



TOMORROW PEOPLE —Oslo

Preface

Katie Paterson discusses Future Library with Margaret Atwood, the first of 100 authors who will contribute to the artist's project: an anthology to be published in 2114 using paper made from 1,000 trees planted last year in a Norwegian forest.

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*Human
interest in
literature will
be sustained*

Novelist
Margaret Atwood



*Our first writer
is setting this
great example for
everybody else*

Artist Katie Paterson

The concept of time has always been an integral part of Katie Paterson's work, be it a series of clocks that tell the time on other planets ("Timepieces") or a necklace made of fossils from major events throughout geological history ("Fossil Necklace"). But Future Library is perhaps her most ambitious exploration of the dimension yet. Every year for 100 years, beginning in 2014, one author will contribute a story that will be held under lock and key in a specially designed room in Oslo's new Deichmanske Public Library, opening in 2018. Nearby in Nordmarka, amid the vast greenery surrounding the capital, 1,000 newly planted trees are budding. In a century they will provide the paper on which the mysterious manuscripts will be published.

As a writer fascinated with the future and our ambivalence about the passing of time, Margaret Atwood is the ideal author to begin the collection. By participating in Future Library she believes she is sending a hopeful message: what is written now will be read and appreciated by literate people several generations away. Over the phone, Paterson discusses the implications of this romantic literary venture and the potential difficulties involved with keeping it afloat. — (M)

Katie Paterson

Katie Paterson is a Scottish artist based in Berlin. She is known for her multimedia artworks and collaborations with scientists, geologists and architects including "Timepieces", "Fossil Necklace" and "Earth-Moon-Earth". In January last year, Paterson was announced as the recipient of the 2014 South Bank Sky Arts award for visual art.

Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood is an award-winning Canadian novelist, poet and literary critic. She is best known for her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and won the Booker Prize in 2000 for *The Blind Assassin*. In 2013, *MaddAddam* marked the completion of the dystopian trilogy that she began with *Oryx and Crake*. Darren Aronofsky is developing the trilogy for HBO.

Katie Paterson: I had the idea for Future Library several years ago. I was sketching out some tree rings and very quickly made a connection between tree rings, chapters, papers, books, future, time and forests. It took several years to bring it all together: we planted the forest not so long ago and worked with architects to design a room inside the new library that will hold the manuscripts for all the pieces of writing still to come. Amazingly, Margaret, you're our first writer for the project. We approached you because the ideas in your writing fit so perfectly with the ideas of Future Library, like projecting forwards into future time and generations. I believe you've started writing already?

Margaret Atwood: Yes but I'm not allowed to say anything about it at the moment. I think it's the kind of project that people either say yes to immediately or no to immediately. They're either going to get it in a flash or they are going to say, "why would I write something that will not be published in my lifetime?" But if you were the kind of child who buried little bottles of marbles in the backyard you would probably say yes, because you will have already grasped the idea of time capsules – because, in essence, it's a time capsule. In essence every book is a time capsule because it's always read in the future and not at the same time in which the writer is writing it. This is the very prolonged version of that.

KP: Time is something that I explore in many of my works and, in fact, this may be the shortest time span I've covered yet but the idea is one of my more far-fetched ones. Initially I couldn't see a way to make it work but then I had this chance to go to Norway for a conference called Slow Days, where they were commissioning artworks around the idea of slowness and time. I thought this could be absolutely perfect in a Norwegian forest; Oslo is surrounded by forest.

MA: It's a very daring project because its completion relies on factors entirely out of this generation's control. You're hoping for a number of different things: that there will be people, that the forest will have grown, that people will still know how to read and that they'll still be interested in reading and that the library building will still be intact.

KP: I agree. At its centre this project has hope because we do believe that there's going to be a readership in the future but we don't know who that readership is going to be and we don't even know, for example, some of the authors towards the end. It's a very unpredictable project but for me that's exciting. It's always going to be moving and changing and reflecting the moment now and also the moment in a 100 years' time. We've worked very hard to set up safeguards along the way. We have lawyers involved, non-disclosure documents for everybody to sign to ensure that nobody reads the text and we formed a Future Library Trust, which is going to change every four years. It involves the artistic people like the creators and the programmers and then some



literary experts who are helping us select the authors to invite, and also the foresters. Together, all of us are responsible for keeping the artwork going. We've done a lot of preventative measures – things like treating the seedlings themselves with a special kind of wax so that bugs can't get at them.

MA: For my part, I can tell you that I went out and got the special archival paper that will not decay. I'm going to have to handwrite it because printer ink fades. The others will have to be told that.

KP: It's absolutely wonderful that you've even thought past the Trust and about the archival paper and the kind of ink to use. Our first writer is setting this great example for everybody else. Luckily the temperature and so on in the room that we're building will be just right to keep the paper intact.

MA: But Katie, there's another problem: what if I arrive at the border and they say, "what's in the box?" I could say, "I'm not allowed to tell," but that's never a good thing to say at a security checkpoint. The manuscript needs to arrive safely at the library without anyone seeing what is written.

KP: Oh my goodness, that's another situation I hadn't thought about! I think we're

going to have to add that to the list of considerations. The full library will be built in 2018 and I'm collaborating with architect Lund Hagem and Atelier Oslo. The site of the library is right next to the opera house and amazingly, quite by serendipity, when you're on the top floor where the room is going to be, it actually looks in the direction of the forest. The wood that we cleared to create the space is going to be used to build this room. It's going to be quite a small room with two parts to it. An interior, where the manuscripts will be held in drawers and the author's name and the title of their piece is going to be etched into the drawer. It will be quite a contemplative space for people to sit down and imagine what's inside these books. Then there will be a second space, which is going to be an archive of the rolling documentation of the project over the 100 years. I think we will always be fascinated with the future.

MA: Indeed, I think the need to predict the future is built into the human genome. Apparently, memory evolved not so that we could remember the past but to help us anticipate the future. You can go back to prophecy and then you can go back to the 19th century when people were very fond of writing positive futures. There were tons of utopias. And you can even find, for instance, magazine pieces with pictures of the appliances that people in the 1900s thought that we would be using now. People are always fascinated about opening tombs and opening secret boxes. I expect there will be a large crowd gathered just to see what's in there and that human interest in literature will be sustained. It won't be the

only book published in 100 years' time.

KP: I agree, unless the entire planet gets wiped out except that forest. I think the book is always going to survive. I think somebody's compared the book to the wheel: there isn't a better design of a book. It's so basic, it's so simple, and this whole project in a way boils down to the simple act of making paper from trees and printing a book on it.

MA: I have to say Katie that everybody, when I go around speaking about it, has heard of this project. I think there's probably already a line-up of people who have got Future Library envy and want to be involved.

KP: That's really thanks to you for spreading the word. I've just loved every minute of watching what's going on all over the world, from beginning in Oslo and then spreading out. We had a look at the list of people that have been looking onto the website and it's extraordinary: there's Bahrain and Iraq and Iran. I hope by the end of 100 years we'll have spanned the planet. It's definitely the first work of mine that's really crossed a lot of boundaries. — (M)

