

Garden of Words I

Willem Boshoff 1997

A work in progress. Follow-up works have been created. These are *Garden of Words II*, 2002 and *Garden of Words III*, 2007. One final work in the series, namely, *Garden of Words IV* is currently being planned.

Created/context

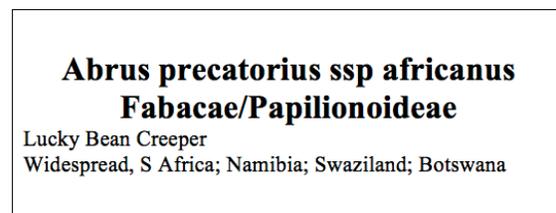
- Collection of plant names: since 1982
- Manufacture: 1997
- Made in compliance with the *Vita Art Now* national initiative for an exhibition that opened in the Sandton Art Gallery on 14 October 1997.
- Seven prominent artists were selected on the strength of exhibitions held in South Africa for the period January to December 1996
- *Garden of Words I* was awarded the *Vita Art Now* prize for top honours in South African art for 1997.

Condition report

- All materials used in work were fumigated before construction in 1997. A second fumigation was made in 2014.
- The blocks of wood and the trays are in good condition. No wood-borer exists in the work and old, small holes have been filled in with wood filler.
- The work is now (2016) almost 19 years old and has been exhibited seven times. Wear-and-tear repairs are attended to after exhibitions.

Labels

- There are 3840 small blocks of wood on which plant labels are glued.
- *Garden of Words I* is a work in progress and not all the blocks of wood have a paper label. There are 120 unlabelled blocks in tray 11.
- Variable species of hardwood are used for the label blocks.
- Labels consist of white paper printed in black ink.
- Size of each label: 107mm (length) X 41mm (width) X 18mm (thickness)
- The labels contain a record of all plants studied by the artist from 1982 until 1997.



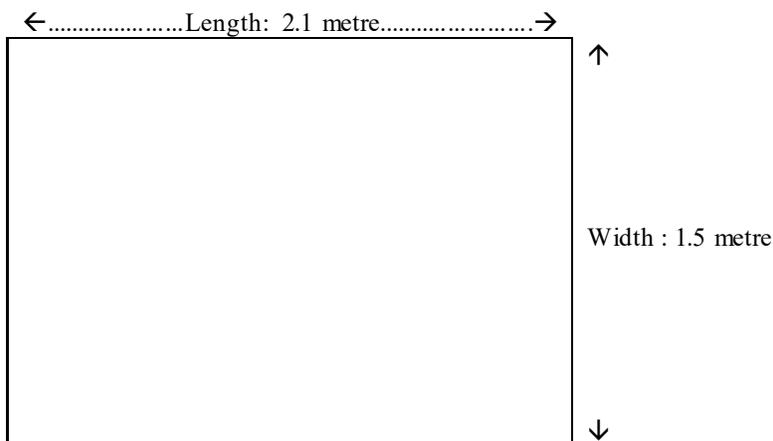
A single label showing the plant family (*Fabaceae/Papilionoideae*), the plant genus (*Abrus*), the species or specific name (*precatorius*) and subspecies (*africanus*). The common name for the plant and its area of natural occurrence is in smaller print at the bottom of the label.

Trays

- There are 11 trays that contain all the labels (originally there were 12 trays of which one was empty. The superfluous 12th tray has been removed from the work.
- The frames of the trays are made of Rosewood (*Dalbergia deceparis*).
- Each tray is designed to contain 360 labels.
- *Garden of Words I* is a work in progress and although all the trays are full of wooden blocks, not all are labelled
- Total number of labelled wooden blocks: 3840. There are 120 unlabelled blocks.
- The trays are used:
 1. To make transportation, handling and storage of the work easier.
 2. To be exhibited, with the labels packed inside, either in single, or double stacked columns or as panels on a wall. Because of a shortage of floor space, most galleries and collections cannot show *Garden of Words I* with all the labels fully laid out on the floor. At such times, the trays are a conceptual reminder of their own content – like closed books in a pile or on a shelf.
 3. To be shown empty, stacked in a column, with the labels finally installed and laid out under glass on the floor in front of it. The column of trays is placed at the head of the work – a reminder that the work is still in progress and that plant names are still being collected and ‘sown’.

Glass

- In order for the work to be exhibited under glass, on the floor, 12 or less sheets of glass are needed. These sheets of glass are not supplied with the trays and labels.
- Laminated safety glass with polished edges are required.
- Each sheet of glass: 6.5 mm (thickness); 2.1 metre (length); 1.5 metre (width)



One sheet of 6.5 mm laminated safety glass with the sides polished for safety reasons

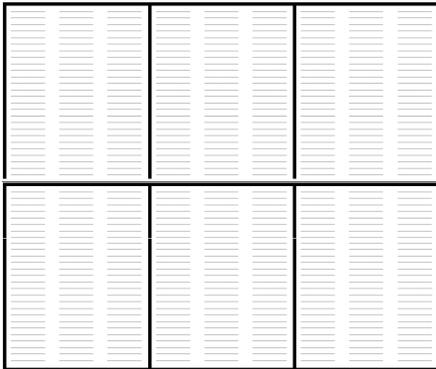
Exhibition history

- **1997** Sandton Art Gallery, Johannesburg. First prize at the Vita Art Now show. The judges were Frank Ledimo (Wits Technikon) Bongi Dhlomo (AICA), Okwui Enwezor (Artistic Director, 2nd Johannesburg Biennale), Kendell Geers (artist).

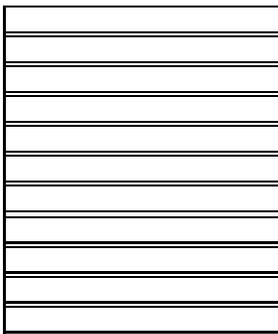
- **2000** Museo Nacional, Centro de Arte, Reine Sofia, Madrid – part of an exhibition entitled “*No es sólo lo que ves. Pervirtiendo el minimalismo*” – *Visiones de Latino America*, curated by Gerardo Mosquera.
- **2003** Michael Stevenson Fine Art, Cape Town – part of *Licked*, Willem Boshoff, solo exhibition
- **2007** NIROX sculpture park. *Willem Boshoff* solo exhibition as part of his artist residency
- **2011** University of Johannesburg Art Gallery. Part of *Setups and Upsets*, Willem Boshoff solo exhibition.
- **2014** Frieze masters, London, *Willem Boshoff* exhibition, hosted by Goodman Gallery
- **2015** Standard Bank Art Gallery, Johannesburg – part of an exhibition entitled *Exact Imagination, 300 years of botanically inspired art in South Africa*, curated by Cyril Coetzee

Exhibition method 1. – The ‘closed book’ method

- The labels could be shown in the trays, stacked in a single or double pile or
- The labels could remain in the trays and are mounted to a wall like a relief sculpture



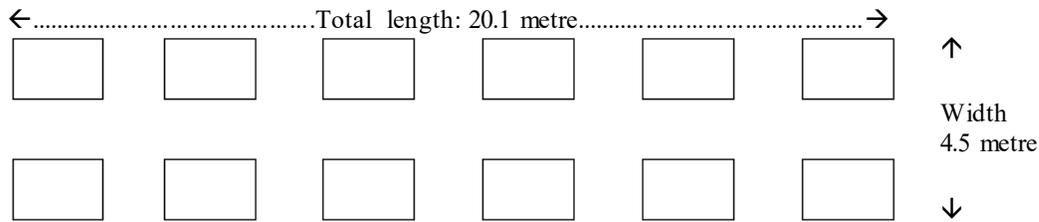
A single tray showing how labels are stored. Instead of being shown in a single stack on the floor, as shown below, the trays can also be arranged on a wall, showing a view of the edges of the labels as above.



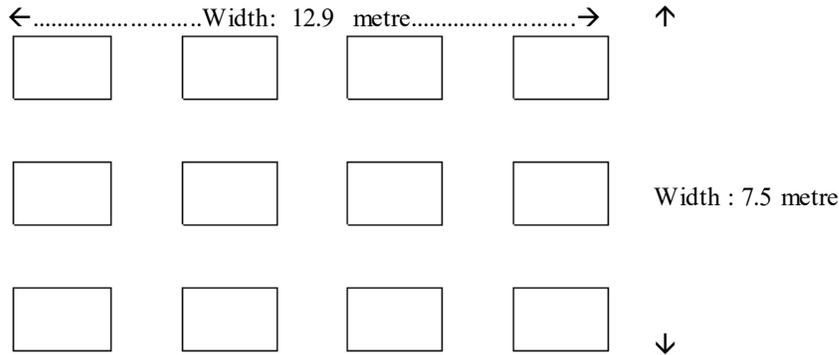
End view of trays stacked in a single column. Wooden spacers of a softer wood are placed in between to create an architectural effect.

Exhibition method 2. – The ‘open book’ method

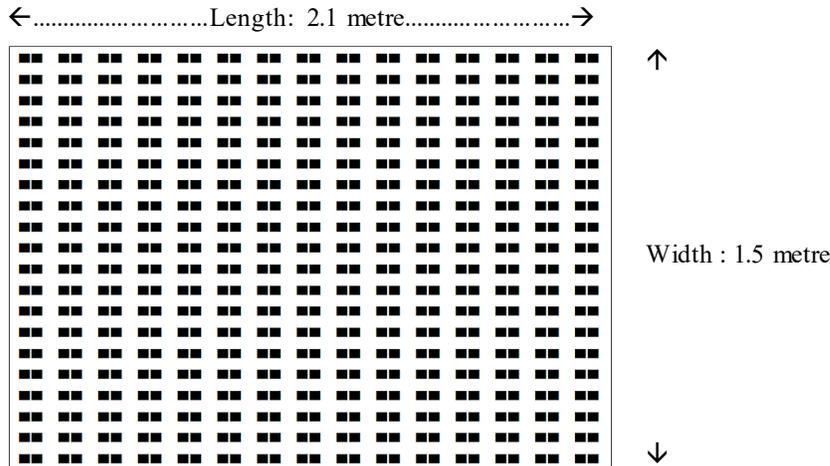
- The labels are arranged on the ground to suggest a burial of plants in a memorial garden.
- The configuration of different fields of labels in composite blocks is there to enable viewers to walk around and read the inscriptions.
- The labels are covered with the large sheets of glass to create an idea of ‘flower beds’ with ‘garden paths’ between them.
- Ideally all twelve sheets might be exhibited, but if space is limited, six or fewer sheets have been used. Because of varying exhibition needs and varying configurations, exhibitors are required to supply their own glass.
- 300 labels are arranged under a single sheet of glass. If 12 sheets of glass are used, 3600 labels are needed.



Suggested layout for *Garden of words 1* with the 12 sheets of glass in the ‘open’ book method – Layout 1.



Suggested layout for *Garden of words 1* with the 12 sheets of glass in the ‘open’ book method – Layout 2.



A single sheet of glass with 300 labels.