



# Books FOR THE FUTURE

*A slow-growing public art project just outside of Oslo will outlive its creators, and leave a rich legacy for generations to come.*

BY SARAH ASP OLSON

Inspired by sketching tree rings and how they represent the passage of time, Scottish artist Katie Paterson started a project called Future Library that would outlive her by decades.

“The idea arose for me initially through making a connection with tree rings — to chapters, the material nature of paper, pulp, words, books — and imagining the writer’s thoughts infusing themselves, becoming the trees,” Paterson says.

The work began in 2014 when 1,000 Norwegian Spruce trees were planted just outside Oslo. In 2114, the forest will be turned into paper for an anthology of books more than a lifetime in the making.

In ensuing years, one writer per year will contribute a text. The writings will be held in a trust and remain unread and unpublished until 2114. A copy of each manuscript — kept hidden except

for the title and author — will be on display in a specially designed room in Oslo’s new Deichman Library, set to open in 2019.

## A CALL FOR WORKS

Several years ago, development company Bjørvika Utvikling commissioned Situations, a visual arts organization, to develop a vision for public art in Oslo’s harbor. They called it Slow Space. Project Manager Anne Beate Hovind searched for artists who would challenge conventional forms of public art.

“In Norway, the easiest way would be to buy sculptures of moose in bronze or something like that,” Hovind says. “We didn’t want sculptures, we didn’t want this traditional way of working. We wanted something that was extraordinary.”

Hovind and the board recognized that extraordinary quality in Paterson,

whose work often reflects themes of space and time. In August 2011, they asked her to submit a proposal for Slow Space.

“A week [later] she called and asked if I had access to a forest where she can stay in a cabin,” Hovind says, who offered up her family’s barebones *sæter*. “She stayed in that cabin a week. Coming out of there she proposed Future Library. I think she felt like Norway would be the best place to propose this idea.”

While bronze moose may be a stereotypical representation of the country, Future Library — with its commitment to the written word and its forest home — seems to have captured something that is even more fundamentally Norwegian.

“We have this very strong understanding of the commons,” Hovind says. “The way we hike, the way we understand the forest, it’s



## OWN A PIECE OF FUTURE LIBRARY

Purchase a limited edition print of Paterson's tree ring design along with a certificate that entitles you (or your descendants) to one full manuscript upon its release in 2114. Visit [jamescohan.com/artists/katie-paterson](http://jamescohan.com/artists/katie-paterson) for details.



Future Library Forest is situated just outside of Oslo, about a 30-minute walk from Frognerstøen station. Visitors are welcome any time, but if you're planning a trip in May you might be able to take part in the annual ceremony where authors hand over their manuscripts. Subscribe to the mailing list at [futurelibrary.no](http://futurelibrary.no) for information on author updates.

so grounded. We don't fence in the forest."

It's an ethos reflected in the accessible, transparent nature of the work. Anyone can walk the forest or view the manuscript titles and authors in the library. The annual ceremonies where authors present their



Katie Paterson, the creative force behind Future Library, in Nordmarka forest.

manuscripts are also open to the public.

"I think it's quite generous," Hovind says. "We don't charge money, we don't set limits of participation. It's totally open and sharing, and yes maybe [that] is quite Norwegian."

### PLANNING FOR 100 YEARS

If Paterson is the creative force behind Future Library, Hovind is her practical counterpart. Paterson says Hovind, her project manager who has extensive experience managing public art and building projects, can move mountains. Hovind looks at it more like laying a path, one stone at a time, and making herself and the project irresistible.

Though there are still aspects of the project that need to be settled, the work has fallen into place in a way that even surprised Hovind.

She first approached the municipality that controls Nordmarka forest and asked to

clear a three mål (about .74 acres) plot to plant a new forest. They said yes. She approached officials in charge of Oslo's new Deichman Library, and asked for space to build a quiet room on the third floor lined with the timber that had been cleared from Nordmarka. "They said yes, too. I don't know," she says. "It's crazy."

Now that the work is off the ground, management of the forest and selecting subsequent authors falls into the hands of the Future Library Trust, currently made up of Hovind, Paterson, the former director of Oslo's city library and representatives from the literary world.

The Trust meets regularly with a list of authors selected for their outstanding contributions to literature or poetry and "for their work's ability to capture the imagination of this and future generations," according to Paterson.

Writers needn't submit manuscripts in English, and the works can be any length in any style, from poetry to non-fiction. The only requirements: It must be words (not illustration) and it must be kept a secret from everyone but the author until the anthology is printed in 2114.

Paterson will be directly involved in selecting authors for years to come, but there will be a time when she'll hand over that responsibility to the next generation. Her dream for the list, she says, is to include authors who give voice to the globe.

"I hope the writings in the Future Library Anthology will contain contributions from all over the world, and contain crystallized moments from this era to the next. And that each piece of writing will hold within it something of its own

A rendering of Oslo's Deichman Library, scheduled to open in 2019.



Check out a video of Margaret Atwood and learn more about Future Library at [futurelibrary.no](http://futurelibrary.no)



time, own moment, projected into an unknown future," she says.

### IN THE FUTURE WE TRUST

Since its launch in 2014, the world has taken notice of Future Library. Publications like The Huffington Post, The Atlantic and The Guardian have extolled its contribution to the art movement and highlighted its inherently hopeful premise. The project has also resonated with the public.

"In this world we're in, with everything going on, this project represents something hopeful, that we'll still be around [in 100 years]," Hovind says.

Hovind and Paterson plan to archive the personal responses they have received from the public who have connected with Future Library.

Those of us reading about Future Library, and dreaming about what the world may look like in 2114 will never know for sure what our ancestors will find in the secret anthology that is yet to be completed. Will the printed word finally have given way to a digital medium? Will the languages represented still be spoken and understood? Will there be a forest left to harvest?

But, as Hovind says, "it's about trust in the future." Paterson agrees. "In its essence, Future Library believes there will be a forest, a book and a reader in 100 years," she says. "The choices of this generation will shape the centuries to come, perhaps in an unprecedented way." ♡

## FUTURE LIBRARY at a glance

2014

1,000 Norwegian spruce trees are planted in **Nordmarka forest** just outside of Oslo. It will supply paper for an anthology of books to be printed in 100 years.

Canadian author **Margaret Atwood** is the first author chosen to contribute a text

2015

British novelist **David Mitchell** is selected to contribute a text

2016

Icelandic novelist **Sjón** is the third author to contribute a text

2019

**Deichman Library** will open in Oslo, housing the growing collection of unread manuscripts

2114

**The writings will be released** from the Future Library Trust

## MEET THE FUTURE LIBRARY AUTHORS



### Margaret Atwood

Canadian Margaret Atwood was the first author to contribute an original work to Future Library. She's a natural fit because she is known for imagining the future in her writing. Atwood is also a committed environmentalist. Her manuscript for this project is titled "Scribbler Moon."



### David Mitchell

English novelist David Mitchell is best known for novels like "Cloud Atlas" and "NumberDream." When asked to contribute a text to Future Library, he made a list of reasons to say "yes." Mitchell's Future Library manuscript is titled "From Me Flows What You Call Time."



### Sjón

Icelandic author Sjón has written novels "The Blue Fox," "The Whispering Muse," "From the Mouth of the Whale" and "Moonstone: The Boy Who Never Was." His works have been translated into 35 languages. He has won several awards, including the Nordic Council's Literature Prize.

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