

Future Library

By Dan Piepenbring



Right now, one thousand new trees are growing about twenty minutes outside Oslo. In the city's new library, a window from a quiet room on the fifth floor faces out onto the nascent forest, which you can see across the harbor. These—those trees, this room—are the basic components of the Scottish artist Katie Paterson's *Future Library*, a century-long project that contemplates the full scale of the publishing process, with its many tangibles and intangibles:

It will be 100 years before the trees are cut down to provide the paper for an anthology of books—a *Future Library* for the city of Oslo—read for the first time in

2114 ... Every year from 2014 to 2114, a writer will be commissioned to contribute a new text to a growing collection of unpublished, unread manuscripts held in trust in a specially designed room in the new Deichmanske Public Library in Bjørnvika until their publication in 2114.

That room, intended to be "a space of contemplation," is lined with wood from the felled forest; once the initial clear-cutting was complete, Paterson and a group of loggers planted the new saplings themselves, as photographed above.

An eight-person trust will guide the project into the future, with a small editorial panel—including the Booker Prize's Ion Trewin—selecting the writers, the first of whom will be announced in September. Writers have no obligation to say what they'll write or how long their manuscripts will be; they can produce whatever they want. A particularly ambitious or deranged author could take it upon himself to write an epic, laying waste to a significant percentage of the forest in so doing.

JAMES COHAN GALLERY

Paterson has also designed a limited run of certificates made from the trees that were cut down to make the new library. The double-sided print features a graphic of a tree trunk and functions as a deed or a share, entitling its owner to receive the anthology of Future Library books in 2114. New York's James Cohan Gallery is showing the certificate in "The Fifth Season," a group exhibition whose opening reception is tonight at 6 P.M.

"It grows in the mind," William Pym, a curator at the gallery, said of the project. "There's really not much to see." Given its duration, Future Library is destined to be "forgotten and then remembered again," he added, noting that attention paid to the project will ebb and flow over the years as new writers are chosen and as printing technologies advance.

The project foregrounds the most easily or willfully forgotten part of bookmaking: the trees. A bound book sits at a far remove from the natural world it came from—*Future Library* reminds us of the geographical realities of publishing, of the time and resources necessary to make paper. And as, presumably, digital media will continue to proliferate over the next century, Paterson's art is resolutely, provocatively analog: every part of its process is tethered to the physical world. A visitor in Oslo can stand in the library and point to the source of the paper.