

# Kongreßdokumentation



## Wiesen und Weiden- ein gefährdetes Kulturerbe Europas

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**FUTURE GARDEN**  
Teil 1 · Die gefährdeten Wiesen Europas  
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und Harrison Studio

In Zusammenarbeit mit dem Bundesamt für Naturschutz, Bonn,  
der Stiftung Europäisches Naturerbe, Radolfzell, der Abteilung Geobotanik und Naturschutz,  
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn,  
und der Akademie der Architektenkammer Hessen, Wiesbaden



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*Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison*

### **On "The Endangered Meadows of Europe", 1996**

We are pleased that this work has been the occasion for a meeting such as this, of so many, who like ourselves have a concern for meadow, grassland and pasture, and the cultural and biological implications implicit in their successful continuation. Since many here are in the biological sciences, we thought it might be of some use to reflect on how we, as artists, became so involved in the meadow as a value. The present work is the latest in a long series of work with grasslands, meadows and the like beginning with a small indoor installation of a hog pasture at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1971. This current meadow on the roof of the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle is the most complex, complete and condensed of our meadow works, but as of this writing, not the most recent.

For instance, by complete, condensed and complex one can see the work on the roof as a narrative, a series of stories about meadows. It is also a permanent work of representational sculpture, a continuously changing, living color field that covers about 40.000 square feet on the center of the rooftop of the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. The roof space is transformed into a field upon which a complex drama is enacted. The drama begins with the decision to save a 400 year old meadow from the Eifel, transplanting it to the roof instead of letting it be torn up and replaced by a housing project. This decision sets the stage. And it is due to the concerned efforts of Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schumacher that we were able to do so. Thereafter, sections of other endangered meadows, a wet meadow, a dry meadow and a stone meadow, are combined to make a diverse ensemble. Conversations between the artists and various botanists and ecologists, meadow masters as it were, fictionalized in a series of texts in both German and English, are set in wooden housings in a fence structure, bespeaking the history and cultural function of meadows. Photographic images, printed on tile, of meadows from other parts of Europe, reflect the texts and confront the living meadow. Certain fencing structures hold story and image and also function as seats. They all together confront and co-join, presenting this drama, a drama which unfolds when walking or promenading the meadow perimeter. The choice of this site was politically appropriate because of its relationship to the Bundeshaus. As artists, we have tended to be in-

terested in discovering the unique within the commonplace. The ecological narrative is used to give voice to a unique element of the European cultural landscape. We understand that the meadow lands of Europe are a recent phenomena from an ecological point of view. They have developed over a number of centuries as a result of forest clearing, and are maintained in their present form by the grazing of livestock and/or the annual cutting of hay. However, they can also be perceived as a kind of agricultural model for a spontaneous, although unconscious, collaboration between humans and nature. The cutting and grazing has set the stage for a meadow ecosystem in Europe of considerable complexity and stability, one of the most successful collaborative and sustainable ventures between our species and the rest of the ecosystem. This collaboration and its history are of great interest to us.

Obvious to all in the field, but unfortunately not to others, is the fact that the intact meadow ecosystem supported microscopic life, invertebrates and insects, various plants, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and avians, as well as the livestock that grazed it. Interestingly enough, it was the annual or semi-annual cutting of the meadows that maintained the system and prevented the natural succession to forest from returning. Others here have far more to say about the details of this eco-system than ourselves. However, when our friend, Dr. Martin Schneider-Jacoby, brought this to our attention in another context in a particularly detailed manner, he pointed out that this remarkable element in the cultural landscape was endangered in many parts of Europe by over cutting and over grazing and mechanized agriculture. Thus, *The Endangered Meadows of Europe* was born as a work.

As artists, we see this collaborative model speaking across time, offering choices, posing questions and functioning as a potential model for future man - nature collaborations. Thinking about this, and the concept of the harvest preserving the system, one can begin to imagine a future forest, a future estuary, a future lake. In fact, one can imagine monoculture Europe becoming a Future Garden, a biologically diverse system, with the meadow as the model (See catalogue, meadow story XV). The concept of the harvest preserving or continuing the system has considerable resonance for us. In 1974 we designed an aqua culture system in some detail using a number of species, in a work called *The Fourth Lagoon*, in which the harvest also preserved or continued the system.

Our history with the meadow form begins in the late sixties where, for different reasons, but out of a common ethos, a common ethical center and a shared life, we came to the decision to do only work that looked to the well being of the ecology, the life web. The life web, as we then understood it, consisted of all living creatures, their habitats and all mediums - earth, air, water - that supported this life.

Let us explain what such a decision meant in the field of art in the late sixties, so that you may gain some understanding of how artists like ourselves became ecologists of a sort and began working so intensively with elements from the biological sciences. To begin with, at that time "Conceptual Art" was a dominant force in American and European art. The theoretical and historical grounds for this movement are fairly complex; however, a simple explanation might be helpful here.

One of the tenets of conceptual art was to make a single decision and follow it relentlessly to its unknown outcomes. Some of our colleagues chose to work from elements derived from geometric forms, and simple or complex patterns. Sometimes these decisions were enacted in traditional media - the painted canvas or the sculptural object. Sometimes these decisions led to performance and use of diverse media from growth systems to video. We chose a path, to only do work that advantaged the life web, that entailed endless complexity. For example, the apparent framing of one element - earth, for instance - led, upon examination, to reframing or unfolding of the boundaries of that element and then into other systems. That is to say, this original commitment led away from any notion of a single central image or idea and towards the perception that the "clarities" of one part were the loose ends of another. It, often, as well, led away from gallery or museum work, and it certainly annoyed those colleagues who thought that an image must, a priori, be non-didactic and self-explanatory.

Therefore, by the early seventies, the ideas and beliefs driving modernism, the typical "framing for understanding", "framing for expression", so much a part of the arts and the sciences, ceased making sense for us. For nature, the life web in its entirety appeared interactive, interdependent, mutually evolving and therefore, in various degrees, indeterminate. Thus our work involved endless grouping, and then regrouping, of whatever we thought might be leading to a clear central image with precise boundary conditions.

Gradually the work became discourse based. That was one of the consequences of a metaphor, whose entailments we were exploring, of the universe as a giant conversation between all of its vast numbers of entities from atoms to molecules to cells to beings to the energies and patterns forming existence itself. The ongoing challenge was to grasp what it might mean if the actions and interactions between, rather than the entities themselves, were the realities of the universe. We intuitively described our process early on by saying that the artist was neither one of us but existed in the space in between. Grappling with these concerns made it less important to worry about such art bound issues as whether or not the visual, stylistic or indeed iconic consistency typical of our field might or might not emerge in the work over time.

Recently we have been trying to incorporate into our thinking the idea that living matter may well be defined by its ability to maintain pattern, to network, to be capable of self-organization, to respond to vast multiplicities of feedback loops by behavioral changes. We wonder what the consequences of such ideas will be and in what ways will these ideas be reflected in the work.

Through the seventies and thereafter, the work dealt with various themes, all having a narrative base, all proposing physical expression, often enacted in the environment, all expressing ecological values, most responding to the violence done to ecosystems when they are, by human interaction, transformed into what we now understand to be the cultural landscape. Over time the life in the soil, toxic earth, pit mine restoration, meadows, estuaries, watersheds, the death of forests, the eco-urban edge, the ecology of cities, have all been subject matter in our work. Recently, retrofitting biodiversity into the cultural landscape has become a central issue as can be seen in several of the works we presented in slide and talk form at this meeting. However, we felt there might be more value in looking backward to the history informing these works. Artists do, in fact, mainly work intuitively, often in a state of not knowing or of almost knowing. Therefore, it is not possible or even desirable, to know the full implications of a work or group of works until considerable time has passed. In other words, the process of art making guarantees that the artist will not know the full content of what he or she has done. This is what is meant by working at the edge of awareness. Therefore, retrospective analysis often enriches future work.

But for the purposes of this essay we are dealing primarily with those of our works which are based on earth and meadows and pastures. Coming from the period of field painting, it was not difficult to move from the metaphorical field of the canvas to the physical field of the earth. We are in this essay asking of ourselves how we got to this point, in this museum, at this time. The beginnings were innocent and naive.

For "Earth, Air, Fire and Water", a large survey of artists working in the materials named for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1971, a work entitled *Hog Pasture* was done. It consisted of a wooden box three meters by four meters, filled with rich earth and planted with R. Shumley Seedsman's Annual Hog Pasture Mix. It was January in Boston and the snow was on the ground. Inside the museum the pasture started to sprout and grew rapidly at half an inch a day for over two weeks. The room was warm and green and crowded with people watching the pasture grow. Much later it became clear that the earth had been inappropriately rich.

A series of indoor farming works followed. One of the ideas embedded in *Hog Pasture* and many other works of that period, *Portable Orchard*, *Potato Patch*, diverse *Upright Pastures*, all growing indoors under lights, was the making of healthy earth, since so many other processes had been involved in covering it over or impoverishing it. Thereafter making earth became an issue and usually included another work called *Worm Farm*, literally a pasture box of manure, sewerage sludge, sand, clay and leaves, seeded with earthworms. The outcome was a sweet-smelling humus-rich earth. These early works, including portable fish farms, were all museum installations. The subject matter under exploration was backyard farming at one level, the performative activities involved in the care of these systems at another. Finally, these works raised issues concerning the separation between the process of food production and everyday existence. This lack of connection resulted in indifference to matters agricultural and biological and ultimately led to the destruction of soils and other ecological disasters.

By the late sixties and early seventies in America, a particularly American movement in the arts became known as "earth works". In it the principal practitioners (fully documented elsewhere) went to the deserts of the American West and variously marked the land. The land was in the main seen as canvas, the

most gentle marks might be mile long chalk lines. The most aggressive might be large scale shapes cut out of the land or mounds. Many of these works: Smithsonian's *Spiral Jetty*, Heizer's *Double Negative*, De Maria's *Lightning Field*, were marvelous to behold. However, we saw this movement as in the main environmentally destructive. Although often linked with it, the perception was simplistic. Since we were involved with earth, the work was "earth art". To distinguish ourselves, we began to call our work "ecological art".

By 1977 there was the opportunity to do a large scale transformation or reclamation of earth at a place called Art Park at Lewiston, New York, along the Niagara River. The work, called *Spoils Pile Reclamation*, was a counter argument to much of the work of "earth art". The location had been an abandoned stone quarry, and when the new power plant at Niagara Falls was built, that quarry had been used a dump for all the rock, earth and debris that had accumulated from the building of the plant. This debris pile had been given a thin covering of clay and left to weather. Over the years a thin covering of soil had accumulated and the ground was sparsely covered with a thin sprinkle of grasses. It became the first American Art Park for temporary work. It became an important place for artists to work in the seventies. When our turn came, we decided to transform the ground plain into a meadow.

The Environmental Protection Agency had decided that all the communities in that area had to rebuild their sewerage treatment plants. Hence, abundant sub-soil! There was, therefore, in addition to the organic wastes, the grass cuttings and leaves we had arranged to obtain, a plentiful supply of earth that had to be disposed of. We were able to arrange that Art Park would not only accept the earth and organic matter, but would give a tax deduction worth \$50,00 for each truckload of earth dumped. For most of the communities, Art Park was also nearer than any other place to dump earth. Suddenly, the work cost less to make than not to make. Three thousand truckloads were dumped. Visually, the mounds made a monumental earthwork. The dumping process made it also into a kind of monumental performance piece, with the trucks rolling in and the piles of earth rolling out to remain as mounds, marching across a large, nearly bare field. By the process of framing, that is including it in an art context, the activities took on a significance far different than normal dump operations.

The following summer bulldozers mixed the earth and the organic debris and spread it over about ten hectares. *Making Earth* had scaled up from worm farms of a few square meters to about one hundred thousand square meters. The local schools and scouts and church groups were organized to collect seeds from the existing meadows and pastures in the area, and the Civilian Conservation Corps donated a large number of seedlings to begin the connection of one side of the plot to a woodland area nearby. Four years later friends sent us pictures of the rich array of grasses and flowers that by then had covered the area. Now, twenty years later, if properly cut, a real meadow will have started to take form.

*Spoils Pile* broke three rules of the modernist code. It was a utilitarian work. At completion it disappeared. It was anonymous, it had no signature. The site was transformed and became the meadow upon which other artists worked, but the art residue now existed only in the mind and in the catalog.

In 1987, for documenta 8 in Kassel, we proposed the reclamation of the Messeplatz by turning it into a place that contained both wet meadow and dry meadow, a patch of woodland, and a stream taken from the Fulda River. The concept was to create a new stream to run through these ecozones ending with rootzone purification in an attempt to make a work *So that you and I might once more go down to the river and drink directly*. We were thinking about acid rain and meadows as purification systems, along with forest floors. But the senior planner for the city of Kassel said "No".

Certainly the meadow as a purification system is part of the normal environmental functioning of meadows. Also it is part of the many cultural functions meadows perform. In the following work the Trümmerflora, when properly cut, moves into a meadow-like state as it performs the function of a memorial.

In 1988 and 1989, we were in Berlin on a DAAD. Driving frequently past the Martin-Gropius-Bau, seeing two huge piles of earth, bits of succession and debris, an eerily deserted landscape, we had the feeling that something awful had happened there. Eventually it emerged that this had been the site of the former Gestapo Headquarters and that the footprints of the former buildings still existed. A small barracks-like structure told the story of the Gestapo acquisition of the whole site and went on to describe what had happened on that site, now called "The Topography of Terrors".



We decided to plan a work that would be a memorial that was not a monument to the lost lives of the holocaust, on this site where the bureaucratic machinery of the terror operated. This plan was then commissioned by the Martin-Gropius-Bau for an exhibition to be called "Gedenken und Denkmal", a survey of work by many artists and architects addressing this subject matter on various sites. Our contribution proposed that the two large piles of rubble left on the site be mixed and part of it placed into gabions. These rubble filled gabions would then be placed so that they outlined the remaining footprints of the various buildings. Thereafter the footprint would be filled to one meter high with the remaining rubble. Structures could then be added to access basement areas where desired. Left to weather, the rubble would sprout and one would see the phenomena of *Trümmerflora on the Topography of Terror*. (For those unfamiliar with the term: "Trümmerflora" or rubble-plants are an ecological phenomena of the last war, the result of the bombing of the cities, the bombed as a plow, mixing long buried seed, often of species no longer present, with the debris from the building, which resulted in an ecology specific to bombed areas - thus, Trümmerflora).

The rubble itself was the symbol of the end of the thousand year Reich and the plants and flowers that spring from it made a living memorial for the victims. Like Art Park, this work would cost little to make, and unlike typical outdoor art, it would also cost little to maintain. In addition, it was recyclable, so that if another generation had a different vision for the site, the rubble could be re-piled. The work, more complex than this brief outline, was much discussed, then rejected.

We have "made earth" many times for many works, but in 1990, for an exhibition called "Revered Earth", that began at the Center for Contemporary Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico and traveled to Houston and a number of other sites, we made the actual making of the earth the central idea for a work of art. The installation revealed the process of turning impoverished earth into nourishing soil. It was amusing to make the requirement that the museum staff literally "make" the earth. As the installation revealed process, the text celebrated the product, the soil. *Making Earth*, like so many of our other works, was performative, playful, ironic, yet quite serious in intent.

The installation consisted of a six meter by six meter and one meter high box containing fill dirt. At each location gardeners were to select the components from their area that would be needed to enliven the fill - compost, various manures, earthworms, etc. There were 100 linen bags, made in the manner of knapsacks, hung on the wall. At each venue, at the end of the exhibit, the bags were to be filled with the soil that had been enriched and sold to be added to the earth as a sort of inoculation wherever the soil was perceived to be poor. The text that was on the wall was also on each bag.

## MAKING EARTH

The world of soil is bizarre.

Communication is chemical and physical.

Worms are its giants.

Fungi move through it at rates measured in centimeters per month.

Bacteria move through it at rates measured in centimeters per year.

The world of soil is ancient and magical.

Contradictory and complex

Mostly solid and opaque to light

Still it acts as a sea to thousands of species

that travel through it horizontally

and vertically.

It is the biological filter that detoxifies

a large proportion of the poisons

that are applied to the environment.

One gram of ordinary farmyard soil

can contain over one billion individual bacteria.

One gram of ordinary farmyard soil can contain

over 100 million individual actinomycetes.

One gram of ordinary farmyard soil

can contain over one kilometer of fungal hyphae.

One gram of ordinary barnyard soil can contain

plants like algae

and animals like collemboids, nematodes and worms.

To sustain modern economies  
agricultural soils need to attain  
high levels of organic matter  
and nutrients.

But agricultural soils  
bring subtle changes to the native soil ecosystems.  
And as the levels of nutrients increase  
so does the level of disturbance  
and the number of native species decreases.

Consider the dynamism of healthy soil.  
Consider that soil covered most of the land of the planet.  
Consider that soil plays a fundamental role  
in stabilizing the biosphere.  
Consider how much topsoil has been lost  
and how many places exist  
where new soil formation has been arrested.  
Healthy soil is a living system.  
Healthy soil needs to interact with  
air and water.  
Healthy soil needs access to the products  
of the plants and of other surface organisms.

Therefore, feed this earth to a place  
where you find the soil is poor.  
Of course, you may choose to keep this earth.  
Then, over time, it too will become poor.

The work here in Bonn began three years later in 1993. Certainly the condition of the earth was an important factor in planning the *Endangered Meadows*. Normal park lawns, as everyone knows, are a carpet of green, a monoculture requiring fertilizers and usually the use of broadleaf weed killing herbicides and some varieties of pesticides. The life in the soil has been drastically altered to suit an "artificial" product. But to change the lawn on the roof back to a more natural grassland such as the meadow was not difficult. The grass, cut short and under watered, was weakened so that the meadow soil placed directly on top took hold quickly. And, as all can see, flourished.

When we were walking through the meadow on the roof with the Directors of the Parks of Bonn, they said they had been trying to do something like this in the Park on the Rheinaue. They asked if we had any ideas. We, of course, answered affirmatively and presented them with the following proposal, after Dr. Gotthard Wolf, who had also worked with us on the original meadow, had explored the parks and selected the "best site" to begin.

A drawing was made that contained the following text:

"If  
the City of Bonn intentionally restates  
the biodiverse elements in its historical landscape,  
making them a central theme in its park system,  
then  
the City of Bonn becomes the first city in the history of cities to so do.  
And  
this event comes to pass when the meadow on the roof of the Kunst- und  
Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, entitled *Future Garden,  
Part 1: The Endangered Meadows of Europe* is both recycled and transformed  
into a new work, *Future Garden, Part 2: A Mother Meadow for the Parks of  
Bonn*, situated in the park on the flood plain of the Rhine.

The work of art on the roof of the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle became a collage of sorts, when four different meadow types were put together making one meadow, having a total count of about 180 different species. Thus, the garden meadow on the roof can be called an extremely rich meadow. The mother metaphor is used as this combination of seed from diverse places can birth diverse "children" under widely differing circumstances.

In the parks of Bonn, the meadow's role enlarges. It becomes the seed bank for the transformation of much of the rest of the park grasslands into meadow. In some areas the meadow can associate with succession forest. When this happens, a repeatable model is put in place where diverse meadow types, transition zones and succession forest areas can be established in any configuration. Thus biodiversity is enhanced and increased and the complexity of figure-ground relationships increased as the new design includes the meadow as field, and transition zones to succession forest/woodland as well as a new

relationship between biodiverse areas and high use mono-culture areas. Moreover, in this new design, park maintenance costs are reduced as meadow lands require cutting only once or twice yearly and require no fertilization. Further, as, over time, the life web grows more complex, the aesthetic experience and educational value available in the great park system of Bonn will be available to all.

Thus, the work of *Future Garden, Part 2*, as it is repeated through the parks, expresses the metaphor: 'A park is an echo of the values of the countryside in the city. It begins as an expression of the beliefs of its founders and continues as an expression of the concerns of those who follow them and of those who are responsible for its care.'

And

this expression of concern can be seen as guiding the evolution of biodiversity in the City of Bonn for generations."

The sites have been chosen, the planting has begun.

Now, at this time one more Future Garden is in process, while several more are under discussion. In Austria, about 40 kilometers outside of Vienna in a town called Berndorf, a six hectare Art Park is being created, mainly for temporary sculpture but with a few permanent pieces. We are designing the site, which will bring into a single mind space an ensemble of elements - some existing, some in process of creation, some to be created.

The site exists as a valley between two hills. One hillside has a pine monoculture with transition species at the margin. The other hillside has a calc meadow and a mature natural succession forest with transition species at the margin. The bottom land has been used as a field for growing oil rape for its seeds. There is a stream running through it. There is a house and barn at one edge of the land.

A new multispecies meadow is being planted to replace the field. The stream will be returned to its original meander. There will be new wetlands created and a new wet meadow. There will be a new fish pond off stream.

At the beginning of the meadow, where a house is to be built, there will be a ten species polyorchard planted, featuring older native varieties of apples, pears and

plums than are currently easily available. There will be mulberry trees planted and a berry walk planted streamside. Meadow furniture will be designed, as will narrative structures in stone and tile that tell the story of the meadow. There will be performance elements and event structures.

Altogether, aside from its use by people, there will be about 500 botanical species present, creating habitat for other species that will also inhabit the space. It should be understood that until all the elements are completed and tuned to one another, this will remain a work of art in process. At completion all processes continue as one process, which we see as the construction of a new cultural landscape.

Here a new gestalt will be formed, a new story of place will be told in a work of art whose materials share properties with older farming systems, modern reclamation methods and the processes of field perception, gesture, collage and narrative, as well as performance, all of which have played such a strong role in shaping avant-garde art over the past fifty years. In fact, a new cultural heritage is in a state of becoming. This work is done in the context of many of our other works which face the process of fragmentation of the landscape and ask, "What are the conditions for Unity?"

Therefore, as you can see, we have used the idea of meadow or pasture or grassland in many ways over the years. We have used it for reclamation, as a narrative source, sometimes in the context of cultural criticism. That is to say, the meadow is a form which, while obviously doing its ecological work, has also served us as a visual field, as a performance generator in terms of sowing and harvesting and as an aid to community formation. It has served as a physical manifestation that functioned as a working critique of monocultural practice. It has even functioned as a memorial.

Most artists, like ourselves, with long active careers, follow certain themes over the course of a lifetime. The forests, the meadows, the drain basins, the flood plains and estuaries as they interact with culture, defined as all and everything that people do, have been ours.

The *Endangered Meadows of Europe* began as a concept when Dr. Martin Schneider-Jacoby commented on them to us at some length. He then became principal ecological consultant for the work.

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schumacher gave abundantly of his time and intelligence to this work, locating and facilitating the acquisition of the meadow from the Eifel, and with his students overseeing the research for and installation of this work.

Dr. Gotthard Wolf also functioned in a consultative manner on this work, also providing a meadow of his own design for the meadow ensemble on the roof, and thereafter facilitated the work for the *Future Garden, Part 2: A Mother Meadow for the Parks of Bonn*.

Dr. Wilhelm Barthlott, throughout this process supplied a kind of global overview on the working of diverse meadowlife in Europe, Africa and South America.

We wish to thank these scientists for their meticulous attention to detail and the contribution of their overall wisdom which enhanced the fabric of the narrativity of this work as well as its structure. Many of the photographic images come from their extensive collections.

Toward the end of this essay we talked about *Future Garden, Part 3: A Mother Meadow for Austria*. We would like to thank Prof. Dr. Georg Grabherr who contributed substantially to the development of this work.