



Lois Weinberger, *Green Man*, 2004
Photo: Paris Tsitsos / courtesy: Studio Lois Weinberger and Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna

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LOIS WEINBERGER

Basics

July 2 to October 24, 2021

Lois Weinberger has been hailed as a pioneer of a different, an artistic ecology. Describing his artistic practice as poetic field work, he emerged in the 1990s as a leading voice in the discourse around the relationship between nature and culture. In *Basics*, the Belvedere 21 presents the last exhibition for which Weinberger compiled a selection of works and writings until shortly before his unexpected death in April 2020. Over one hundred works created between the 1970s and 2020, most of which have never been seen in Vienna, are on display inside the Belvedere 21 and on the museum's grounds.

General Director Stella Rollig: „*One of the great sages of contemporary art, Lois Weinberger practiced ecological thinking as a philosophical discipline before the concept entered wide currency. Showcasing the last exhibition planned by Weinberger himself, we not only pay tribute to his creative achievements, but also spotlight the continuing vitality and relevance of his art.*”

Lois Weinberger (1947–2020) was an early and visionary critic of the dislocations of the Anthropocene—the era defined by humanity's profound impact on Earth. His oeuvre grapples with existential questions concerning the relationship between humans and their world: What constitutes our being? How do cultural influences, our own histories and those of our families, and geographical circumstances shape our lives? What are the consequences of our alienation from nature? Are nature and culture actually opposites? Can we think our existence outside of nature?

Weinberger set forth from a farmstead in Tyrol to become an ornamental blacksmith and metalworker, an actor, and, finally, a visual artist. Socialized in a time of cultural upheavals—the protests of '68 were making headlines—he took inspiration from Minimal and Land Art, the *Wiener Gruppe*, Surrealism, and the *Junge Wilde* to forge his own conceptual art. Between ironic shamanism and an intellectually rigorous yet always also poetic approach, his art illustrates the limitations of human agency and lets us experience that our dominance over the natural environment is an illusion. With "precise carelessness," Weinberger's works interrogate our ethical standards, challenging them with the ostensibly marginal, unprofitable, and worthless and lending engaging sensual expression to an all-encompassing and ineluctable cycle of becoming and passing away.

The two-time documenta participant's sprawling exhibition takes up the Belvedere 21's ground-floor galleries and sculpture garden and encompasses works on paper, photographs, sculptures and objects, paintings, two videos, and six outdoor installations. It is not designed as a retrospective, although it brings together works from several decades. Rather, the show should be seen as a dynamic ensemble of cross-connections and correspondences, a tangle that encourages visitors to trace diverse, equally important narrative strands that extend through Lois Weinberger's oeuvre. The artist worked on the conception for this exhibition—his second in Karl Schwanzer's pavilion—from the fall of 2018 until his unexpected death on April 21, 2020. Franziska Weinberger, his partner in life and art since the 1990s, gathered his ideas and, together with the curator Severin Dünser, put together a presentation that is faithful to the artist's vision. The title *Basics* was chosen by Lois Weinberger himself; it is borrowed from his work *Basics—The Idea of an Expansion*: seven sculptures molded out of an earthen mix around pieces of wood rest on their backs like unfinished golems, awaiting the formation of their definitive bodies.

Curator Severin Dünser notes about Weinberger: *„His distinctive perspective on fundamental concerns—man's relationship with nature, the relativity of existence, the subjectivity of human standards—is more relevant than ever in light of today's societal debates over climate change and efforts to save the environment. Weinberger shifts reflections from the periphery to the center that make us rethink our unquestioned rule over nature. The diverse paths traced by his meditations form a poetic-political network that is not easy to chart.“*

The "Green Man," a recurring figure in Christian ecclesiastical architecture, is a kind of leitmotif. The face from which leaves sprout melds human and plant in a hybrid creature. The archetype permits a range of interpretations: from the pagan imaginary of a forest deity, a representation of a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, to the sylvan sprite, an embodiment of dark, untamed, and dangerous nature and antagonist of the light of Christian revelation, to the head overgrown with vegetation, a memento mori reminding us of the impermanence of all existence. Lois Weinberger's self-portrait—the body of works, including watercolors and one object, bearing the collective title *Green Man*—encapsulates the major thematic complexes of his oeuvre. Rather than seeking a reconciliation with and return to nature, Weinberger sees the problem as rooted in much more profound questions concerning humankind's self-conception. Culture and nature, he believes, are not opposites.

Sculpture La Gomera, a shrub with shoe soles hanging on its branches, might be interpreted as Surrealist. But it is actually a realistic representation, one in which human-made products are self-evidently borne by a plant as though they were leaves or fruit. This work is making its public debut in the exhibition.

Lois and his wife Franziska Weinberger co-created the installation *Journey of Leaves* for the 2009 Venice Biennale; it is complemented by a documentary film produced for the exhibition. *Journey of Leaves* draws our attention to processes: leaves, green cuttings, and algae are piled up at the center of a wooden hut in a rectangular block that is slowly decomposed by soil organisms. The transformation of "waste" into nutrient-rich humus makes for a condensed illustration of the cycles of becoming and passing to which we humans are also subject.

In *Debris Field*, an installation comprising some one thousand individual pieces, Weinberger probes the relation between dwelling and being in the built reality of a home. It gathers around seven centuries of history in the form of countless found objects the artist retrieved from his parents' farmhouse in Stams, where he grew up. Unearthing the "debris field" of his personal origins, the work also charts a system of references to and symbols for the everyday lives of peasants. *Debris Field* was first presented at the 2017 documenta in Athens and Kassel. Weinberger wore a filter mask during the excavation work that he subsequently used in his sculpture *Bishop*, which is on public display for the first time. The figure emblemizes religious piety—an integral part of peasant life in Stams as elsewhere—as a common element across cultural differences.

In *Home Voodoo I*, Weinberger performs a ritual of purification and liberation that amalgamates local custom and family mythology with voodoo, Catholic, and pagan practices in a humorous ceremony.

Several works await discovery in the Belvedere 21's sculpture garden, where *Wild Cube* has been permanently installed since 2012. Inside the tall steel cage, reforestation proceeds spontaneously and without human interference. Weinberger has created a literal *hortus conclusus*—an enclosed garden from which humans are locked out. An asylum for flora and fauna, it demonstrates the untamed force of nature. The title is a nod to the "white cube," which supposedly offers ideal conditions for the presentation of contemporary art.

Wayside sheds are structures Weinberger encountered in Greece, where they not only serve as memorials to victims of accidents, but also store provisions for wayfarers. The artist reprises this altruistic idea in his *Wayside House*. It contains a supply of poems on pieces of paper on which the visitor can print bark-beetle tunnels—an allusion to hiking passbooks in which stamps earned on summits document the distances covered.

Marginal zones and brownfields captured Lois Weinberger's interest; he collected wild plants growing in urban environments, propagated them on an unused plot leased for the purpose, and resettled them, while conversely extracting other plants from the fallow land that he released into the city. By accelerating migration flows, he helped dismantle arbitrarily imposed habitat boundaries. Such migrations carry distinct political overtones, which Weinberger underscores in his *Portable Garden* series. PVC bags are filled with soil in which seeds scattered by the wind and animals find a new home.

The containers establish a connection to the lives of immigrants, who often use just such plastic bags to carry all their worldly belongings with them.

Skyscraper for Birds is the artist's take on the human rationalization of residential real estate, which he transposes into the animal kingdom—a critique of the indignity of living conditions subjected to the pressures of efficiency enhancement.

A reading corner in the gallery invites visitors to examine a selection from Weinberger's library and explore his interests in transdisciplinary art and holistic approaches.

EXHIBITIONS OF LOIS WEINBERGER

1947 Stams (Tyrol) – 2020 Vienna

Lived and worked in Vienna and Gars am Kamp (Lower Austria)

Exhibitions, Commissions, and Works in Public Space (Selection)

- 2021 *Basics*, Belvedere 21, Vienna
Kunsthhaus Bregenz
Ruderal Society, salle principale, Paris
- 2020 *Basics – die Idee einer Ausdehnung*, Feststiege Schloss Esterházy, Eisenstadt
- 2019 *Debris Field*, Tinguely Museum, Basel
Piacé le Radieux, Bézard – Le Corbusier, Piacé
Watari-Um Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo
- 2018 *L'envers du paysage*, FRAC Franche-Comté, Besançon
salle principale, Paris
- 2017 *documenta 14*, Athens & Kassel
Konjunktionen mit Heath Bunting und Ladislav Zajac, ngbk, Neue Gesellschaft für
Bildende Kunst, Berlin
- 2016 salle principale, Paris
- 2015 Kunsthalle Mainz
- 2013 Tiroler Landesmuseum, Innsbruck
- 2011 Musée d'Art Moderne Saint-Étienne
- 2010 *Ruderal Society*, NÖ Landesmuseum, Sankt Pölten
- 2009 Österreichischer Pavillon, Venice Biennale
- 2008 LENTOS Kunstmuseum Linz
- 2007 *Garten Eden – der Garten in der Kunst seit 1900*, Kunsthalle Emden
Kunsthalle Gießen
- 2006 Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol
- 2004 *Wir sind des Baumes müde*, Kunstraum Dornbirn
- 2003 Kunstverein Hannover

- 2002 Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck
Octopus, Kulturhauptstadt Europa 2002, Bruges
Kunstverein Bonn
- 2001 *The Waste Land*, Atelier Augarten – Zentrum für zeitgenössische Kunst, Belvedere, Vienna
- 2000 Museum moderner Kunst im 20er Haus, Vienna
Freud Museum, London
Camden Arts Centre, London
- 1999 *Empty Garden*, Watari-Um Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo
- 1997 documenta X
- 1996 Kunstverein Marburg
- 1995 Secession, Vienna
- 1992 Kunstverein Salzburg
- 1991 21. Biennale São Paulo
- 1990 Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Fribourg
- 1986 Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz
- 1983 *Raffl*, cinema film, direction: Christian Berger, main character and art direction: Lois Weinberger, Tyrol 1983/84, Max Ophüls Preis, Cannes International Film Festival, Moscow, Cairo etc.

Professorship, Grants, and Awards (Selection)

- 2006 Tiroler Landespreis für Kunst
- 2005 Honorary Prize for Fine Arts , Austrian Federal Chancellery
- 1998 Prize of the City of Vienna
- 1993-94 Professorship at the State Academy of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe

CATALOGUE



Lois Weinberger. Basics

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EXHIBITION PROGRAM

Subject to the current valid regulations.
The Exhibition Program can be found under www.belvedere.at/programm.

We are looking forward to your visit!

GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition title	<i>Lois Weinberger. Basics</i>
Curator	Severin Dünser
Works	130 works, including 60 works on paper, 30 photographic works, 25 sculptures and objects, 3 paintings acrylic on canvas, 6 installations outdoors as well as 2 videos
Dates	July 2 to October 24, 2021
Exhibition venue	Belvedere 21 Arsenalstraße 1, 1030 Vienna
Opening hours	Tuesday to Sunday 11 am - 6 pm 2 July – 1 August Friday to Sunday 11 am - 9 pm
Tickets	Regular 9 € Discounted 7 € Annual pass Belvedere 39 € Children and youth under 19 free
Web	belvedere.at facebook.com/belvedere21 twitter.com/belvedere21 instagram.com/belvedere21wien #LoisWeinberger

For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos please visit <https://www.belvedere.at/en/press>.