
Proposal for dOCUMENTA (13)

Willem Boshoff



GARDEN OF WORDS I

Since 1982 I have ardently studied plant species in locations all over the world. I have compiled plant lists in order to memorise each species and to learn as much about each plant as is possible.

I keep a key record of various species I have actually encountered in real locations like botanical gardens and the wild. I believe in a real-life experience with each species before I enter it in my plant lists. Studies from books and internet are valuable, but my plant lists are autobiographical in the sense that they provide a record of my own interactions. To me, the memory of plants names and special words become the 'garden' of my mind. I am primarily a language artist and I also 'garden' with other linguistic constructs. To date I have written more than 15 dictionaries and made many language works. See my website at: <http://www.willemboshoff.com/>

By 1997, I had studied a little more than 5,000 plants first hand and I designed a memorial garden for them so that others may know how far I've got. I ultimately hope to record at least 30,000 plants. In 1997 there were 30,000 plants on the international *Red Data List* of plants threatened with serious extinction (the number now exceeds 33,000). The result was the artwork *GARDEN OF WORDS I*. It showed 5,000 labels on wooden blocks, laid out under sheets of safety glass, to invoke both the idea of a futile hot-house of names and a memorial garden such as that for soldiers who die in a war. *GARDEN OF WORDS I* was adjudged to win the *Vita Art Now Award* by a panel of judges led by Okwui Enwezor. This award was given annually to an artist thought to be the most ground breaking in South Africa.

GARDEN OF WORDS I was exhibited in 2000 at the Reina Sofia Gallery in Madrid, Spain as part of the exhibition *Visiones del Sur: No es sólo lo que ves: pervirtiendo minimalismo*, curated by Gerardo Mosquera.

I left my full-time employment as fine art lecturer in 1996 to make artworks and to devote myself more completely to my quest of becoming acquainted with plant species that reflect the importance and vulnerability of plants.



GARDEN OF WORDS II

By 1999 my key list had grown to about 10,000 plants. For *GARDEN OF WORDS II*, I designed ten 'flower beds' for the 10,000 plants and made a small transparent 'leaf' insert that labels each plant. These 'leaves' were planted upright in the 'flower beds' and moved together, like a field of grass, when the wind blew over the work. This work was exhibited in France and Denmark, after which it was bought by the Hans Bogatzke collection and exhibited at venues in Europe.

In 2006 my key list exceeded 15,000 plants and I was asked by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) to make an installation, set to coincide with their Global Environmental Facility (GEF) conference. *GARDEN OF WORDS III* was then developed for the main lawn of the Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden. It has since been exhibited a view times in South Africa and also in Moulin, France.

The *GARDEN OF WORDS* installations are an ongoing pursuit and the installation *BIG DRUID IN HIS CUBICLE* utilises information gathered in regard to plant and word lists over the years and it also provides impetus for making new 'gardens'. The use of digital photography has also meant that a visual documentation is now kept in addition to the written record. *BIG DRUID* makes use of several computer screens that reflect, amongst others, the writing of dictionaries, the visual and written plant records and various *DRUID WALKS*.

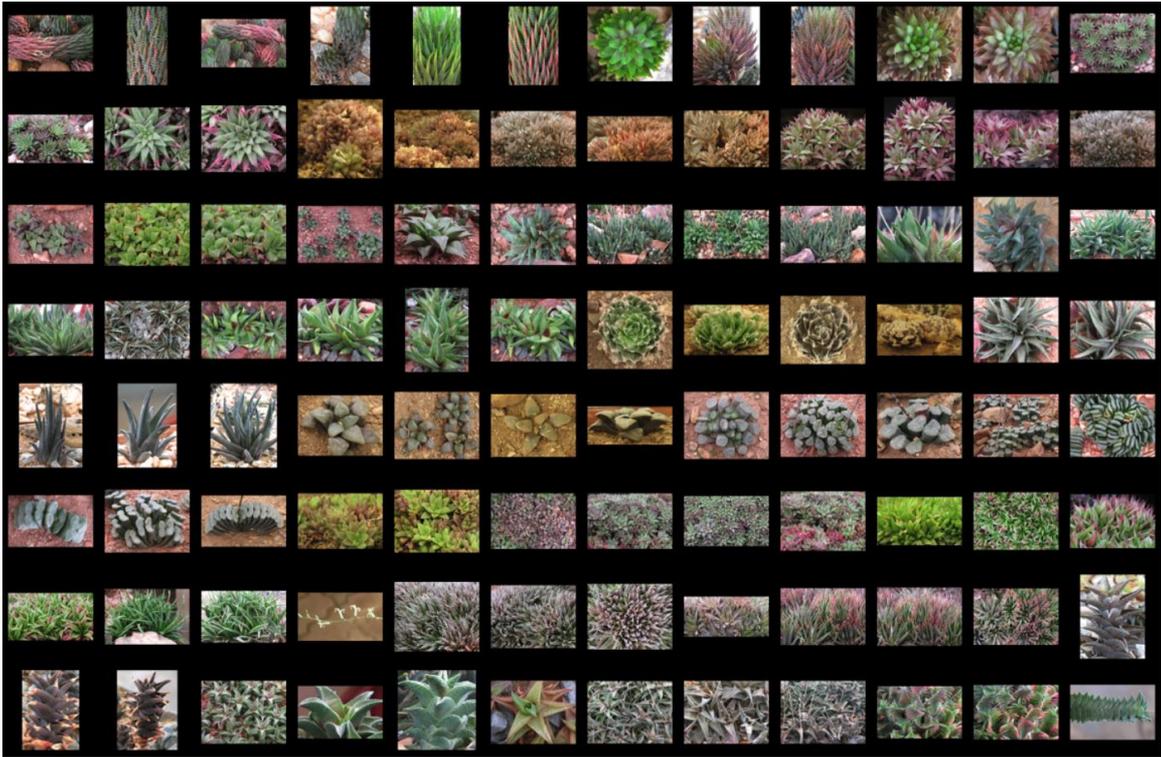
I have now studied more than 20,000 plants and I am planning a new work to celebrate the occasion. My documented concern with extinction and the *Red Data List* has reached the $\frac{2}{3}$ mark and I am looking for a fitting way to bring the occasion to everyone's attention. I was hoping to get a fundamental work finished by November 2011, in time for the United Nations Framework Convention For Climate Change (UNFCCC) to be held in Durban, South Africa.



Part of the 15 Flower beds and 15,000 flowers that make up *GARDEN OF WORDS III*

I am pleased to learn about the interest in my work for dOCUMENTA (13). The following scenarios might be possible:

1. An exhibition of one or a combination of the existing *GARDENS OF WORDS*: please consult my website at:
http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/artworks/garden_of_words.htm
2. The commission of new artworks like *GARDEN OF WORDS IV* or *BOTTLED HOPE II* for *Documenta 13*. For *BOTTLED HOPE* please see:
http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/artworks/bottled_hope.htm
3. The exhibition of *BIG DRUID IN HIS CUBICLE*, a performance-based installation that includes all of my work, and for which I have to be in attendance. I have already submitted a written proposal in this regard.
4. A combination of the above suggestions or a new, negotiated resolution.



Detail of my records for some of the plant species in the genus *Haworthia*, mostly occurring in remote and arid regions of the Karoo



Haworthia reinwardtii ssp. *olivacea*



Haworthia nigra ssp. *nigra*