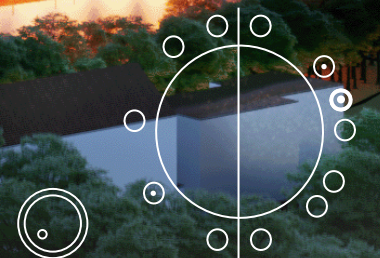


TWELVE EARTHS  
NÖRDLINGER RIES \ 48°51'4"N 10°29'18"E  
FEBRUARY 24 2025



Fathomers and Michael Jones McKean Studio are excited to announce Nördlinger Ries, a massive 14.7 million-year-old impact crater hidden in plain view in the Bavarian countryside, as the third announced site in artist Michael Jones McKean's long-form planetary sculpture, *Twelve Earths*.



Nestled beneath checkered farmlands and red-roofed buildings, just north of the Danube River, lies a circular, 16-mile-wide meteor crater. The meteor's impact, its force and heat, created a new type of rock in a millisecond—suevite—that is full of microscopic diamonds, some 79,000 tons in aggregate. These same stones were quarried to build the medieval town of Nördlingen, which sits near the center of the crater.



Discovered in 1960, the Ries is one of the best preserved and most studied craters on Earth, sharing close morphological similarities with impressions found only on other planets and moons.



“Nördlinger Ries is a story of touch,” says artist Michael Jones McKean. “The crater itself is a fingerprint, a geophysical recording of an ancient event. But, as one walks around Nördlingen today, it’s easy to feel this fleeting moment of contact reverberating through time, touching us—a kaleidoscopic echo continuing to transform all around it.”



Since 2018, McKean has been engaging with local interlocutors in Nördlingen, including the RiesKrater Museum, which celebrates the history of the Ries Crater, and the Stadtarchiv, Nördlingen's city archive. The Stadtarchiv contains one of the most complete and nuanced histories of a city of its size on Earth, documenting Nördlingen's founding and evolution over 1,200 years.



TWELVE EARTHS

NÖRDLINGER RIES IMPACT CRATER  
48°51'4"N 10°29'18"E



AERIAL VIEW OF NÖRDLINGEN





Dr. Johannes Moosdiele-Hitzler, Director and Archivist of the Stadtarchiv in Nördlingen says,

“Nördlingen has a special charm. Traditions are still lived here, historical awareness is awake and creates community and identity. It is fascinating to see how the city and its rich history have continued to inspire people for generations. With his project, Michael is another link in a chain of researchers, writers, and artists that began hundreds of years ago.” [translated from German]



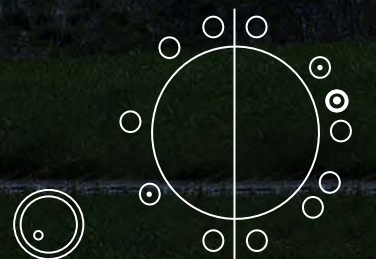
This announcement follows the public release of two other *Twelve Earths* sites: Abrigo do Lagar Velho, a famed Paleolithic rock shelter in Portugal, and Cerros Pachón and Tololo in Chile, home to dozens of the world's most powerful telescopes, including the Vera C. Rubin Observatory, which will achieve first light later this year.

Looking ahead into 2025, McKean and Fathomers will name five more *Twelve Earths* sites in a quickening chain of announcements.



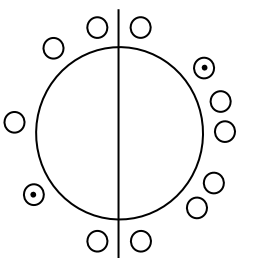
David Kim, Fathomers' Associate Director, says,

“Supported by years of careful research and planning, Nördlinger Ries adds another specific contour to the ambitious sweep of *Twelve Earths*. Each site rests on a foundation of local collaborations, each such relationship a thread in the warp and weft of the project. We're thrilled to share more and more of *Twelve Earths* and invite new collaborators and audiences into the project.”



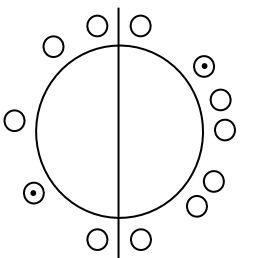
**FAQ: What is *Twelve Earths*?** *Twelve Earths* [c. 2017–2029] is a planetary sculpture exploring radical interconnectivity along a 25,000-mile circular path, linking 12 diverse locations around the planet. Together, these locations form an emergent commons to practice creative intimacy, empathy, and communion with Earth—its matter, histories, temporalities, and life in all its manifold expressions interweaving us all. **Who is making *Twelve Earths*?** The project is led by artist Michael Jones McKean with critical long-term support by Fathomers, a creative research institute based in Los Angeles, California in the United States. Working alongside McKean are a number of international thinkers and practitioners from the sciences, arts, philosophy, government, history, business, technology, philanthropy, and more. **Who is the project for?** *Twelve Earths* is an artwork that operates at a planetary scale, forging hyper-local connections with partners and individuals at each of the 12 sites, while also building a decentralized audience—people interested in art, ecology, the sciences, geopoetics, and more—who might not be geographically near the ring. A central value of *Twelve Earths* is to hold connections across disciplines, backgrounds, and borders, centering relationship-building as an organic process. As such, these connections might coalesce in myriad forms and scales: from a simple conversation after an event, a group visiting a site, or a volunteer effort to remediate a grass plain. The project attempts to dissolve the theatrical distinction of ‘actor’ and ‘audience,’ enfolding them as one. **Is *Twelve Earths* a sculpture?** Yes. Early on in the project’s development, McKean, a sculptor by training, imagined Earth as a natural human threshold—a common plane of shared material existence that we ourselves are composed of, and also bound within. This materiality, in all its recombinant potential,

forms an alchemic foundry of Earthly possibility, acknowledging that all matter exists in a state of ‘becoming.’ The project imagines sculpture as an expanded creative tool, one of deep learning tied to emphatic rituals with people, matter, making, and transformation. **Why 12 sites?** *Twelve Earths* lives in communion with mythic, folkloric, and spiritual traditions that celebrate interconnectivity. Accordingly, the number 12 has held significance in cultures around the world, showing up in everything from timekeeping systems to musical notes, astrological houses, counting systems, magic symbolism, and much more. **How were the locations determined?** Determining 12 sites, each linked formally along a continuous path around the globe, required 3 years of research. The process began with the development of a coordinate database hosting thousands of global locations that each relayed different chapters of Earth’s larger story. An algorithm was then developed to sift through the database spatially, drawing millions of paths, or rings, around the Earth. Out of 67 million potential routes, a handful of rings emerged that, against geographic odds, connected a few locations in our database. These few dozen rings were studied by hand over many months to reveal 4 rings—each remarkable, strange, mysterious, and tonally idiosyncratic—that were then studied in more granular detail. Through this thorough research, supported by conversations with partners around the world, *Twelve Earths*’ ring path gradually and gracefully emerged. **When is it happening?** Currently. Initially developed in 2017, *Twelve Earths* will continue to ‘unfold’ across 12 years until 2029. At this point, the project will then ‘enfold’ over an additional 12 years, reaching its full articulation by September Equinox of 2040. By design, the work exists in different forms indefinitely, continuing to pose questions along deeper timelines in the future.



**Why take so long to finish an artwork?** *Twelve Earths* takes cues from the natural speed of the planet. As a team, we are prioritizing building slow, respectful dialogue with local stakeholders at each site. Relationship building takes precedence over predetermined outcomes, allowing true conversations—and friendships—to blossom. We think of slowness not as an obstacle to surmount, but as a care practice that deepens engagement and helps us to be in right relationship with each other and the Earth. **When will the sites be revealed?** Though all twelve sites were determined in 2019, their announcements to the public will be staggered with locations being revealed in the years leading up to 2029. Three sites have been announced so far: The first location, announced on the equinox of September 22, 2022, is Cerros Pachón and Tololo. Located in the Coquimbo region of Chile’s Andes Mountains, this site houses a cluster of powerful telescopes destined to capture the most complete map of the universe ever created. The second site, announced one year later on the equinox of September 23, 2023, is Abrigo do Lagar Velho. This rock shelter, located in the Lapedo Valley of Portugal’s District of Leiria, contains the 29,000-year-old remains of a four-year-old child that questions our perceptions of what it means to be human. The third location announcement is forthcoming in March 2024. **How do I experience *Twelve Earths*?** *Twelve Earths* exists as 12 physical locations whose connections are being articulated sculpturally and poetically. While it is certainly possible—and would be rewarding—to visit each *Twelve Earths* location, the artwork can be experienced without any travel at all. Local and regional programming will be developed over the longer arc of the project. Participation, however one may define it, may encompass events hosted by affiliated institutions or virtual opportunities for engagement wherever you and your devices may be. While *Twelve Earths* is deeply rooted in specific, singular places, it also exists through ideas, which allows it to be experienced from numerous vantage points. *Twelve Earths* by

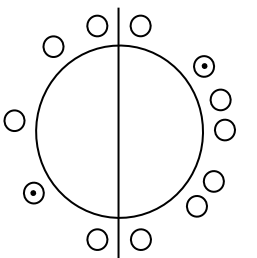
and large is a cognitive antenna that helps modulate concrete aspects of the Earth into signals—stories—that help re-mythologize place, re-worlding our conception of Earth. **Is there an archive?** Yes. The project’s physical archive is currently housed at McKean’s studio and will be relocated to the Center for Art + Environment at the Nevada Museum of Art after the project’s completion. The archive acts as a crumb trail to the project’s origins, its methodologies, early and ongoing conversations, source materials, and library, as well as location research, history, geology, current events, and more. A curated archive will also exist and continue to be updated on the *Twelve Earths* website. At each site, a number of artworks are being developed, some with an eye toward long durations, in effect serving as an in situ planetary archive. **How is *Twelve Earths* being funded?** *Twelve Earths* has maintained critical support from Fathomers since 2017. The project has also received early generous support from a number of organizations, including the National Endowment for the Arts, Sable Systems, WeTransfer, Blueprint Pictures, and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. *Twelve Earths*’ unusual form, both as a large-scale artwork wedded to a planetary body, and as one temporally stretched out over non-traditional time horizons, creates funding challenges still to be solved. **How can I become involved?** In many cases, the best way to experience *Twelve Earths* is through deep and active involvement. An artwork at this scale and complexity requires the uplift and support of many voices and skill sets: engineering, material sciences, bio-sciences, geology, wayfinding, philanthropy, and so much more. If this sounds like you and you’d wish to learn more about ways to contribute to the work itself, or if you’d like to simply receive occasional updates and advance notice of public events and announcements, please be in touch at [office@twelveearth.com](mailto:office@twelveearth.com). If you wish to explore ways to help lift the project through financial support, we are also eager to speak with you.



**MICHAEL JONES MCKEAN** (b.Micronesia, lives/works in the US and France) is a sculptor whose work explores the nature of objects in relation to folklore, technology, anthropology, and geography. McKean has received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Nancy Graves Foundation Award, and has lectured and shown his work extensively around the world. He is currently an Associate Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University in the Sculpture + Extended Media Department; a Contributing Editor for Art Papers; and the Artist-in-Residence of the Vera C. Rubin Observatory, the Museu de Leiria, and the Centro de Interpretação do Abrigo do Lagar Velho.

**FATHOMERS** founded in 2016, is a creative research institute based in Los Angeles, California dedicated to producing sites and encounters that challenge us to live and act differently in the world. They nurture the ideas of die-hard dreamers, cultivate projects whose horizons span decades, and enlist expansive thinkers across disciplines. In all their work, they aspire to enlarge the limits of scale, scope and support for artist-led projects.

**NÖRDLINGER RIES** is a 14.7 million-year-old impact crater in Bavaria, Germany where the circular medieval city of Nördlingen was built. The Ries is the only crater of its kind on Earth. Its depression, which formed in the Miocene, is a type of Rampart crater, a formation which has otherwise only been found on the surface of Mars. This combined with the unique presence of suevite makes it a site of compelling geological intrigue and study.



TWELVE EARTHS

Doce Tierras

十二地球

Ip-ki Te-ki Nok-in Au

Tekau Ma Rua Nga Whenua

Doze Terras

Zwölf Erden

Двенадцать Земеля

Teruich Mea Teblong El Beluulechad

Он Екі Жер

дванаццаць зямель

Mëbêngôkre kabĕn

For more information about *Twelve Earths*, or how to become involved in the project, please visit [TWELVEEARTHS.COM](http://TWELVEEARTHS.COM), or reach out to [YES@FATHOMERS.ORG](mailto:YES@FATHOMERS.ORG).

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