgic sadness connected to the vanishing of the world," she says. "I'm capturing the natural beauty of things and also mourning the loss of something that's passing. There's this feeling of hope that we're trying to build for the future, but also a lot of darkness, with the question: Will there be a future?"

Another project, *All the Dead Stars*, looks even more deeply to the past. In it, Paterson mapped the locations in the sky of nearly 27,000 stars, the deaths of which have been recorded and observed by humans. "I'm taken by the sublime nature of looking at a star dying," she says. "The remnants given off also build new planets and new life."

Her map, she believes, "is like a graveyard of stars, but it also describes a place of constant recycling. It's destruction and self-destruction and self-regeneration—the way that something always becomes something else."

PATERSON TRANSFORMED THE TONES OF MOONLIGHT SONATA INTO MORSE CODE AND BOUNCED THE RESULT OFF THE MOON VIA RADIO WAVES.