

# GARDEN OF WORDS II

1982-1999 (Work in Progress)

*All things of value are truly defenceless – Lucebert*

At the beginning of the Genesis myth we find a creative spirit on edge, one who moves restlessly on the face of unoccupied waters in a world of pervasive chaos. The directing of these confused waters into elements of sun, earth, water and sky sets the stage for an inchoate, most powerful seeding of words. The commands that follow, by word of mouth, bring life and substance out of nothing – *creatio ex nihilo* – or as some would have it, they impose a divine order upon the primordial watery chaos. The Greek philosopher Thales Apollodorus of Miletus, already in the 6th century BC, based his entire cosmology on water as the essence of all matter. The creation of heaven and earth from water, through language, is the most prevailing act found in all sacred scriptures. This accomplishment anticipates in itself the later *tour de force* of saving the world from obliteration by water in the story of Noah. Today we find ourselves once more in antediluvian anxiety. The industrially proficient among us tend (once more?) to taunt and ridicule the skies. Are we finally to witness a returning of water to water when all life drowns back into the waterlogged graves so vividly portrayed in those ancient tales?

*GARDEN OF WORDS II* is born out of a romantic fascination with the use of language in various creation myths. It tracks down the enchantment Adam had with the names of living things in Genesis, and it supports *Hermes Trismegistus* and his classified texts of creation spells in Egyptian cosmogony.

Both these myths follow a perversely Platonic order of events. They begin with an *archetype*, that is an apperceptive mental image of things intended for creation – not unlike Kant's *noumenon*. In the Genesis myth this is a pre-ordination. In both myths this *idée mère* – the 'mother idea' – is followed by an *ectype*, an externalising of the mental image. The *ectype* is exercised as a spoken 'language': "Let there be light." In Genesis Adam is asked to retrieve this 'language', but in the Egyptian myth *Hermes* locks it away, *hermetically* sealed as a covert script in his library of secret books. The original concrete features such as light, animals and plants created by the *ectypal language* are called *prototypes*. As the world begins to procreate and duplicate itself, the subsequent features become known as *stereotypes*.

The installation *GARDEN OF WORDS II* follows Adam in his impossible infralapsarian task of reviewing the *prototypal* world by identifying living things. Adam's fascinating and apparently foredoomed attempt at shaping language was made when he was alone, with no-one to talk to – Eve had not yet been fabricated, and Lilith had already absconded: "... and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him." *GARDEN OF WORDS II* empathizes with Adam's lonely soliloquy and also plagiarises the bold attempt of Carl Linnaeus and that long line of scholars who walk in his shoes in their quest to find the *clavis scriptorium*, the key that will unlock the impenetrable vaults of *Hermes Trismegistus* – an attempt both daunted and enriched by today's revised systems of DNA identification.

For *GARDEN OF WORDS II*, in typical Adamic fashion, I have distinguished more than ten thousand plant species over a period of seventeen years in actual locations all over the world. As was the case with Adam, this pointless undertaking has no apparent scientific value. It is an infinitely laborious effort, arguably wasted on so many confident assertions already put in place by the world's famed taxonomists.

My larger *GARDEN OF WORDS* project is mostly a garden of the mind. To allow the section of *GARDEN OF WORDS II* to escape from being hidden in the tomb of my memory, I have created ten artificial flowerbeds, each containing the thoughts of a thousand plants to make up a total of ten thousand plants. I was thinking of those memorial gardens we lovingly set up for the soldiers who do not make it back from the battlefield. "The grass withereth and its flower fadeth." *GARDEN OF WORDS II* seeds its own sterile *ectypal* 'language' in hopeless desperation. It presents a view of austere 'flower-beds', like rows of silent graves. These are planted with fields of translucent blades of grass, invoking the memory of defenceless plants that did not survive that dreaded cataclysmic siege that inexorably comes when our proud modern world tenders the collapse of all natural life. I have labelled the plants on transparent plastic name-tags to allude to an artificially steamed-up memory, to create the idea of blades of grass moving in the wind and of drops of rain that fall from the sky only to evaporate under the harsh sun – ultimately to speak of incalculable futility. Furthermore, the work is a garden of remembrance that prematurely recognises the shades of expired life – a useless hot-house at the end of time. I hope that the labels in their transitory state will appear a bit like the *ectypal* spirits of forsaken plants returning from their watery grave to haunt us, if we should be there to know it.

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