

# GARDEN OF WORDS

WILLEM BOSHOFF 1982-1997 (Work in Progress)

*GARDEN OF WORDS I* 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 identifies with *Hermes Trismegistus* and his texts of creation spells in Egyptian cosmogony.

Both these myths follow a Platonic order of events. They begin with an *archetype*, that is an aperceptive 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* or 'mother idea' is followed by an *ectype*, - an externalizing of the mental image. The *ectype* was exercised as a spoken language: "Let there be light." In Genesis Adam was asked to revive this language, but in the Egyptian myth *Hermes* locked it away, *hermetically* sealed as a covert script in his library of secret books. Concrete features such as the light, animals and plants created by the *ectypal language* are called *prototypes*, and, as the world began to procreate and duplicate itself, the subsequent features became known as *stereotypes*.

In the *GARDEN OF WORDS I* an *ectypal* language is made to rise from the flower-beds ground blades of words on labels. *GARDEN OF WORDS I* follows Adam in his impossible task of reviewing the *prototypal* world and his identifying of all living things. Adam's fascinating and apparently futile 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 absconded.

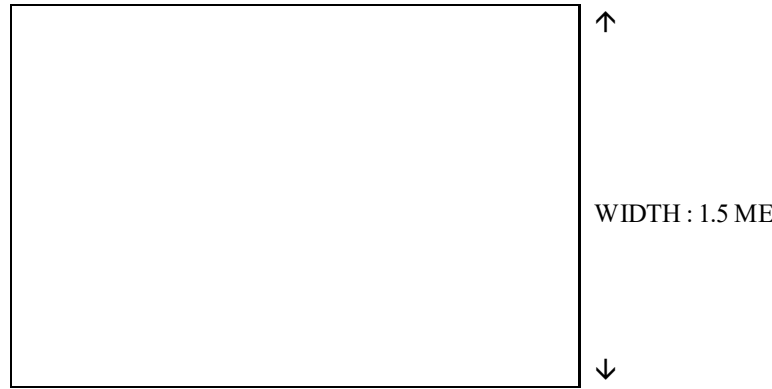
*GARDEN OF WORDS I*, in typical Adamic fashion, has concerned itself with almost 4,000 plants over a period of fifteen years in actual locations all over the world. The work is an ongoing seeding, or *semination* of their names, - the Latin for seed is *semen*. The seed of words is committed to the earth under glass, a hot-house at the beginning of time.

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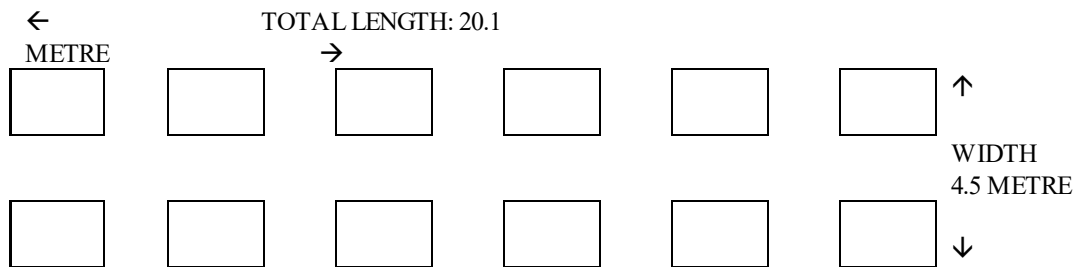
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## SUGGESTED LAYOUTS FOR 'GARDEN OF WORDS'

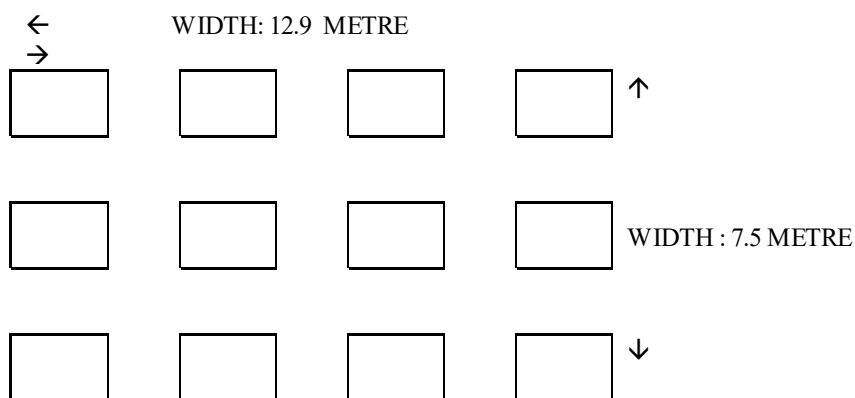
('The 12 flower beds' with 'garden paths')



### LAYOUT 1.

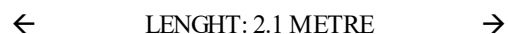


### LAYOUT 2.



### ONE SHEET OF SAFETY

GLASS (At least 15 mm thick,  
laminated safety glass with the  
sides polished for safety reasons)



## LABELS

Number of labels prepared: ±3800. Only 3600 labels are actually needed to be laid out under the glass. The spare labels are there to replace damaged ones.

Medium: Black ink printed on white paper glued down on wooden blocks

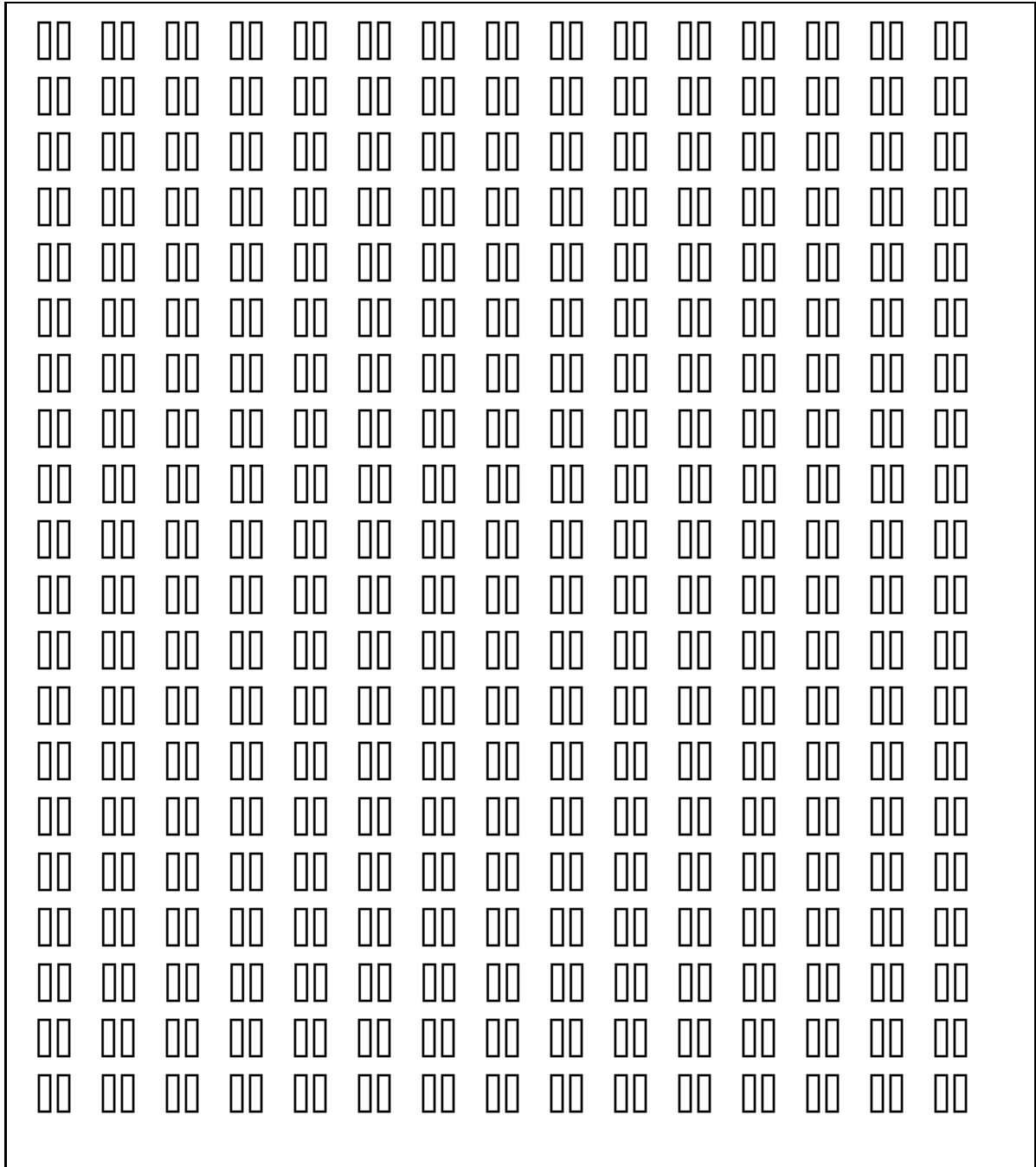
Actual size: 107mm (length) X 41mm (width) X 18mm (thickness)

**Abrus precatorius ssp africanus**  
**Fabaceae/Papilionoideae**

Lucky Bean Creeper

Widespread, S Africa; Namibia; Swaziland; Botswana

LAYOUT OF ONE 'FLOWER  
BED' (With 300 labels under glass)



## THE TWELVE TRAYS

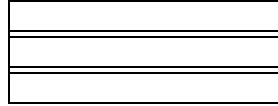
There are twelve trays and each tray is designed to contain 360 labels.

Total number of labels in all 12 trays: 4,320. One tray is empty to serve as a spare in case one of the others get damaged.

Size of each tray: 1060mm X 810mm X 50mm (height)

The trays are used in three ways:

1. To make transportation and storage of the work easy.
2. To be exhibited, with the labels packaged inside, in a single stacked column. This will happen when the the work is not properly installed. *GARDEN OF WORDS* is so massive that most galleries and collections cannot show it with all the labels fully laid out on the floor. At such times, the column of trays is a conceptual reminder of its own content – it is like a closed book on a shelf.
3. To be shown empty, stacked in a column, with the work properly installed and laid out in front of it. The trays are placed to the one side of the work, in the centre, at the head of the work, like an altar or pulpit before an ‘audience’ - a platform from whence the plant names were ‘sewn’. The empty trays ‘at the ready’ also reinforces the idiae the the work is still in progress.

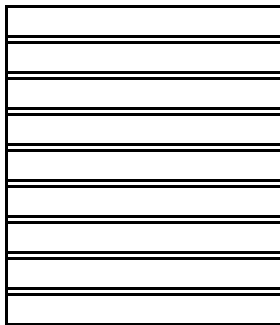
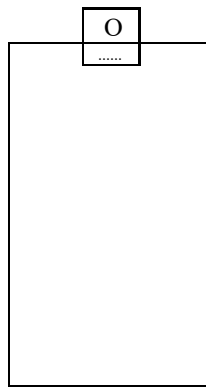


## CLIPBOARDS

40 Clipboards hold the documentation compiled at the various locations

Size of each clipboard: 240mm (width) X 327mm (length)

The clip at the top protrudes by 35mm



TRAYS STACKED IN A COLUMN (Wooden spacers are put in-between to create an architectural effect)



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In the *GARDEN OF WORDS* an *ectypal* language is 'planted' as words on transparent labels in elusive fields of grass. *GARDEN OF WORDS* follows Adam in his impossible task of reviewing the *prototypal* world by identifying living things. Adam's fascinating and apparently futile 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 absconded. Finally *GARDEN OF WORDS* recognizes the brave attempt of Carl Linnaeus in his quest to find the key to unlock the hermetic vaults of *Hermes Trismegistus*, an attempt that appears all but fruitless in the light of the new revised systems of DNA identification.

*GARDEN OF WORDS*, in typical Adamic fashion, has concerned itself with more than ten- thousand plants over a period of about seventeen years in actual locations all over the world. The work is an ongoing seeding, or *semination* of their names on pathetic labels, - the Latin for seed is *semen*. In this memorial garden I recall what may happen if all plants should be obliterated - a futile hot-house of the mind at the end of time when the dismal collection of plastic *hortus siccus* will do precious little to dignify the eventuality and naming of it all.

WILLEM BOSHOFF

I am trying hard to give shape to a big, wonderful garden in my mind, a garden free from the industrial pollution, global warming and other similarly ridiculous threats. Since 1982 I have made every effort to grow for myself just such a garden - in the soil of my memory. To do this I travel out of my way to visit special gardens and natural habitats of plants all over the world. There I record first-hand the names of as many plants as each visit allows. Afterwards, in my study, I carefully check out the existence of these plants and try to memorise their names. I prepare various lists, each time reinforcing the presence of the plants in my mind. None of the names that I use for my work are merely copied from books, they are all gathered from direct personal contact.

To allow others into my garden I have prepared the names of the plants on labels. I use the full botanical name, genus, species and family, and as many common names as possible. I also indicate the places where the plant originally grew. There are now 30,000 species on the world's red data list of plants threatened with extinction. This is 5,000 plants more than the total plant population of South Africa. What an unthinkable disaster if a global nuclear disaster or the foolishness of industrial over-capitalizing on natural resources should melt the polar caps and destroy the plant kingdom. Plants will be gone forever! All we will have left will indeed be names. I am dedicating my work to such a senseless incident. Botanical labels that once indicated living species are for me a garden of remembrance, a futile garden reminding me of the incredible waste that might yet be.



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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* or 'mother idea' is followed by an *ectype*, - an externalizing of the mental image. The *ectype* was exercised as a 'spoken language': "Let there be light." In Genesis Adam was asked to retrieve this 'language', but in the Egyptian myth *Hermes* locked it away, *hermetically* sealed as a covert script in his library of secret books. Concrete features such as the light, animals and plants created by the *ectypal language* are called *prototypes*, and, as the world began to procreate and duplicate itself, the subsequent features became known as *stereotypes*.

*GARDEN OF WORDS* allows its own futile *ectypal* 'language' to sprout up from a lawn as the names of plants on translucent blades of grass. "The grass withereth and its flower fadeth" - a premature memory of the shades of inhabitants. It follows Adam in his impossible infralapsarian task of reviewing the *prototypal* world by identifying living things. Adam's fascinating and apparently futile 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 absconded.

*GARDEN OF WORDS* also endorses the brave attempt of Carl Linnaeus in his quest to find the key to unlock the hermetic vaults of *Hermes Trismegistus*, an attempt that appears all but fruitless in the light of the new revised systems of DNA identification.

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