

Julian Charrière
Katie Paterson

A necklace made of fossils.
A diamond made of captured carbon.

Andri Snær

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To have the work of Katie Paterson and Julian Charrière in the same space is a festival for the senses and imagination. Their work expands our minds and brings our thoughts into the most extreme dimensions. They work on the scale of geology, eternity, using elements from ancient fossils to radioactive measurements to astronomical observations.

Julian and Katie work in a playful manner, they take on huge thoughts and issues but still shamelessly poetic, fun, sometimes absurd, always philosophical. It is interesting how these playful, sometimes simple observations of scale and elements can bring us into a space of mysticism, meditation or mythology. Meditating through lights and the sounds of volcanic eruptions, resting your head on a carbon pillow, listening to the rumble of a volcanic eruption while the frequency of the blinking lights bring you into a state of a waking dream.

Their works spans a timescale of the possible range, Katie bounces a song from the surface of the moon and brings our thoughts to the beginning of time to the end of everything with a poem about turning off the lights of the universe one by one. Julian puts a piece of coal on display, 300 million year old compressed life forms, almost pure carbon dug up to be burned and released again into the atmosphere, the possible end to the planet as we know it as current science tells us.

It is natural and probably essential today to observe and put ourselves into the light of geology and eternity. We are living times where earth's forces have left geological speed and entered human speed and we as humans are a driving force of geology. During times of the sixth great extinction we see fossils in a new light, we are starting to see ourselves and our environment as possible future fossils. We are living times when the pH level of the world's ocean might drop to a level not seen for 50 million years in a lifetime of a single human being, when a glacier can no longer be taken for granted. The scent of the first forest on earth and the last one, might be a nice curiosity in itself, but has a different meaning when we are witnessing the loss of the Amazon.

Sticking your head into a large piece of coal from Julian's work is perhaps a good metaphor for the inaction of our times, while the steel structure reminds us what we have created from the burning of this same material, our cities, sky scrapers and infrastructure. The gods might have made a fundamental mistake when they put iron rich mountains too close to layers of coal, giving humans the two key elements to become what we are today. The materials that gave us

superpowers, the rise of the era of steel and fire. Most people have never seen a real piece of industrial coal, still it is one of the most abundant products of humans, millions of tons burned every day. And most people go through a single day without seeing fire, but currently, in human factories, homes and cars, the greatest fires the earth has ever seen are burning every hour, every day, decade after decade. Emissions are a vague word as emissions are invisible, but fire is mythology, and now the combined fires on earth contribute 200 times more CO₂ than all the volcanic eruptions on our planet. Something to think about when you lie on the floor with a coal pillow under your head, listening to the rumbling of volcanoes. Julian's fire fountain, «And Beneath it all Flows Liquid Fire» is again a metaphor of our time, the violent prosperity of humans made visible as a burning fountain.

We are living times when our relationship with the fundamentals of our reality has shifted. When the leaders of the world meet to discuss how they are melting glaciers and raising sea levels that is a situation leaders of the world have not faced since the world was controlled from Mt Olympus. As a scientist finally has the tools to map and measure the world, this same world is vanishing before his eyes and an artist or activist, can claim that the aim of his work is to prevent glaciers from melting, or calm the oceans.

In this light a simple piece of coal gets a political and at the same time a mystical status, it raises awe, almost cursed or stigmatised, the source of our prosperity and the reason for our downfall. While the diamond created from CO₂ captured from the atmosphere points at the other end of this cycle, a possible future, but in the context of the billions of tons that have been burned, returning the diamond to the ice sheet brings our thoughts to the world of Mary Shelley, as Dr. Frankenstein shaped to monster into the arctic to destroy it in one of the first warnings of how man might lose control of his creations.

Katie brings us Ideas in the form of poems, almost like haikus with work ranging from the possible to the impossible. «The universe rewound and played back again.» While «Future library» becomes a fundamental mind experiment in long term thinking, placing ourselves and our lives, diverting our activity to be aligned with the lives of those that live after us.

You could combine Katie and Julian's work into a poem:

The world saved
with a pyramid of diamonds
made of thin air