

Lois Weinberger

Soil | solo exhibition | 05 april - 29 june 2024

For this new solo exhibition devoted to Lois Weinberger, which brings to a close a 10-year cycle of activities at the gallery, we have asked two personalities from the “field of nature” to comment on some of the artworks.

Gilles Clément, a poet and committed gardener, and Thierry Letellier, a farmer from the Montagne Limousine region, agreed to take part.

Gilles Clément — february 2024

The soil

These three photographs from the series titled ‘Stage’ show the biological amplitude of frugal species. They have no need for rich, well-watered soil loaded with vitamins to put down their roots and grow—a patch of concrete is enough. Some plants manage to settle here and thrive. The cleverest ones, the most modest ones and the oldest ones establish themselves easily. These are the *bryophytes*: the mosses.

Mosses belong to a set of plants that are both ancient and highly efficient. Are they more advanced than all other species, which require assistance and cannot cope with poor subsoil or survive when faced with the vagaries of climate change?

Climate is not a rich material to call home, but it does contain a few mineral salts that plants can use. All they need is a little water to dissolve them and make them into a useful nutrient.

The high performance of moss comes from its structure: it has no roots; instead, it sits on the ground and sucks up its moisture, perhaps enriched with minerals. If the ground dries out, the moss shrinks and takes a break. It waits while the other plants die.

It comes back to life as soon as it rains again. It seems to be eternal.

By staying in one place, it creates organic soil from its own waste. This subsoil allows other, more demanding plants to establish themselves. One of the photos shows a wild lettuce stalk growing, no doubt making the most of these favourable conditions: a slight hollow in the slab that forms a perfect receptacle for organic soil and is able to retain moisture: all the conditions are right, and the concrete turns green.

Not everywhere, though. It creates a landscape whose depth increases thanks to contrasts between the bare concrete and the green plants. But who made this landscape?

It’s hard to answer that question, but one thing is for certain: the photographer saw it.

Not everyone has his eyes.

Over the centuries, the concrete will become enriched. Its colour will vanish behind what chlorophyll brings. Its structure will always seem present to us...but we know how fragile it is.

In a while, the photographer will show us a forest.

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Thierry Letellier — february 2024

'Untitled (Holding the Earth)' 2010

In the imaginations and representations of indigenous peoples of Central and South America, "Mother Earth" is often drawn or painted as a round, beautiful, fertile, planet-like image, or in highly poetic presentations of agricultural, pastoral or woodland ecosystems. At the end of the twentieth century, the damage caused by human industrial and mercantile civilisation began to appear within them.

In the photograph 'Untitled (Holding the Earth)', Lois Weinberger offers a western take on this narrative. A man, who could be a farmer given his hands and shirt, holds an armful of black soil against his heart, in a gesture of care and protection. The colour of the soil tells us that it is especially rich in micro-organisms and fungi and thus full of life. It's a rich, natural soil that bears within it the promises of the plants that will be able to thrive there.

In the 1990s, some of Lois Weinberger's artworks, including 'Burning and Walking' and 'Garden', suggested that nature was stronger than concrete, asphalt or plastic. That all we had to do was to break through that inert, dead layer for the different strata of the soil and the atmosphere to reconnect and give natural life forms a chance. Mosses, lichens, grasses and shrubs upset the artificial order of minerals. The organic reappeared and multiplied.

In this photograph, some fifteen years later, Lois Weinberger, always the visionary, told us, emotionally and radically, that we must take care of the Earth and stop destroying our precious resources. He said that we must first re-establish contact with the Earth and its non-human occupants. He told us what we all know. Rampant urban development, intensive agriculture, widespread deforestation...today everything is in the process of destroying our soil, our forests and our agricultural land.

He suggested above all that we should rediscover a form of intimacy and a vital connection with the Earth, like the European farmers who were our ancestors, like the hunter-gatherers of the Amazon 10,000 years ago, and like today's Zapatista communities.

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'Storksbill, the life of plants' 2011

In this video, 'Storksbill', Lois Weinberger takes us into the depths of the plant kingdom and of the landscape.

We are a bee visiting a common stork's bill (*Erodium ciconium*) or a rosechafer grazing on its delicate petals in a sunny garden.

In the depths of the flower, we can observe and sense the movements of plant life.

The respiration and circulation of the sap is like a heartbeat; Lois Weinberger allows us to get close to the incredible vital energy that every plant bears within it.

Most plants are able to produce oxygen from carbon dioxide, to get their energy from sunshine, and of course to adapt to their environment. We also know that plants of the same species can communicate and exchange information. *Erodium ciconium* is a wild geranium, an especially resilient and hardy perennial. It thrives along sandy or stony paths, where it even tends to be a little invasive...

These images full of the poetic and aesthetic life of plants should prompt us to think about our connections and relationships with them. Every time we cut a flower or pull up a plant we think of as a 'weed', let's remember the amazing respiration that we're about to interrupt.

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thursday to saturday | 2 - 7 p.m.
and by appointment

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