

Brian Castriota, Early Stage Researcher, NACCA

Creating, Implementing, and Actualising Katie Paterson's "Future Library" (2014–2114)

In 2014, a thousand trees were planted in the Nordmarka forest on the outskirts of Oslo, Norway. As these trees grow over the next century, a different author is invited to compose and contribute a text each year. In an annual ceremony, held amongst the trees in the forest each summer, the title of the text is announced to the public and the completed manuscript is handed over to the city of Oslo. The contents of each book will remain unread until 2114 when the trees will be felled and a limited edition of the anthology will be printed. Until then, the growing collection of unread manuscripts will be held in a specially-designed chamber in the Oslo Public Library.

This is the premise of Katie Paterson's "Future Library" (2014–2114), a century-long public artwork whose conceptual mandate hinges on the work's long-term enacting and conservation. But as an artwork that exists entirely outside the museum – in the absence of an official conservator – how will such a work's enacting be preserved? This paper considers Paterson's "Future Library" in order to probe familiar questions around material significance, artistic intent and sanction, and distributed authorship, and also to challenge existing frameworks built around clear-cut divisions between an artwork's creation and its implementation. Through an examination of an artwork that breaks with conventional ontologies, temporalities, and structures, this paper expands the concepts of authenticity, presence, instantiation, and actualisation, and considers how conservation can function as an integral component of an artwork's creation, rather than an inert, extraneous activity.