

GARDEN OF WORDS I (work in progress)

1982-1997

Media: Small wooden blocks, printed paper, six sheets of safety-glass

Dimensions of one sheet of glass: 2100mm (length) X 1500mm (width) X 7mm (thickness)

Dimensions of overall layout: 22m (length) X 4.5m (width)

Collection: The artist

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 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 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 seeding of words is committed to the earth under glass, a hot-house at the beginning of time.

WILLEM BOSHOFF

Text for the first exhibition, Sandton Civic Gallery,
Johannesburg, 1997

Left: *GARDEN OF WORDS I* at the Sandton Municipal Art Gallery, Johannesburg, October 1997. In addition to the labels on the floor, the storage trays are neatly stacked in front of the work and on the walls are displayed the clipboards containing a record of all the locations visited and the plant names gathered there.

Right, from top to bottom: *GARDEN OF WORDS I* being installed in the Reina Sofia Gallery, Madrid, Spain in 2000.

Top: A section of labels being lifted from one of the storage trays.

Upper-centre: The labels being laid out with the aid of three taped-down measuring sticks.

Lower-centre: The labels are aligned alphabetically, all facing the same direction.

Bottom: A sheet of laminated safety glass is laid down over all the labels.

Left: GARDEN OF WORDS I installed at the Reina Sofia Gallery in Madrid, Spain, December, 2000.

Top: A label shown in its actual size. A single label: contains the following information: Line one: The genus, species and subspecies of the plant; Line two: The plant's family; Line three: Old names and regional names; Line four: Places of origin of the plant.

Bottom: One sheet of safety glass showing the layout of 300 labels under it. In GARDEN OF WORDS I 5000 plants had been studied, but the labels of only 3,600 were placed under the twelve sheets of glass.