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Katie Paterson, artist: 'I do not want to re-create. I want to be doing the next thing.'

By Karen Wright



Katie Paterson and her fiancé, fellow artist Martin John Callanan, live in the increasingly trendy Kreuzberg area of Berlin. Their studio is above their apartment, which they share with their two cats, Missy and Toro.

"It is my first studio," says Paterson proudly. "I somehow got it in my head that because of the work I do I did not need a studio, but when I got one I thought: this is brilliant." It is sparsely furnished: a comfy sofa and long workbench with the ubiquitous large Apple Mac computer in central position. On one wall is a prototype of a timepiece. The work, currently installed in Edinburgh, shows the times on five planets, accurate, says Paterson, to three digital points. Paterson's work has big ambitions, requiring

research and collaborations with unlikely people – scientists, geologists, writers, astronomers, supernova hunters, amateur-radio enthusiasts known as moon-bouncers, foresters and architects, to list just a few. "I kind of rely on the generosity of a lot of people, and their experience, for my practice."

Her most ambitious project to date is the Future Library in Norway. An endearingly simple idea, it involved planting a forest and commissioning 100 writers. In 100 years the trees will be harvested to make the paper to print the books. These will be shown in a reading room she is helping to design in the as-yet-unfinished library in Oslo. Working with foresters in Norway gave her an insight into how time can be perceived differently. "For them, a 100-year time span is part of daily life."

Paterson, born in Glasgow in 1981, was educated at the Edinburgh School of Art. While waiting to take up a place on the MA course at the Slade, she went to Iceland. "I worked as a chambermaid in a hotel in the northeast, in the middle of nowhere – there was a fish factory, a petrol station and the hotel." Iceland has inspired much of her work since. "It feels like the closest to being on another planet, but it is the Earth."

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The landscape, its diversity and geological features, led to Vatnajökull (the sound of), a work that she made while still at the Slade – and her first collaborative piece. Sponsored by a mobile phone company, she utilised technology and logistics to install a microphone deep in a glacier; a neon phone number enabled a caller to listen to the sounds of the glacier in real time. There were a large number of calls.

"I have been asked to re-create it a lot but I do not want to do it again," says Paterson. "I do not want to be an artist who re-creates. I want to be doing the next thing. I have so many ideas. I want to do them all. If not all of them, at least the next."