

Overview of the artwork

Amulets are miniature objects, typically carved in stone. They have been crafted over millennia and cultures carrying cultural and cosmic significance across civilisations. The Latin root of the word amulet, *amoliri*, means “to drive away, to protect”, and these small, talismanic objects, small enough to be hand held, are often considered protective.

Afterlife reimagines this tradition. Nearly two hundred ancient amulets from across time and all corners of the globe have been sourced from museums worldwide, representing Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Viking, Islamic, Japanese, Indian, Chinese, Celtic, Greco-Roman, and Pre-Columbian traditions, amongst others. For *Afterlife*, these small, intricate amulets have been recreated from materials sourced from endangered landscapes and fragile ecosystems to serve as a bridge between past and present, drawing on centuries of cultural and spiritual traditions while reflecting the fragility of the natural world today.

The materials used to recreate the amulets reflect the pressing environmental issues of our time. Rocks from glacial terrains left bare by retreating ice, coral from the Great Barrier Reef, stones from islands facing rising sea levels, and other materials from devastated or threatened ecosystems are transformed into tiny objects of reflection, connection, prayer and renewal.

The amulets are grouped into thematic zones across the two tables: Biosphere, Hydrosphere, Cryosphere, Place and Climate, Wildfire, Anthropocene, Extraction, Mining, War, and Pollution.

How were the amulets sourced?

The artwork has taken several years to create. They were sourced, 3D scanned, and 3D printed from collections worldwide, from which casts have been made, including from Brooklyn Museum; John Hopkins University Museums; National Museums Liverpool; the Louvre; Musée Dobrée; the National Museum of Iceland; University of Bonn; and the MET; with a netsuke scan provided by Edmund de Waal. The research to create the artwork has been extensive.

How were the amulets made?

A range of methods was used to create the amulets. Many were cast from moulds made using 3D prints, with materials crushed up and mixed with plant resins, beeswax, and various plasters. Others were carved by hand. Each amulet was considered individually.

Telling the story of the Earth’s destruction through its material remnants has involved sourcing a wide range of difficult, contentious, and highly charged substances—a significant challenge throughout the making of *Afterlife*. Many of these materials were generously donated by major research institutes and individuals across the world, acquired as deaccessioned items, gathered as hand-collected found objects, or reused from Katie Paterson’s previous projects. Most of the materials are pre-existing, approached with sensitivity to their origins. The collection comprises recycled, cast-off, discarded, and obsolete matter—ranging from ice samples, deaccessioned ice cores and glacial meltwater to stratigraphic samples, chemical residues, microplastics, space debris, minerals, fossils, sands, vegetation, seeds, detritus, waste material, corals, and marine sediments—tracing a journey from the deepest parts of the globe to the stratosphere. This evolving

material archive has been made possible through the generous support of hundreds of people and places worldwide. The extensive list is in the middle of the catalogue.

How was the table made?

Katie Paterson has collaborated with Berlin / Mexico City based architectural studio Zeller & Moya to design a special table to host the amulets, the curving structure responding to the circular shape of the tower, with hollows and channels etched into its surface in a reference to a riverbed. Locally-grown sycamore wood was the selected material for the table. It provides a natural backdrop for the amulets, as well as a smooth and warm tactile experience. Each 'dip' in the table has been designed individually to hold each amulet, a bit like being held intimately in the palm of a hand.

About Martello Tower

Afterlife is installed in a Martello tower, one of a network of circular structures built around Britain's coastline during the Napoleonic wars, designed in part as defence, in part as early warning system. It has been closed to the public for a few decades.

What cultures and eras to the amulets represent?

The amulets span millennia, the oldest being from Mesopotamia several thousand years ago. The amulets cross cultures, including those from Africa — Morocco, Tuareg, Ghana, and Ivory Coast; the Americas — Aztec, Chorotegan, Maya, Mexico, Olmec, Pre-Columbian, Tairona, and Taino; as well as Ancient Greece, Ancient Koban Culture, Ancient Rome, Bactrian, Byzantine, Celtic, Chinese, Egyptian, European, Portuguese, Greco-Roman, Greenlandic, Inuit, Icelandic, Indian, Indonesian (including Lombok), Islamic, Japanese, Near Eastern cultures — Babylonian, Mesopotamian, Syrian, Iranian; and also Nepalese, Pagan, Phoenician, Sassanian, Sri Lankan, Thai, Viking, Neo-Assyrian, and Sumerian traditions.

What significance do the amulets carry?

They carry a wide range of symbolisms. Many depict animals such as birds, fish, insects, lions, rams, and snakes; others represent deities, human hands and hearts, plants, shells, everyday objects like hammers and headrests, as well as astronomical symbols referencing the sun, stars, and the universe.

Some interesting examples:

- Amulet of Bat, a pre-dynastic Cow Goddess (Ancient Egypt)
- Netsuke of an Owl (Japan, c. 1615–1868 CE)
- Amulet of a Ram's Head, Snake Head, Frog and Papyrus (Ancient Egypt)
- Amulet of Hathor, Goddess of the Sky (Ancient Egypt, c. 3000 BCE)
- Amulets of Two Scarab Beetles, representing protection and transformation (Ancient Egypt)
- Amulet of a Foot, representing safety and guidance (Temple of Ishtar, ancient Mesopotamia, c. 2500–2340 BCE)
- Amulet of a Ba-bird, a symbol of the soul (Ancient Egypt, c. 664–332 BCE)
- Amulet of a Headrest, signifying protection during sleep (Ancient Egypt, c. 664–30 BCE)
- Amulet of Ptah, God of Creation (Ancient Egypt)
- Amulet of Carahu Swallowing the Moon (Thailand, 20th century CE)

- Amulet of an Ankh Cross, 'The Breath of Life' (Ancient Egypt, c. 664–332 BCE)
- Amulet of a Quadruple Wedjat Eye, a symbol of restored wholeness (Ancient Egypt, c. 1069–332 BCE)
- Amulet of the Deity Heh, God of infinity, Holding Signs for Millions of Years (Ancient Egypt, c. 1300–950 BCE)
- Amulet of a Whale Tail (Inuit culture, Greenland, 20th century CE)
- Amulet of an Ear, a symbol of listening (Ancient Egypt, c. 2500–1500 BCE)
- Ankh Amulet, symbolising life and the eternal cycle of birth and death (Ancient Egypt, c. 900–1100 CE)
- Amulet of Two Fingers, signifying unity (Ancient Egypt)
- Amulet of Maat, Goddess of Cosmic Order (Ancient Egypt, c. 664–30 BCE)
- Amulet of a Falcon-headed God (Ancient Egypt, c. 664–525 BCE)
- Amulet of Ganesh, Lord of Beginnings and Remover of Obstacles (Thailand, 20th century CE)
- Amulet of a Double Crocodile, representing duality and the two realms (Ancient Egypt, c. 664–343 BCE)
- Amulet of Wepwawet, 'The Opener of Ways' (Ancient Egypt, c. 3500–2900 BCE)
- Amulet of Thoth, God of Wisdom and Writing (Ancient Egypt, c. 664–332 BCE)
- Amulet of Zeus' Thunderbolt (Ancient Rome)
- Amulet of a Nile Goose Head, conveying life-giving abundance (Ancient Egypt)

What have the amulets been remade with?

Example materials with which amulets have been remade include:

- Palm oil from Sago forests
- Polystyrene recovered from the deepest part of Earth's ocean, the Mariana Trench
- Microplastics from the summit of Mount Everest, where even Earth's highest point is contaminated
- Twigs from 'zombie forests'
- Regurgitated plastic from an Antarctic baby albatross
- Sediments from marine dead zones, regions of the ocean so depleted of oxygen that animal life can no longer survive
- The strands of 'ghost nets', discarded fishing nets that drift through the oceans for many years
- Meltwater from an Antarctic ice core, reflecting the nearly 5 trillion tonnes of ice lost from the continent over the past three decades
- Black soot from Greenland's 'Dark Zone'
- Remnants from Glacier National Park in Montana, where only 26 of 150 glaciers remain
- Sands from the Horn of Africa, emblematic of global desertification
- The remnants of tsunamis
- Sands from Oceania's South Pacific islands, the 'ground zero' of climate change
- Embers from wildfires
- Meltwater from the Palmer ice core, containing atmospheric aerosols and pollutants carried by strong winds to Antarctica
- Minerals from 'America's most toxic ghost town'
- A sample of nuclear fallout
- Carbon drawn from the oceans
- Salts from the shrinking Dead Sea
- Material remnants caused by fracking
- Tar from Alberta's oil sands, the world's most destructive oil operation
- Lithium drawn from evaporation ponds in the Atacama Desert

- Debris from mountaintop removal mining in Appalachia, USA, where explosives have torn away the tops of over 500 peaks
- Ground-up Trinitite from the first atomic bomb detonation in New Mexico, USA
- Plastiglomerate, a human-made material formed when plastic and stone fuse to create a new form of geology
- 'Forever chemicals'
- Plastic from the Great Pacific Garbage Patch
- Pulverised rock from Onkalo, Finland, the site where nuclear waste will be buried for 100,000 years, longer than humanity has known itself
- Metal shards from Chittagong, a vast ship-breaking yard in Bangladesh "where ships go to die"

The catalogue lists all the information.

Are the materials and amulets connected?

Yes, in many cases the amulets and their symbolism are connected. Some examples:

- Amulet of a Bee X Fertiliser, "elixirs of death", marking the rise of mass industrial pesticide use which has decimated pollinator populations.
- Amulet of a Leaf X Australian eucalyptus seeds, reflecting the destruction of koala habitats.
- Amulet of a Headrest, signifying protection during sleep X Twigs from 'zombie forests', where trees stand dead yet upright.
- Amulet of an Ear, a symbol of listening X A ground-up whaling harpoon, signalling the plight of the critically endangered North Atlantic Right Whale, whose songs fade with each passing year.
- Amulet of Shu, God of Wind and Air X A stratigraphic sample of nuclear fallout.
- Amulet of a Gorgon's Head, representing the power to petrify X Eocene bitumens, asphaltum, and petroleum, thick residues of ancient life trapped in rock, binding past and present in a cycle of extraction.