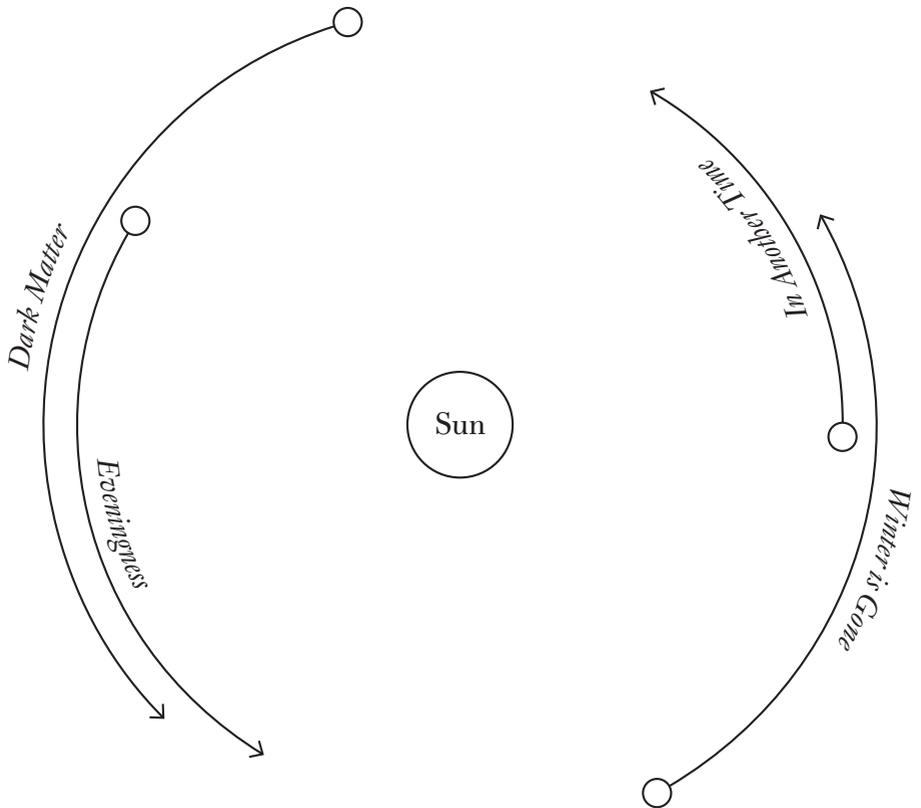


Katie Paterson, *In Another Time*
Thursday 2 May – Saturday 22 June
Mead Gallery



SIGNS AND WONDERS

BRIAN DILLON

We would have to go out into space until the breadth and mystery of new discovery would force us to comprehend the world once again as poets, comprehend it as savages who knew that if the universe was a lock, its key was a metaphor rather than measure.

Norman Mailer, *A Fire on the Moon* (1970)

In the early decades of the nineteenth century a thesis held sway regarding the origins and composition of heavenly bodies that was soon to be undermined, at least for a time. The nebular hypothesis—originated in 1734 by Emanuel Swedenborg and upheld a century later by William Herschel and Pierre-Simon Laplace—proposed, on the evidence of a bright hazy medium that seemed to hang around some distant clusters, that stars were born from this ethereal or nebular substance, and planets from the same: flung out by stars, and subsequently condensed and solidified.

By the 1840s this belief had come under ruinous pressure from observations made by such astronomers as Lord Rosse, at Birr Castle in Ireland. (The hypothesis would return in the twentieth century, and a modern variant is now widely accepted.) Subjected to powerful new telescopes, the nebulae in question seemed to resolve or clarify themselves into congregations of distinct bodies, the wondrous intermediate haze vanishing under scrutiny. Still, a certain awe persisted. Not least with respect to the Orion nebula, for which even Herschel's son John, who had continued his late father's research, struggled to find an adequate language: 'No simile exactly represents the object.'

In 1846 the essayist and autobiographer Thomas De Quincey seemed to take up the challenge to find a comparison sufficient to the Orion nebula and the startling engravings of it that had recently been published. De Quincey's essay 'The System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes' readily accepts that Rosse has dispatched the nebular hypothesis,

seemingly for good, but like John Herschel he finds that the illustrations now current of the complexly teeming mass require some poetic supplement in language. It's as if in the absence of the nebular substance some other medium must bind these disparate points of light together. The medium in question is metaphor. 'The System of the Heavens' is an instance of extreme allegorical over-reading of the night sky. In a kind of cosmic theatre, De Quincey writes, Rosse has revealed the 'phantom' or 'abominable apparition' of the anthropomorphic nebula. It resembles 'a head thrown back, and raising its face (or eyes, if eyes it had), in the very anguish of hatred, to some unknown heavens.' The nebula can only be described or understood by comparing it to something else.

With the art of Katie Paterson we're assuredly some distance from this interstellar Gothic or cosmic phantasmagoria. The works of hers that engage present researches in astronomy and astrophysics, with their invocations of deep distance and time, have no need of the melodrama that animates De Quincey's eye; Paterson does not spy ghosts or monsters in the recesses of space. And yet she shares something with the author of 'The System of the Heavens': her work is not only metaphorical, it is partly a deadpan inquiry into the nature and limits of metaphor. The Greek term *metapherein* literally means to carry across; the transfer of meaning from one object or image or word to another is imagined as an actual trajectory in space. Metaphor, like curiosity, wonder and the adventure of discovery, takes us out of ourselves, deposits us at some amazing remove or makes distant things seem close and intimate—the latter much in the way, for example, that Paterson's *Light bulb to Simulate Moonlight* (2008) brings the moon's radiance to the space of a gallery and the timescale of a human life.

Paterson's art not only invokes vast distances in space and time; it is fundamentally about the kinds of transformations or translations (that is, metaphors) that distance and time allow. Consider for instance two of her early works and their employment of sounds derived from remote points or projected across ever vaster intervals. When she graduated at the Slade in 2007 she showed *Vatnajökull (the sound of)*; a mobile phone number

in white neon on the gallery wall connected visitors to a microphone submerged in the lagoon of the Icelandic glacier that gave the work its title. In a later work the creaking of the ice as it melted and retreated was recorded and mastered onto three LPs made of frozen water from the glacier itself, and the records filmed playing before they liquified. In the same year, *Earth-Moon-Earth* involved bouncing the first movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, recast as Morse-code radio waves, off the surface of the moon; back on earth a player-piano performed the rebounding sonata, now somewhat degraded.

Since then, Paterson has produced work that time and again effects a kind of metaphorical conversion or transmutation of some original event or matter: distant flashes of lightning turn into flickers of ordinary street illumination in *Streetlight Storm* (2009), dying stars into multicoloured confetti in *100 Billion Suns* (2011), the same lapsed heavenly bodies into laconic letters of condolence for *The Dying Star Letters* (2011). For *Campo del Cielo, Field of the Sky* (2012), she melted down a substantial meteorite and had it recast as, in effect, a model of itself. Among the strangest and most eloquent of these works is *Second Moon* (2013–14), for which at the time of writing Paterson plans to Fedex a small piece of the moon around the world for a full year, so that it is continually travelling and orbiting the earth once every three days. Among other things, *Second Moon* turns the circulation of heavenly bodies into mundane, everyday logistics or transport. Once again in her work, the movement of metaphor is also a movement of return: physical or astrophysical fact becomes wondrously estranged but is brought succinctly down to earth. The work is ambitiously metaphorical and at the same time oddly literal.

In 1965 Italo Calvino published *Cosmicomics*, a collection of short stories that playfully elaborate on certain facts or past conjectures about the composition and behaviour of the universe. The nebular hypothesis is among these, Calvino writing: 'The planets of the solar system, G. P. Kuiper explains, began to solidify in the darkness, through the condensation of a fluid, shapeless nebula.' The comically domestic story in question, 'At Daybreak', describes life before the nebular medium resolved

itself into solid matter; other stories involve embarrassing revelations signalled across the vasts of time, and the Milky Way interpreted as a vast game of marbles. It is hard to say in these stories whether Calvino makes astrophysics seem more wondrous or more familiar, more literal or more symbolic—most likely, it is both. So too with the art of Katie Paterson: her great metaphorical skill is to make the most sublime aspects of our universe seem at once astonishing, absurd and newly near at hand.

Brian Dillon is UK editor of *Cabinet* magazine and Tutor in Critical Writing at the Royal College of Art. His books include *Objects in This Mirror* (Sternberg Press, 2013), *Sanctuary* (Sternberg Press, 2011) and *Tormented Hope* (Penguin, 2009). He writes regularly for *frieze*, *The Guardian*, *London Review of Books* and *Artforum*.

WORKS IN THE GALLERY

Light bulb to Simulate Moonlight, 2008
Light bulb with incandescent filament, frosted coloured shell, 28W, 4500K
Produced with the lighting company OSRAM in series of 'lifetimes', each set contains a sufficient quantity of light bulbs to provide a person with a lifetime supply of moonlight, based on the current average life-span for a human being alive in 2008. (Each bulb burns for 2000 hours, a lifetime contains 289 bulbs).

Earth-Moon-Earth (Moonlight Sonata Reflected from the Surface of the Moon), 2007
Disklavier grand piano
Earth-Moon-Earth (E.M.E.) is a form of radio transmission whereby messages are sent in Morse code from Earth, reflected from the surface of the moon, and then received back on Earth. For this work Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* was translated into Morse code and sent to the moon via E.M.E. Returning to Earth fragmented by the moon's surface, it has been re-translated into a new score, the gaps and absences becoming intervals and rests. This new 'moon-altered' score plays on a self-playing grand piano.

As the World Turns, 2010
Prepared record player
A turntable that rotates in time with the Earth, playing Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. If performed from beginning to end, the record would play for four years. The movement is so slow it isn't visible to the naked eye, yet the player is turning, imperceptibly.

All the Dead Stars, 2009
Laser etched anodised aluminium
A map documenting the locations of just under 27,000 dead stars—all that have been recorded and observed by humankind.

Vatnajökull (the sound of), 2011
Neon sign, book, sound recording (58 min)
An underwater microphone lead into Jökulsárlón lagoon—an outlet glacial lagoon of Vatnajökull, filled with icebergs—connected to an amplifier, and a mobile phone, which created a live phone line to the glacier. The number +44 (0)7757 001122 could be called from any telephone in the world, the listener put through to Vatnajökull.

The Dying Star Letters, 2011 – ongoing
Ink on paper
Upon hearing the news that a star has died, the artist writes and posts a letter, announcing its death.

History of Darkness, 2010 – ongoing
2200 handwritten slides
This slide archive is a life-long project, which eventually will contain hundreds upon thousands of images of darkness from different times and places in the history of the Universe, spanning billions of years. Each image is handwritten with its distance from Earth in light years, and arranged from one to infinity.

WORKS OUTSIDE THE GALLERY

Dying Star Doorbell, 2010
Sensor box, sound file (1 second), speaker
Entrance to the Mead Gallery
A doorbell that emanates the sound of a dying star.

Crystal Mountain, 2010
University House Boulevard
Public notice of a plan to create a new mountain formed entirely from cosmic dust. (Location maps provided in the Mead Gallery).

EXHIBITION EVENTS

Exhibition Tours
Tuesday 14 May and Thursday 23 May, 6pm
Saturday 18 May and Saturday 1 June, 12 noon
Free
Join the Mead Gallery's Curators for an introduction to the exhibitions, Katie Paterson, *In Another Time* and *Artists' Plans for Sustainability*. The exhibition tours are free but places are limited so please book ahead by calling the Box Office.

A Tour of the Night Sky
Thursday 16 May, 8.30pm
£39.50
Come to the Mead Gallery for an introduction to star-gazing. The evening begins with a glass of wine and a tour of the exhibition, Katie Paterson, *In Another Time*, followed by a three-course meal, including wine, in Warwick Art Centre's Le Gusta restaurant. Once fully fortified, Professor Tom Marsh, who leads the Astronomy and Astrophysics group in the Department of Physics at the University of Warwick, will be providing an introduction to the night sky including, weather permitting, outdoor observations. Please book places no later than 9 May by calling the Box Office.

Family Art Day
Saturday 25 May, 10am–2.30pm
(lunch 12–1pm)
£5 (£20 tickets for up to five people)
Bring the family along for a fun packed day of art activities in the Mead Gallery. Take home works of art that you have made and win some fantastic prizes, while learning about art and getting creative. Children must be accompanied by a responsible adult of 18+. Please book places in advance by calling the Box Office.

Drawing Week in the Mead Gallery
Tuesday 28 May – Sunday 2 June
Free
As the University's students disperse for Reading Week and car parks are vacated, the Mead Gallery invites you to join us for our very own Drawing Week. Still-lives will be available for visitors to draw and there will be opportunities for children to plant seeds and decorate their own plant pots from 12–4pm on Tuesday and Thursday as well as from 10am–5pm on Sunday when the Mead Gallery opens for Warwick Art Centre's 'Sun-day Fun-day.' All of the activities are free and no booking is required.

A Tour of the University of Warwick Art Collection
Wednesday 29 May, 7pm
Free
Come along for an evening tour of the University art collection. The tour will focus upon a selection of artworks which address ideas raised by the Mead Gallery's latest exhibitions. The tour is free but places are limited so please book ahead by calling the Box Office.

Box Office: 024 7652 4524