

## Willem Boshoff's GARDEN OF WORDS III

A memorial garden for threatened plants in anticipation of their extinction.

*I study all the plants species I can find. I want to know their names and where they grow. Since 1981 I have made notes on more than 15,000 plant species on trips to natural areas and botanical gardens all over the world. (Willem Boshoff 2006)*

Each one of these species is printed onto cloth to make up the 15000 memorial flowers, which are “planted” on the main lawn at Kirstenbosch.

The idea of using flowers as a memorial device came after Boshoff visited the fields of poppies at Ypres in Flanders. Like those memorial gardens in northern France and Belgium for soldiers who never returned from the war, the purpose of this memorial garden is to illustrate the loss to the world should threatened plant species become extinct.

*When soldiers and war victims are lost, we commemorate them in different ways. Stakes, or crosses in a field, a cenotaph with a list or granite walls with the victim's names etched on them.*

*I have constructed a memorial garden made up of 15 000 hand-made flowers that have multiple references.*

*I have chosen red for the cups as red is the colour for threatened species – the red data list. Red is also the colour of the poppies in the memorial fields of Flanders.*

*The white cloth is used to print the botanical and every vernacular name I can find of each plant. In addition the native country of the specie is printed on the cloth as flowers, like people have an identity and an origin. The cloths are small handkerchiefs pointing to abjection and vulnerability. One uses a handkerchief when one is sad.*

### PLANT FACTS

Plants and animals are disappearing faster than at any time in the past. Of South Africa's 22 102 plant species, over 1,500 face a high risk of extinction in the near future and are therefore classified as “threatened”. At the present rate, half of the species that were alive in 2000 could be extinct by 2100. The survival of many thousands of plants and animals is under threat. The highest concentration of threatened plants in the world is in southern Africa, and many of them are in the Cape Floral Kingdom. Scientists predict that 4 out of every 10 species of the protea family will be extinct by 2050.

There are between 300 000 and 400 000 plant species in the world.

There are over 30 000 species on the red data/endangered list.

There are 51 000 species in Africa of which 22 102 are in South Africa.

In the UK there are only 1756 species.

Boshoff has taken 25 years to find and record the names of the 15 000 species in his "Garden of Words III"

## QUOTES

We are destroying the Earth at a rate comparable with the impact of a giant asteroid slamming into the planet. - Richard Leakey

"All the indications are that we are standing at the opening phase of a mass-extinction event comparable in scale to the previous five, the most recent of which eliminated the dinosaurs 65 million years ago." Dr Russ Mittermeier, President, Conservation International, USA.

"Planet Earth is 4.6 billion years old. If we scale this inconceivably vast timespan down to a more manageable 46 years, then modern man has been around for four hours, and the Industrial Revolution began a minute ago. During those 60 seconds of biological time, man has multiplied his numbers to plague proportions, ransacked the planet for fuels and raw materials, and caused the extinction of countless species of animals and plants".

Jonathon Porritt

This installation was commissioned by South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and its international partners to communicate to visitors the current extinction crisis facing the biodiversity of planet earth.

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