

00:00

Have you ever bathed under a light that creates the glow of a full moon, sculpted beaches into miniature mountains or breathed in the aroma of Earth's first trees? These are some of the artworks I've made to come to an understanding of deep time. But what is deep time,

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and why does it matter to us all? The term describes the history of the Earth over a time span of millions of years. My first encounter with deep time came after I'd finished my studies, had no job and didn't know what to do. So I took off to work as a chambermaid in the remote north of Iceland. I was tilted on my axis and began a series of explorations to try to figure out how to tell the story of deep time. This has been the quest of my work, and it's taken me through the cosmos, the geological strata of the Earth, to encounters with the earliest forms of life. In Iceland I realized that we live on a planet. By opening my eyes to the primordial landscape, I started to understand we're not born out of nothing. The sea, the sky, the Earth, the air: we're made of the same stuff, we coexist.

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In just my lifetime, we humans have become a geological force. We've caused glaciers around the world to melt entirely. I wanted to bring these distant landscapes closer to our lives in a visceral way. So of course, I set up a phone line. People everywhere could dial a number and listen live to the sound of a glacier melting.

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(Ice cracks)

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It was an elegy to disappearing landscape.

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(Glacier melts)

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Can we connect to deep time via sensory experience? This artwork, called “Totality,” brings together nearly every solar eclipse documented by humankind in a mirror ball. Over 10,000 images reflect the progression of a solar eclipse. Their light surrounds us, and we can feel mesmerized.

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This led me to wonder: What is the color of deep time? I mapped the colors of the entire universe, from its very beginnings to its potential ends, discovering the pale blue hues of the first stars to the dark moons of the last light.

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Every single atom in our bodies was formed in a star billions of years ago. The remnants of stars make up all of us. My vision was to gather every dying star across the universe and make a map. The result: over 27,000 supernova, stellar black holes and gamma-ray bursts shimmer as pinpoints of aluminum. What you see is a graveyard of stars, yet it alludes to life.

03:00

The journey we humans have been on to arrive right here is nothing short of a miracle. “Fossil Necklace” is a string of worlds made of the material of life itself. Each bead is carved from ancient fossils and strung geological epoch by epoch. The beads chart major moments in Earth’s history. The first single-celled life, the first flowers, the first creatures to see and to fly. “Fossil Necklace” speaks to our long continuum.

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Every day we walk past trees, but do we stop to think that they are our cousins? We share so many of our genes with trees, and forests give us our breath. I wanted to honor them by creating a sculpture made of every tree type on Earth. This is “Hollow.” Designed with architects Zeller & Moyer, it brings together over 10,000 tree species spanning millions of years. We were donated wood samples from almost every country: the Indian Banyan, the White Mulberry, the Dawn Redwood and twigs from sacred forests around us. Looking upwards into the light, we see the most threatened tree species of now.

04:18

More recently in my practice, I've come to believe that looking forward is just as important as looking back. How do we speak to unborn people? How do we build a bridge across time? I thought the world's literary voices may be the best at doing that job, so I proposed a library of the future: a forest, a room, 100 authors and 100 years. It started in 2014. On the outskirts of Oslo, we planted a thousand baby Spruce trees. When they're fully grown, they're going to be cut and made into paper. Every year for 100 years a different author is invited to write something new. Their words will become an anthology of books printed on paper made from these trees, only to be read in the year 2114.

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The core of Future Library is time and longevity, but also hope and rituals. Every spring, we take a pilgrimage to the forest. Authors hand over their manuscript and announce its title. Their text will be stored here in Oslo's new library. You take off your shoes, you step inside. Each glass drawer holds a manuscript.

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100 years is not vast in cosmic terms. Yet if my young son lives to read the books, his world is likely to have changed beyond recognition. Will human beings survive to read the books? Future Library is a century-long prayer. Future generations may be invisible to our eyes, but we are connected through our actions. I wanted to see to future readers, "I see you." "We see you."

06:02

Why does connecting to deep time matter to us all? Shortsightedness may be the greatest threat to humanity. To be human is to understand that we're part of a long continuum. Let's embrace our cosmic context, respect our origins and hold our future close.

06:23

Thank you.