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Close-up

WORDS BY MIKE HIGGINS
PHOTOGRAPH BY JEAN GOLDSMITH

Katie Paterson

Last year, the young artist took us inside a dying glacier. Next stop? The final frontier

Katie Paterson wasn't exactly coy with her mobile-phone number last year—she had it set in neon and exhibited it in the Slade gallery. Callers were treated to some creaks, the odd crunch and, if they were lucky, a gurgle. It wasn't the 27-year-old Scottish conceptual artist on the other end, but Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier, on a live link-up. With help from Virgin Media, Paterson had inserted a microphone deep within the melting Icelandic ice sheet. "Ten thousand people called, from 47 countries," she says. "Loads from the Middle East, which is interesting."

Vatnajökull (*the sound of*) was part of her degree show, and it brought her welcome, though misguided, attention: "I got invited to talk at environmental events," she laughs, "but that wasn't my main intention." Rather, Paterson says that with all her art she tries to "get the viewer to imagine distant places by withholding the visual".

Take, for instance, her "moon-bouncing" project, *Earth-Moon-Earth (Moonlight Sonata Reflected from the Surface of the Moon)*. For this she translated the piece by Beethoven into Morse code, "bounced" it off the moon by radio transmission and, using the echoes, retranscribed the broken score to recite on a grand piano, gaps and all.

Another moon-bounce work and an electric bulb that mimics the light of the moon, left, will feature among Paterson's new work at London's Albion Gallery. But after the moon? Infinity and beyond, in the form of a map of all the dead stars. "I Googled 'supernova hunters', and now I'm emailing astronomers around the world," she says. "I've tracked 27,000 dead stars so far..." ■

New works by Katie Paterson, Albion Gallery, London SW11, 020 7801 2480

