

edge of Vienna. The garden was known as the 'Area'. The artists planted and nurtured many different species of ruderal plants and documented their development. The plants were collected from all over Eastern Europe. In 1999 the Weinbergers sold their garden and watched the bulldozers roll across it. The only remnants of the garden are the seed collection and **Garden Archive: Area**, 1988-99, shown here, a collection of 624 slides displayed on a light box. However, unlike a conventional archive, there are neither labels nor any other system that might be employed for didactic purposes.

The video-work, **Datura Stramonium**, 1996, at first appears to simply document a dried up thorn apple, but the camera itself becomes an instrument of violence, crushing the gnarled stems of the plant, actively destroying it. Also known as the 'Judgement Trumpet' thistle, this plant has superstitious associations with the devil in Central Europe.

One of the miniature algae-covered gardens from **GALLERY 2** is revisited in the other video work here, **Event**, 2002. The camera slowly pans across the miniature landscape, scanning its surface, examining its topography. A layer of ambiguity is introduced as the sense of scale is altered.

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### STAIRWELL

Outside the galleries, in the stairwell, the Weinbergers have created a new wall-based work, **Paths**, 2006. The painting is based on patterns made by bark beetles that burrow into trees leaving visible traces. The routes eaten into the bark are prescribed by 'indeterminate factors' such as the hardness of the wood, with the beetle burrowing in whichever direction is easiest. The Weinbergers have long been fascinated with these patterns and have incorporated them into many of their works.

### GAP SITE

Outside, next to Arnolfini there is a 'gap-site'. The old warehouse that once stood there was demolished in the 1970s. Whilst the surrounding area has seen major regeneration since then, the gap-site remains untouched. Fenced off and signposted, "Private Land", this area has been left to the forces of nature. It is now filled with all kinds of grasses, nettles, thistles and other weeds. Lois and Franziska Weinberger have claimed the gap-site for art, placing a small plaque on the railings, drawing attention to this unique 'garden'. Rather than interfere with the site their approach is to stand back and let nature have its way: "The best gardeners are those who abandon the garden."

### FAMILY PACK AVAILABLE FROM ARNOLFINI RECEPTION

*There will be a fully illustrated publication documenting this exhibition will be available from the bookshop in January 2007.*

## Introduction to the exhibition

Lois & Franziska Weinberger  
Home Voodoo

9 December 2006 – 4 February 2007

The starting point for Austrian artists Lois & Franziska Weinberger's highly poetic art is the idea of the 'garden' as a metaphor for society. They refer to this as a site which is in constant flux rather than something fixed and unchanging. Within this temporary, shifting arena, they investigate the interaction between unstructured patterns of growth as they collide with socially imposed concepts of order and stability. By simply observing the effects of unfettered forces of nature on the hierarchies of social space, their work becomes a political metaphor, suggesting models for alternative ways of living.

The Weinbergers are particularly interested in weeds, or more precisely 'ruderal' plants. Characterised by their capacity for survival in the most inhospitable conditions, this wild vegetation is usually found on

wasteland or at the fringes of the urban environment. Nature and culture overlap in these sites, on the margins of society. The Weinbergers' approach is far from being an idyllic or sentimental vision of 'primary' nature, preferring to focus on man-made places in which wild plants struggle to survive despite our best efforts to exclude them.

### GALLERY 2

The complex installation, **Marginal Room**, 1977-2006, introduces many of the key themes and concepts running throughout the artists' practice and can be thought of as a laboratory of ideas and experiments. Included here are a large variety of objects: models, sculptures, photographs, texts and drawings. Many previous projects are represented here, including Lois Weinberger's contribution to Germany's

Documenta X, 1997, exhibition where he planted a garden of weeds amongst the railway tracks of Kassel station. The plants he used were all cultivated in his garden in Vienna, from seeds collected throughout Eastern Europe.

The Weinbergers have been collecting and studying seeds for many years. The **Ruderal Seed Table**, 1990-2006, presents part of their collection. There is no attempt at formal classification here; instead the artists adopt their own poetic method of classification, covering the seed packets with their own designs.

Amongst the many other objects in the gallery is a miniature 'garden', **Untitled**, 1988-99, functioning as a living eco-system. A white tray was filled with clay and plastic bottles set into it. Over time the clay hardened and cracked forming a simple habitat for algae and moss. Water is collected by a green plastic tray above it, which irrigates the garden. These works are ultimately uncontrollable; the Weinbergers set up a self-contained system and let nature take over.

### GALLERY 3

The large drawing on the wall **Fieldwork (Bristol)**, 2006, takes a map of central Bristol as its starting point, but the city's road and place names have all been replaced by a new classification system, one using the names of plants. 'Good King Henry', for instance, is an edible wild vegetable found primarily

in wastelands. This work reflects the Weinberger's interest in classification, mapping, and the processes of change. A city's history is reflected in its place names, many relating to specific people or events from the past. Similarly, each plant name has a history. By superimposing these plant names onto the map of Bristol, the Weinbergers have created a potential alternative history for the city where nature is in control.

Since the early 1990s the Weinbergers have been developing their concept of the 'portable garden' to explore the themes of movement and change. For **Mobile Landscape**, 2003, the artists have taken aluminium containers normally used to store cut flowers before being transported around the globe. Some of these containers were filled with soil and planted with typical ruderal seeds. The plants are left to grow and nature is allowed to take its course. Onto the outside of the containers are printed names of small European towns – 'Harmanli', 'Nevrokopi', 'Swindon', 'Raciborz', – places which are "only known to those with personal knowledge of them". With references to international trade and the potential for worldwide travel this work explores ideas of the global in relation to the local.

Behind **Mobile Landscape** are a series of works based on images created by the distorting effects made possible with a photocopier. In **Field**, 2005-06, the printed names

of different weeds are put through a photocopier and played with until they become distorted and deformed. The resulting images are then transcribed into wood and painted in the colours of the respective plant's blossom. The undistorted names of each weed can be found on a canvas in **GALLERY 2**.

As part of their research the Weinbergers frequently document wasteland areas. The two large black and white photographs, **Berlin Marzahn**, 1994, show an area on the outskirts of Berlin, where the city gives way to a barren wasteland. The densely packed estates and high-rise tower blocks seen in the distance, like the weeds, also evoke a powerful sense of uncontrolled growth and decay.

For the Weinbergers the results of research are just as significant as anecdotes and folk legends. Their **Home Voodoo** series is concerned with the creation of 'homemade magic'. The photographs document a series of rituals that the artists devised to explore ideas and practices drawn from local superstitions, African Voodoo, Catholicism and Paganism. The characteristics and special properties of plants are often the starting point for these rituals.

For **Home Voodoo I**, 2004, a series of photographs mounted on light boxes show Lois Weinberger performing a ritual involving a snowman. Historically snowmen were used to ward off the threats of winter. The snowman

has Ostrich fern root for hair and a flowerpot for a hat, items that were found lying around the garden. It was then doused with Lourdes holy water, which Lois Weinberger's mother brought back from a pilgrimage in 1983. This ritual was devised spontaneously, the artists using whatever came to hand at the time.

In **Home Voodoo IV**, 2005, Lois and Franziska discovered an exploding puffball mushroom known locally as 'Hasenfurz'. These puffballs are often caused to explode by wild hares thumping their hind legs on the ground, creating vibrations. For this ritual, Lois & Franziska Weinberger mimicked the action of the hare, softly tapping the ground. Eventually the mushroom burst open releasing its spores in a dense cloud.

### GALLERY 4

For **Home Voodoo II**, 2005, special plants with medicinal properties were collected and then ritualistically burnt in the Weinbergers' back garden. The smoke given off from the burning plants was then inhaled, along with the smoke from Cuban cigars. In this ritual the artists are referencing the many and varied ways that smoking has been used in different cultures: for cleansing, the release of scents, its disinfective and anti-inflammatory effects or as an intoxicant or drug.

In the late 1980s the Weinbergers created a garden in wasteland on the