



STARING INTO SPACE

KATIE PATERSON SHOOTS FOR THE HEAVENS
BY COLINE MILLIARD

KATIE PATERSON IS LOOKING FOR A LARGE METEORITE.

That's one of the first things she tells me when I meet her for breakfast at the Barbican's café in London. "You can just buy them on the Internet," she explains, all smiles, as she shows me grainy pictures of variously shaped space rocks on her laptop. Paterson's wide-eyed enthusiasm is contagious, and that might account for some of the phenomenal success she has encountered since graduating from London's Slade School of Fine Art in 2007. The Scottish-born, Berlin-based artist, whose work has appeared at the Tate, Performa 09, and Modern Art Oxford, has been invited to produce a piece for "Road Show," a large street festival on

London's Exhibition Road that is scheduled to coincide with the Olympic Games this summer. Paterson's idea is as poetic as it is simple: She hopes to cast a meteorite, melt it, and recast it "in a new version of itself."

Things get hairy at the realization stage. Some facts: Most of the millions of meteorites on earth are made of stone, some are composite (casually described by the artist as "iron stony meteorites"), and others are almost entirely composed of (meltable) iron and a little nickel. The vast majority of meteorites are quite small, but for Paterson's project, size matters—which, when one remembers that iron is among the heaviest materials on the planet, complicates things.

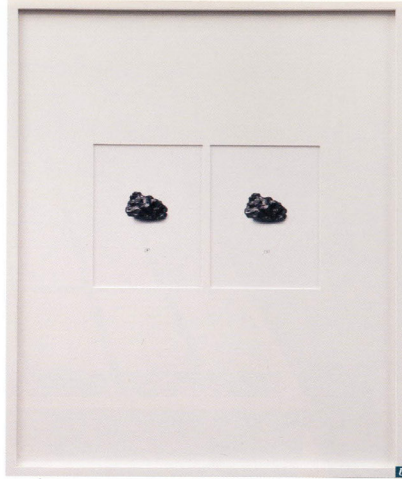
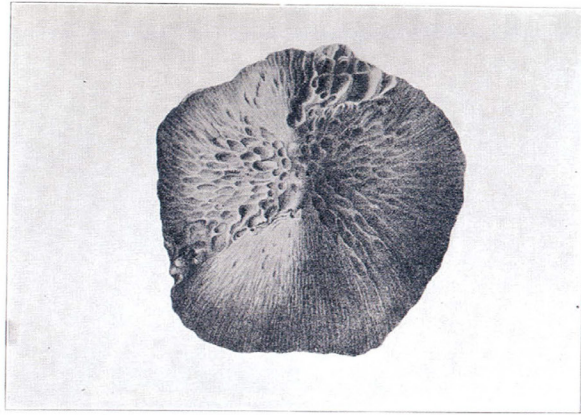
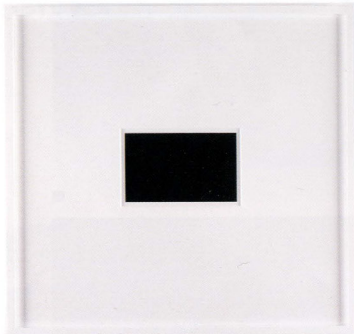
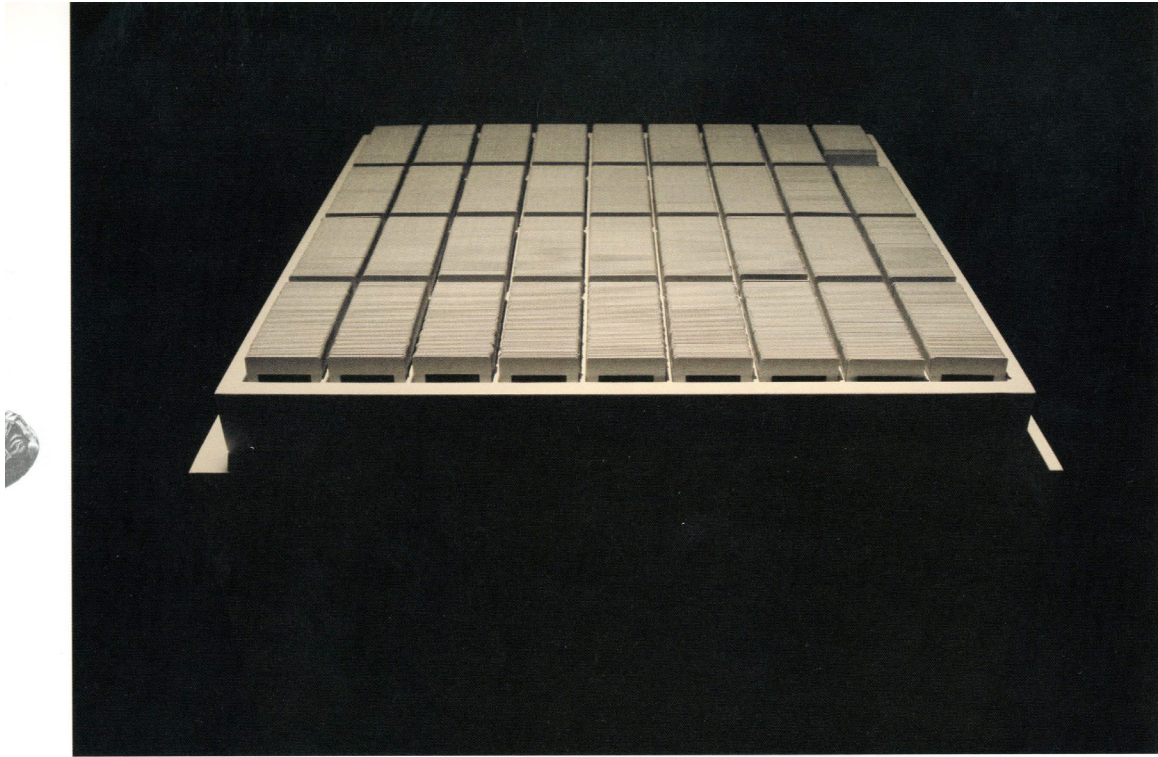


FIG. 19.—Front side of Goalpara meteorite, showing radial arrangement of pittings. After Haidinger.



Research material for Paterson's "Road Show" project: *a*) Drawing of a Goalpara ureilite meteorite. *b*) Paterson's photo work *Campo del Cielo, Field of the Sky*, 2012. *e*) Photo of a meteor shower. *d*) Sample meteorite. *e*) Campo del Cielo meteorite crater. *f*) Photo of a meteor shower.





ABOVE:
History of Darkness,
2010. Ongoing
slide archive
containing 2,200
handwritten slides in
a box, 22 x 22 in.

LEFT:
History of Darkness,
2010. Black-and-
white photograph in
a de-bossed mount,
7½ x 7½ in.



"I'd like it to be as large as I can find," says the artist. "The specimen I'm looking at is over 150 kilograms, and over 50 centimeters in width—fairly large in terms of meteorite sizes." Although some trace elements will dissolve during the melting process, causing the total mass to reduce by approximately 5 percent, the final piece will in all probability look very much like the original.

As it goes through this slightly absurd cycle, Paterson's meteorite will morph from raw substance from the depths of space to man-made object. The artist domesticates the cosmos's immensity; she gives the unfathomable a human scale, putting it within our reach. "The cast meteorite will likely be placed on Exhibition Road in a discrete place, where people can sit around it and be able to touch it," she says. "Most meteorites have been traveling

around space for over four and a half billion years. They are older than the earth, and the oldest objects on earth. I like the idea of this vast cosmic history being embedded inside them. Melting a meteorite and reforming it is a little bit like compressing and merging together these layers of time, history, and space. Eventually I would like to send the meteorite back into space, though that might not be for many years."

Paterson shares this dream with Cornelia Parker, who has wanted to shoot a meteorite (un-messed-with, in her case) back into the firmament since the mid 1990s. Finding herself in Texas for a project, the British artist even initiated talks with NASA that eventually fell through when the scientists discovered she wasn't a permanent U.S. resident. Over the years, Parker produced several fireworks containing ground-up

FROM TOP: KATIE PATERSON AND WAUNCH OF VENISON; INGLEBY GALLERY, EDINBURGH



meteorites, burned the positions of landmarks onto maps using a red-hot meteorite heated up on her kitchen stove, and once threw a lunar meteorite, at night, into a lake in Boston—a gesture only signaled afterward by an aluminum sign stating the work's title: *At the Bottom of This Lake Lies a Piece of the Moon*, 2000. "An alien object from space, the meteorite embodies the fear of the unknown, fear of the future," Parker has said.

Yet Parker's and Paterson's lines of investigation are distinctly different. While the former draws on the symbolic and apocalyptic potential of meteorites, the latter approaches them with amateur-scientist gusto. Paterson has been collaborating with astrophysicists, meteorologists, and nanotechnologists for the past few years. "I do a great deal of research, but I'm skimming the surface of huge bodies of thought that have been going on

for thousands of years," she says modestly. "I don't have a claim to be any kind of authority on any of this."

For all their preparation, Paterson's projects retain a haiku-like, expressive efficiency. Most could be described simply as such: "Making a phone call to a glacier" (*Vatnajökull [the sound of]*, 2007); "Burying a reduced grain of sand in the Sahara" (*Inside this desert lies the tiniest grain of sand*, 2010); "Collecting darkness" (*History of Darkness*, 2010—ongoing). And whether or not they end up as objects, their effortless evocative power is what makes Paterson's projects so convincing. "I'm thinking of new works, which might involve text, as idea images," she says. "They won't necessarily be something that you come across or see; rather they're a way of communicating these ideas and allowing them to take form in people's imagination." MP

PATERSON PLANS TO CAST A METEORITE, MELT IT, AND RECAST IT "IN A NEW VERSION OF ITSELF."

ABOVE:
Inside this desert lies the tiniest grain of sand, 2010. Archive box.

RIGHT:
Katie Paterson.



FROM TOP: HANNUCH OF VENSIGN; KATIE PATERSON