

Exquisite pursuit

If it were up to me Willem Boshoff <http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/biography.htm> would be declared a living treasure. Not only is he enchanted with words, and deeply examines the taxonomies and lexicons we use but constantly flags, in a prodigious body of work, the destructive presence of humans on the planet. Keywords, for me, through which to read his work are *silence, subtlety, patience, curiosity, exquisitus negotium* (I looked up the Latin for the title of this piece because Latin features among Boshoff's resurrections).

He has also over the years taken it upon himself to memorise the names of thousands of extinct flower species. In the true spirit of transmitting cultural material through vocal utterance in oral tradition and oral lore, remembering equals preserving. Boshoff told Virginia Mackenny in conversation that he stands in front of plants; that he has to meet them, spend time, and converse with them in order to commit them to memory. He described a time in the Berlin botanic gardens where even he was aware that he must have seemed a strange figure focusing on one plant for a couple of hours... he said he has reached 20,000 plants (he has an exhibition every 5,000).

The 'flowers' in Garden of Words I, II and III

http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/artworks/garden_of_words.htm

are made of white cloth folded into red holding cups and the cloths are printed with both botanical and vernacular names.



Garden of Words I, II and III (1997 – 2006)

http://www.willemboshoff.com/images/artworks/large_views/GARDEN-O-W-3-K-25-.jpg

This is not the place to even begin to explore Boshoff's academic and philosophical concerns, which are rich and deep, but I want to pay tribute to the way in which his work of preservation and resurrection is "never ending" and can only be done, as he jokes, when he dies. I want to pay tribute to the living treasures in his cranium. In a culture that marginalises invisibles and forgets all too easily, Boshoff's pursuits remind me of Bacon's "exhilarated despair...the painful yet lyrical disturbance felt by all those who, living in these times of horror spangled with enchantment, can contemplate them with lucidity."

When Boshoff dies, we lose a chunk of living history filtered through an exquisite sensibility.