

## MEANS OF PRODUCTION- ARTISTIC VISION AND ISSUES ADDRESSED

With its explicitly utilitarian didacticism and naturalistic horticultural arrangements, one might well ask, "What makes 'The Means of Production' a work of art?"

Clearly the project facilitates the *production* of art by directly furnishing materials for art making, but is it *itself* a work of art?

At first glance, the plantings are quite pleasing to the eye, the bright varicoloured stems of willows and bamboo contrasting with the dark sculptured shapes of the coppiced trees.

In addition, 'Means of Production' is paradigmatic; a working model of inner city forestry and neighbourhood self-sufficiency, an homage to arcadian tradition and ecological agit prop. But this is only part of the aesthetic equation.

In my previous "land art" work, (Cottonwood Gardens, 'Healing the Cut- Bridging the Gap', 'Memory Trees' etc.), I have adopted what the seminal Fluxus artist Joseph Beuys has termed "the homeopathic role of the artist." Here, the artist and by extension his (my) work becomes a covert agent of social change.

Beuys, despite his stated aspirations, was himself extremely overt, caught up in the overblown celebrity culture of the twentieth century's avant-garde. Still some of his later works, notably 'Stadtverwaltung statt Staatverwaltung' (also known as 'Seven Thousand Oaks') pointed the way out towards a new artistic mandate.

Urban reforestation as art moves us away from the pervasive banality of the contemporary artist who, as stylish purveyor of 'branded' fetish commodities to an ever-shrinking constituency of jaded cognoscenti, hopes at best to evoke some small frisson, a knowing wink, irony.

'Means of Production' abandons this parlour game. There is no more secret handshake, no more "Fifteen minutes of fame."

I succeed only when viewers of my work forget about me and any cleverness of my artifice and begin to experience the work as ambience. Then they will start to ask the questions that need to be asked.

After numerous cycles of harvest and regrowth, any residual aura of me as artist or horticultural dramaturge will have disappeared, beneath the whispering trees. It no longer matters.

And now it gets interesting.

Because now the artwork has receded into what Walter Benjamin has called "the optical subconscious." The artist's unseen hand. The work no longer screams out, "ART", but has already become part of the infrastructure, part of our assumptions, and an internalised component of the urban visual field.

In short,

The new normal.