

# LOIS WEINBERGER: GREEN MAN

Weinberger states, "The way that a society treats plants is a mirror image of itself." His concentrated spaces for that which is marginalized, unpleasant and driven out of public awareness impart to the viewer a mental space of reflection and define a physical site in which aspects of naturalness and liveliness become visible and supersede all regulatory strictures. Weinberger thus repudiates the classical concept of art, customary work-forms and traditional artistic locations.

Introductory Text by **Tim Chamberlain**

Interview Questions by **Bergit Arrends and Jessica Ullrich**

**B**otanists are as explorers of old, living in the field, *out there*, in the wild grasslands, jungles and forests of the world. Constantly discovering new species in uncharted regions across the world's varied biomes and they sail home their treasures to a myriad herbaria and laboratories for classification, molecular chromatography and DNA analysis.

In the coldest, driest parts of the worlds, little evidence can be seen of any living plants however, for most human societies, plants are tightly woven into the fabric of society as food, shelter, healer and landmark. Plants also form the main component of the foundations of our planet's food-chains.

The survival of plants as foodstuff and as (biotic) climatic component is therefore inextricably linked with the continued existence of our species. As climatic changes induce more or less favourable growing conditions for any given species, so the components of a seemingly stable terminal succession community, the climax community, can change although with large slow growing species this may occur over many years. The net result is that absolute species compositions of any given habitat are in a state of flux.

Many plants and animals benefit from the

conditions created by disturbances.[1] Ecological disturbance such as fire or flooding, as well anthropogenic disturbances allow for the invasion of plant species particularly adapted to exploiting recently disturbed sites and plant ecosystems can be remarkably quick to recover and (re)colonise. The term *ruderal* is given to species that colonise waste ground.

The global population continues to expand dramatically and so too does the pressure on resources and human communities. The question of whether there is now sufficient land to grow food for everyone as UN figures estimate over 850 million people currently suffer from hunger or malnutrition gives rise to the very serious projection for a not-too distant future: *Who in 2050 will feed the world?* [2]

The rapid spread of our towns and cities through widespread domestic and industrial development has been responsible for the destruction of critical habitats and for the 'farmacification' of land on a vast global scale. This can often resemble a botanical desert.

'The garden' as human artefact and microcosm of nature within an urban setting is the subject matter for artist Lois Weinberger. It has vast amounts of cultural heritage and cultural baggage and by way of its creation through



**Lois Weinberger**

*Green Man*, 2004, c-print, 40 x 30 cm, edition: 5, photo: Paris Tsitsos © Lois Weinberger

human endeavor, it must also be seen as a physical manifestation of thoughts and ideas and an emotive response.

Artist Lois Weinberger (b 1947) in association with Franziska Weinberger, creates sculptures, drawings, installations and interventions which act to investigate, and as a result to counter-act, the desertification of the human sphere, thereby casting a contemplative light against the falling shadow of a civilization hell-bent on eventual self-destruction. Far from aspiring towards a utopian Eden, they "prefer to focus on man-made places in which wild plants struggle to survive despite our best attempts to exclude them."<sup>[3]</sup>

Using a wide range of media Weinberger creates installations as new worlds wherein a

mediated contemplation and guided re-evaluation can begin to happen, that is, the processes of plant succession and colonization made visible within 'the garden' are offered as metaphor to consider the struggle between natural and cultural processes, and of displaced peoples and communities.

In 1982, the year of Weinberger's first solo show, Agnes Dene reclaimed a bit of downtown New York site by planting two acres of wheat on it. This was a new way of thinking and prepared the ground (!) for Weinberger's later reclamation works.

Ten years later Weinberger created WILD CUBE, a stiff, formal geometry, an enclosure, (or a *human exclosure*), as a site for "spontaneous vegetation" growth. <sup>[5]</sup> Subsequent works involved

scarifying and breaking up the asphalt surfaces and letting pioneer plants (seeds) 'do their thing' and make visible the normally invisible.

Installations make use of practical, ready-to-hand, throw-away materials such as bottles, bags and plastic. This 'ready-made' aesthetic is contrasted with the sharper, more formal qualities of works such as *Untitled, 1998* and *Mobile Landscape, 2003* which carry a similar feel to the didactic works of Mark Dion's *Mobile Wilderness Unit – Wolf, 2006* and also the works of Henrik Hakansson with which they are "...content to show... *fragments of natural cycles.*"[4]

Inherent in the works are representations of and actual inclusions of organic materials. Weinberger's 2009 show in Bratislava, titled *Field Work* utilised a variety of leaves, saplings, earth, branches and bracket fungi.

In presenting artwork as beauty and in a poetic, rather than a scientifically-structured order, the work in the Gartenlust Belvedere, Vienna, requires the (repetition of the artist's) act of looking and becomes a small exploration and personal voyage of discovery, of form and colour and variety.

*What is beyond the plants / is at one with them, 1997* is a work that used vigorous, neophytes to actively crowd out local weed species and involved a 100m section of railway track. The artist's intent was to use the botanical metaphor to create a dialogue around human migration. A more powerful work is **Burning and Walking** Broken asphalt / spontaneous vegetation, 1993 / 1997 which not only shows living processes and hints at what might happen when we have finished with this Earth but the up-thrust earth and plates of asphalt hints at the latent dynamic turbulence just under the seemingly unbreakable skin of human society.

In 2009 Lois & Franziska Weinberger were invited to the Austrian Pavilion at the Venice Biennial. As part of their multi-media installation within the pavilion, they also created a work within a shed, titled *Laubreise* on which a text read "The decay of the heap is created by time/that makes it possible/to notice a small part of the large change...". The interior of the construction contained a huge, geometric heap of plant material, under ambient light though a blue plastic ceiling. This work involved the transformation of matter, of a never-ending, hidden change and disintegration of order made visible before us.

*GARTEN (1994 / 2002)* at the New Museum of Lower Austria both manifests change and implies the possibility of practical solutions and a sense of optimism for the future. The solutions-

based, community-looking aesthetic of this work hints at a vision for how we will be thinking in the future. Crowding the space with brightly coloured plastic containers filled with soil and "the planting is left to the wind/the birds" [5] and the soil's own seed bank. The mobility of 'the garden' and its real potential pragmatic use for producing food and a green aesthetic within our industrialising society must never be underestimated.

***Jessica Ullrich: Plants are both material and living things at the same time. They are symbols of process, dynamics, and change. As an artist, you are perhaps inspired by the dialogical aspect of working with plants. They are capable of forming networks or rhizomatic structures, and they are able to transgress boundaries. Do you think plants could serve as an example for human structures or a model for a new human being? What could we, as a species, learn from plants?***

**Lois Weinberger:** A society's approach to plants is also a mirror image of itself. For me, a focus in the art realm on the wasteland, the periphery was necessary in the late 1980s. The botanical term "ruderal" (*rudis* = wild and artless)—I don't want to distort the world with art—seemed to me a promising metaphor in a debate that has recurred over and over around the subject of "art and nature."

Now twenty years later, I can see that "ruderal" has lost nothing of its contemporary relevance, and still retains the unsuspected power that I had wanted to dock into. Ultimately, I described my approach to nature around 1990 using the term "precise carelessness."

***Bergit Arrends: The subject you explore in your work is the subject of "nature." Can you explain how you understand the term?***

**[LW]:** Nature is always what we can imagine under that particular term, which is constantly changing and always culturally coded. It's not possible for us to translate the life of a plant to our own lives. Just as we approach nature, nature itself withdraws from us.

For me is important to differentiate between visible nature (greenery) and invisible nature, an inherent dynamic / the nature of the spirit, which we also construct by means of visible nature. The nature of the spirit as effect before cause.



**Lois Weinberger**

*Green Man*, 2004, c-print, 40 x 30 cm, edition: 5, photo: Paris Tsitsos © Lois Weinberger

It may well be that only our faith in nature keeps it going, just as the belief in rationality keeps technology and science alive.

**[BA]:** *It could be argued that nature only exists as a cultural concept. In that sense, nature is often solely understood in terms of its metaphorical value. Would you agree with this?*

**[LW]:** In 1994 I wrote texts that were published in 1997 as "Notes from the Hortus": "Into the time / yes it is true / nature does have time / in the repeated / in the repeating as a motto of coming into being / in the fun of the not having fun / nature lies in the repeated time." The aspect of time and dynamic leads to a more illuminative level.

The more we are able to "make" nature, the less we get part of it. The discourse about cultural concepts targets humanity's self-conception, as opposed the rest of the world: stones, chickens, ghosts, cars, or dragons.

As long as nature allows us to die, it's impossible to just see it as just metaphorical. I have been working in this realm—without a hedge—for the entire world to see, changing the soil, observing conditions, looking for what's usable. Is that not political and applied beauty, the map of the world as wasteland?

**[BA]:** *How do you conceive of humanity's role in nature? What is your understanding of natural hierarchies, in regard to humanity in particular?*

**[LW]:** Loving nature means taken to its ultimate consequence would require mankind's disappearance. The wrath against sandwort and stinging nettle is nourished by a premonition that they will be growing on our graves.

**[JU]:** *Recently, scholars have been discussing the existence of agency in animals and even in things. Would you say that plants have agency?*

[LW]: We still know extremely little about the life of animals and plants. I record their motion, their movements, let myself go, observe, discover, intervene, leave things alone and take other paths, branching out, in fact / curiosity as something that casts out / drives / branching out this way and no other / with no IFS or BUTS / beyond reason. Plants spoke in this (poetic) fashion. In some ancient cultures, it was said that in the beginning the stones spoke, all things wooden spoke, all plants spoke, all animals spoke—in the beginning, the soil spoke. But is it not the case that the more agency we grant to animals and plants the more we find ourselves in a state of cannibalism?

In the years to come, there will certainly be parameters that will expand and extend the being and life of plants. In addition, it could be beneficial for our situation of sharing the planet if we granted the plants a soul. In a 1992 exhibition featuring Austrian artists in Tielt, Belgium, my contribution was a plant transfer. I called the work *Brennen und Gehen* (Burn and Walk), and it referred to the two ruderal plants *Urtica* (burn/stinging nettle) and *Chenopodium* (walk/goosefoot). “Burning” or “stinging” as an anarchic dynamic and walking as a human quality—I engage with a plant / I charge it, whatever, to a respectable counterpart. Academic distinctions often generate immensely empty books. The free and unorthodox approach for me means expansion and a ray of hope.

***[JU]: Sometimes you pick up on the traditional symbolic meaning of plants as remedies or as apotropaic signs. How would you characterize your own personal interest in plants? Is it their symbolic-semantic aspect, their aesthetic value, their historical-social coding, or some kind of biographically-rooted attachment that is most important to you, or are there other aspects?***

[LW]: My work should be seen as a conglomerate with gaps and extensions. Fundamentally, I am interested in every kind of examination of plants or engagement with them. In 1988, I began to plant a ruderal area on the outskirts of Vienna that served as seed storage and distributor for unwanted plants, so-called weeds, underdogs. I studied open dumps, city wastelands, and the like, brought the plants to my area / had them multiply / to then in turn bring them to other places that were not marked as mine, where they disappeared. Plant transfers in the landscape realm as well as in urban space, in urban centers

like Berlin, where I spent 1994–95 on a fellowship at Künstlerhaus Bethanien. There, on my research walks through the city my cartographic works emerged, maps of the city in which the streets, mostly named after heroic fighter names, were renamed after so-called weeds. The city puts aside the wastelands / just as they take over urban space.

My realm on the city outskirts of Vienna I have documented and stored loosely for eleven years from time to time, as a ruderal archive. A selection of 650 slides on a light table – a sculpture. There are 3 existing copies of the work in museum collections: one at SMAK in Ghent, one at Vienna’s Belvedere, and one at the Arnolfini in Bristol.

***[BA]: How far back can you trace your reference to the exploration of plants, the question of decorative and use plants in correlation with the history of economy, colonization, and scholarship? How germane are these to your work?***

[LW]: The plant stands for the explosiveness of issues / from nutrition to the processes of migration in our time, for all systems surrounding us: this is a kind of thread running through all my work. I grew up surrounded by animals and plants, by the traditions and rituals of life on my parents’ farm, and no doubt I was shaped by that experience. My father in particular was a major influence, and in spite of the daily hardships of working on the farm, he always took time to maintain herbaria of field plants. As far back as I can remember I was always drawing or collecting plants, counting the legs of beetles, boiling animal heads, etc.

If only for economic reasons, there was no other possibility for me to reflect upon my immediate surroundings. I felt that it was important to examine the village I lived in, to observe how nature and culture establish a symbiotic relationship. It was all relatively haphazard, and not so much driven by artistic ambition. I realize now that the foundations were all laid back then, and this foundation continues to be important still today. Art always stems from the provincial, and quality should be what determines whether or not it achieves international acclaim.

***[JU]: You apply scientific as well as humanistic techniques and methodologies in your work. Do you consider yourself an artist/researcher?***

[LW]: In the broadest sense, all art has to do with research, but all research also has to do with art.



**Lois Weinberger**

*Tree Celebration*, 1977, cherry tree, plastic bags, c-print, 67 x 79 cm, edition: 5, photo: Studio Weinberger © Lois Weinberger

For a long time, sober botanical or scientific treatises were a kind of prayer book for me. Nature was never a topic of discussion on my parents' farm, even though everything revolved around it. We lived off it and from it. There were fields, meadows, cattle, the cold, the heat, the high pressures and the low pressures, the baling press and the blood poisoning—litanies, melodies and enumerations—in a word, repetitions.

I see myself as a fieldworker, I pick up things that are in the air; many of my works bear the title "Fieldwork." Like *Baumfest* (Tree Festival), or *Fliegenfänger* (Flycatcher) from the 1970s, to the *Home Voodoos* that emerged in recent years. As I said in 2004, "A chthonic procedure, emerging from the earth. Demonstrated are overlaps between reality and unreality. Whereby the meaning, for one, lies in overlapping and, for the



**Lois Weinberger**

*Ruderal Enclosure WILD CUBE*, 1991/ 1999 rib steel, spontaneous vegetation, 37 x 4 x 3. 70 meters, New Social and Economic University Innsbruck henke & schrieck architects, photo: Gerbert Weinberger © Lois Weinberger

other, in undermining the usual structures and opinions. A makeshift aid to revive memory, one that happily links socio-cultural aspects with individual needs—HOME VOODOO.”

Or as Helmut Draxler put it in a 1982 exhibition catalog on the work *Baumfest*: “Weinberger circles around the lost familiarity with nature, the discrepancy that opens only closes in the act of celebration. He heightens the forces that it summons to a festival, the festival of the tree, the festival of growth, the renewal of the world.” I saw the origin of the work in the more mundane: after flooding, the River Inn left behind colorful plastic trash in the bushes and trees lining the riverbanks.

From Michel Leiris’ *The Ethnographer’s Eye* to Hubert Fichte’s *The House of the Mina in Sao Luiz de Maranhao*, ethnology, botany, and cultural studies have been decisive for my work, and for a long time I thought that theorists of nature and scientists were essential informants for my work. Now I see that somewhat differently, but they definitely left their mark on me. For me,

philosophers often simply provide key terms that I use for my own difficult engagement in a work. As an artist, I don’t feel dependent on philosophers and thinkers.

**[BA]:** *Ever since the late nineteenth century, we have understood nature as ecology, and since the twentieth century we have seen nature in terms of biodiversity. We also look to nature to provide services for humankind. This is summed up and defined in the notion of “ecosystem services,” an idea that has been around since about the 1970s. What is the role of ecology, economy, and human subjectivity (as defined by Guattari) in your view?*

**[LW]:** Nature becomes more feasible, even if in small parts of that which is living, and there are many reasons for maintaining a critical attitude to the—in part cynical—conquests of the economy/science connection. As Gregory

Bateson put it, "Of all imaginary organisms—dragons, protomollusca, missing links, gods, demons, sea monsters, and so on—economic man is the dullest. He is dull because his mental processes are all quantitative and his preferences transitive." The notion of service in respect to nature highlights the totalitarian, economic view of anything and everything. How could a chicken only be imagined as a service provider?

**[JU]:** What is your opinion about the distinction *between nature and culture? Is this dualism obsolete in a world that is characterized by globalization, urbanization, climate change, and environmental pollution?*

**[LW]:** In the 1990s I once wrote: "Even if a river is swimming in oil residues, the so-called ecological balance is still there. After all, new life could still emerge from this vision of contamination." I am not a gardener, and my field has to be seen as an analysis and counterproposal to the prevailing consumerism.

Nature has nothing to do with general notions of purity, which is why I see art as constructions of everyday life, as suitable engines of life. Wherever the materials might come from: from a great-great-aunt on my mother's side, from a carver of tupilaq figurines, from the abolition of slavery . . . Concern for nature is based on the extraneous view that we living beings are in an inseparable relationship between nature and culture, as nature appears as the consequence of structural connections and is therefore always intact / concern for nature is directed at the way in which we approach ourselves and all that surrounds us.

**[JU]:** *Your prefer the term "perfectly provisional area" for your interventions, yet nevertheless some of them are entitled "garden." Whereas the classical garden is informed by the idea of the hortus conclusus, the Garden of Eden, or other utopias, there are also more recent trends towards understanding gardens differently: for example as heterotopias (other-spaces), as elaborated by Michel Foucault, or in terms of Marc Augé's notion of the non-place. Can you relate to one of them in terms of your own understanding of a garden?*

**[LW]:** Taking recourse to the unripe, the unfinished allows forces to shine forth that are otherwise devoured by the finished. The "perfectly

provisional realm" is a term I developed in the early 1990s for my work. A perfectly provisional solution is a framework that just keeps from falling apart, but still works wonderfully, and doesn't cost anything, or something like that.

The garden for me was my mother's vegetable garden, I use the term garden more as a disturbance, as something that could not take place this way or elsewhere. I called my plantings areas from the very beginning; they are poetic locations that have reached a point where it's possible neither to speak of beginning nor of ending or stopping, a realm of possibilities that marks a point of intersection.

"A PLACE /  
WHERE THE LIVING  
SHOWS ITSELF  
VISIBLY ABOVE  
THE ORDERING  
WHERE THE IMPOSSIBILITY  
OF DESTRUCTION  
BLOSSOMS AGAIN AND AGAIN  
FROM ITS OPPOSITE  
FROM IMAGINABLE CONSEQUENCES  
OF THE NON-STERILE  
INTO A DARING FUTURE

Fallow grounds / peripheral fields / gaps in the urban are places where boundaries show themselves as something in motion / something uncertain, gardens left to their own devices in all their variety correspond to today's necessity / the noticing of caesurae / connections and their repercussions / the garden as a symbol of voluntary renunciation / of tranquility of nonintervention. Space / created as a consequence of precise carelessness towards what we generally call nature / further and essential a work about the emerging and ceasing—towards our invisible nature."

I wrote this in the early 1990s.

**[JU]:** *All your plantings leave traces that go beyond the duration of the exhibition. Your projects are not finite, neither in terms of space nor time. That makes them transitory, yet simultaneously promising. How important is the dimension of time for you, especially keeping in mind that most of your work is based on the search of traces, on collecting and archiving? Do you keep track of the developments that take place in your interventions in urban spaces?*

**[LW]:** Only if they accidentally cross my path once more—as in St. Pölten. Eight years ago, I filled several thousand plastic buckets with soil



**Lois Weinberger**

*Railway Track*, neophytes from South-and South East Europe, 100 meters, documenta X, 1997, photo: Werner Maschmann © Lois Weinberger

from the fields, and let it be. The plastic buckets with metal handles, which are not intended for the outdoors, begin to disintegrate, become once more part of the earth from which they come. A reservoir of nature emerged that could have formed without my contribution. Or a different work: in 1991, a plan emerged for a ruderal-enclosure for which later the term WILD CUBE manifested itself—a monumental reinforced steel body 40 meters in length, in which reforestation takes place by way of spontaneous vegetation, without any human hand involved—RUDERAL SOCIETY, a gap in urban space.

This work was presented seven years later

at the Neue Sozial-und Wirtschafts Universität in the center of the tourist town of Innsbruck and was initially the target of demonstrations: right wing populist politicians called it a eyesore, the largest and most expensive garbage pail in all of Austria.

But the work was not intended as a provocation, I had not counted on wild growth uncontrollability triggering such resistance and fear. In the meantime—the work has now existed for twelve years—it has become a research project of the Botanische Universität, and has been mentioned in numerous publications, accepted by the population and even defended; each change is registered and commented upon

by passersby.

**[BA]:** *Do you solely work with plants and sculptural forms? Do you understand your work as investigating the role of plants in culture? What is your understanding of the invasion and migration of species (plant species), and do you equate it to human mobility?*

**[LW]:** The occupation with the living being of the plant has an indicator effect / into everyday life with its needs. After the 1970s, the first time the issue returned in a large scale fashion—the relation between art / nature/ urbanism / politics / sites / non-sites etc.—was at 'Documenta X' in 1997, and that triggered a boom that lasted until today, as could be seen at the subsequent documenta contributions that again dealt with the subject of the plant /garden.

At Documenta 1997, I planted a disused train track of 100 meters with neophytes from southern and southeastern Europe, which was intended as a metaphor for the migration processes of our time, with its poetic political references, was to point beyond it, and in this sense is still very present, as I notice in the unbroken interest in my own work.

**[BA]:** *The ownership of land and land rights, especially if the land is used for agriculture, the spiritual value of land are often very contested and subject to conflicts. Do you take an activist role in such conflicts?*

**[LW]:** I speak through my work, which seems explosive enough to me, and not as an organized activist. When there's a cage with wild growth standing there, a whole avalanche of controversial discussion breaks out. I do not create art as species protection, but my actions are effective in this sense. For me, it's about a paradigm shift from intervention to being there.

The need to be occupied with these issues—in the course of global economic development as well—is quite great and is reflected in art. I have seen this continuously since the start of the 1990s and with no end in sight, for the issues remain explosive.

**[JU]:** *Would you agree that there is nowadays a new trend towards "green art" that is comparable to the one in the 1970s and then again in the 1990s when the topic was very present in the art world? How did nature involving art change over*

*the last couple of years and what social changes might have contributed to this?*

**[LW]:** I don't follow the latest art trends. It is true that the urgent issues of the day come through all sorts of channels of everyday life, they are simply in the air. One of these urgent issues for me in 1992/93 was to rip out a piece of the asphalt in the kitschy city center of Salzburg (8 meters by 8 meters in size), to enclose it and leave it alone after an initial planting.

In the fall, the work was removed and covered with asphalt again. In 1997, the work was once again installed on the parking lot of Kulturbahnhof, and in 1998 in Tokyo outside Watari Museum of Contemporary Art.

**[BA]:** *What other artists' works are important to you? What kind of art historical references do you make and what other artists' models do you refer to for an engagement with nature in its widest sense?*

**[LW]:** Art historical references have never played a very important role for me in my work, except in my beginnings: there are works that I truly value, but I can't remember the details. The more I got into the work myself, the less I was interested in art history. I didn't attend an art school, and today I think that's a great strength, I worked for sixteen years in steel construction and at my parents farm, writing, making theater, films, drawing, etc. on the side. It was only in 1977 that I abandoned my profession and began working solely in the realm of art. It was already important to me to find conceptual approaches in the realm of a contemporary debate on nature—thinking through everything myself, working it out, formulating it. In the late 1980s, the wastelands / the ruderal societies seemed to me an adequate metaphor of a way for engaging with the subject of nature and art that was fitting for the time. The increasing planning of our surroundings, as well as economic development, have not and do not allow for any free spaces.

**[JU]:** *You represented Austria at the Venice Biennale. The Biennale in general has been criticized for being an outdated display of national pride.*

**[LW]:** As a participant artist, of course the national pressure is palpable. The greatest interest is not in the art, but in the boost in cultural tourism before the backdrop of the city of Venice. There have repeatedly been attempts to dissolve the country



**Lois Weinberger**

Laubreise, Austrian Pavillon Venice Biennial 2009, heap of rotting plants, 350 x 250 x 170 cm, architecture: wood, color, blue plastic tarp, 500 x 400 x 420 cm, photo: Herta Hurnaus © Lois Weinberger

pavilions, but it's not possible for me to see myself as the representative of a certain country.

*[BA]: The two of you haven't always worked together, but now have been collaborating on projects in public space since 2003. Why is this and do you only work together on projects in the public realm?*

*[LW]:* Franziska's point of view and my discussions with her are important, and so they shape my work. In addition, my wife deals with all issues of public relevance, and for some projects in the open air we use both our names, for example the open-air project at the Venice Biennale.

*[JU]: How important is site-specificity to you? Is it possible to transfer works like the Transportable Gardens without any adaptation into another context or is the resulting shift of meaning rather undesirable for you? Do you approach commissioned works in a different way than the projects that you develop without any specific commission?*

*[LW]:* Art makes the space / the immigrant bags (portable gardens) of WILD CUBE or the ripped out asphalt are possible in all sorts of surroundings / in the urban space (large city, small town, village) as well as in the open space of a rural area. The change in meaning is an inherent part of the work. When the planted bags are placed at the entry to the exhibition hall at the Gyumri Biennale in Armenia, the fields of association that result are quite different than those that emerge before Toyota Museum in Toyota City, Japan or at the *Liverpool Biennial*.

*[JU]: To what extent do you consider animals part of your work? I'm not so much thinking of the animals that obviously surface in some projects—like the spruce engraver, the colored hens, or dead flies—but the insects and birds that use your work and co-construct it in some ways.*

*[LW]:* A *WILD CUBE* in a city is immediately inhabited by animals, those who anyway are responsible for planting, along with the wind and the seeds found in the soil.



**Lois Weinberger**

*Portable Garden*, 2004, Immigration bags, earth, spontaneous vegetation, dimensions variable, exhibition view: Hortus and Botany, Liverpool Biennial, photo: Angie Konstantinidou © Lois Weinberger

The video *Datura stramonium* shows the destruction of a dried up thorn apple in the condition of animalization (as if this were possible). I felt up the plant with the camera running, more or less violently, breaking leaves and branches, in the closest approach to the plant, destruction, like a wild animal, to whom we attribute arbitrariness and boredom.

**[JU]:** *Your style of writing seems to have the same rampant quality as your plantings. What role does the written word play in your oeuvre? Are your texts independent bodies of work or do you consider them more as mental preparations or follow-ups of your more haptic installations?*

**[LW]:** Using the associative flow, provisional text constructions emerge. I see these interweavings and transports as a poetic, political act—why not poetic politics / when poetry is understood as branching out between many layers, as condensing, that it is still possible to drive out. This way of writing is very liberating and is linked to

Sigmund Freud’s technique of “free association.” This was also the title of an exhibition to which Tom Trevor and Zoe Shearman invited me in 2000 at Freud Museum in London, on the occasion of ceremonies for the one hundredth anniversary of the publication of *Interpretation of Dreams*.

**[JU]:** *You once said that a good gardener should abandon his garden. What exactly do you mean by this?*

**[LW]:** On top of that, I think that in the paradox the values can be found beneath the surface. Being involved with nature and not being a garden artist: for me that’s a good state of affairs. Maybe the actual garden can be found beneath / in the soil / one descends into it / only in so doing is it perceived—and above, partial results and remains. Fine that way, down and out.

**[JU]:** *What have been some recent projects, and what are you planning to work on in future?*

**[LW]:** New projects for next year include



**Lois Weinberger**

*Datura stramonium*, 1996, video film, 7 min. exhibition view: Arnolfini Bristol, photo: John Melville © Lois Weinberger

comprehensive individual exhibitions at Watari Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo and Musée d'Art Moderne Saint Etienne, and exhibition project of Frankfurt's Städelmuseum at Villa Schöningen in Potsdam as well as an artist book that will appear with *Captures Éditions* in France and which I am especially pleased about, a large *WILD CUBE* will be installed next year at Stiftung Braunschweigischer Kulturbesitz next year.

My concept foresees that this work is permanently installed in different locations in the urban as well as the landscape space. There are now two, and I hope a few more will come. London would be a great place for a *WILD CUBE*.

**References**

1. Pringle, L. (1979) *Natural Fire: Its Ecology in Forests*. William Morrow and Company, New York. 27-29.
2. Ford, L. (2009) *How to Feed the World in 2050 Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations*, Guardian Website, Mon 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009.
3. Arnolfini (2007) Introduction to the exhibition: Lois & Franziska Weinberger – Home Voodoo (leaflet)
4. Miki, A. (2006) *The Clearing In: Henrik Hakansson THROUGH THE WOODS TO FIND THE FOREST*,

5. Weinberger, L. (2010) [www.loisweinberger.net](http://www.loisweinberger.net)

Born in Stams/Tyrol in 1947, lives and works in Vienna. After working as a locksmith and wrought-iron craftsman, the artist was professor at the Karlsruhe Academy from 1994 to 1995, giving numerous lectures in Austria and abroad in 1996–2004. Lois Weinberger assumes a particularly individual position in Austrian sculpture. He operates at the interface between art and nature, nature and sculpture, and art and life, fighting above all against the concept of beauty with subtle anarchic means. In his rural environment he created art works in the mid-70s using civilisation waste such as plastic bags by mounting them on trees. As of 1979, Weinberger began making sculptures of wood and different materials. The renowned artist has received numerous prizes, for example, in 1998, the Prize of the City of Vienna, in 1999 the Art Scholarship of Tyrol Province and, in 2005, the Achievement Prize of the Federal Chancellery. Lois Weinberger's works have been on show internationally, including at Vienna Secession in 1984, at the Municipal Art Gallery in Los Angeles in 1985, and at the Biennale in São Paulo in 1991. In 1997 the artist featured at the "documenta" in Kassel, in 2000 at the Camden Arts Centre in London, and in 2001 at the Sculpture Biennial in Münsterland. Since 2003 the artist has been working for art projects in public space together with his wife Franziska Weinberger.