@workinthegarden.community

NORBERT FRANCIS ATTARD

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Norbert Francis Attard, artist-in-residence with *A Lot of Possibilities*,
creates a series of 15 site-specific works
at the West 104th Street Community Garden,
off Central Park West in New York.

Curated by Anna Lise Jensen.

18 September – 13 October, 2010.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT **A discussion with Suzanne Charlé, gardener.**

I was immediately intrigued by the challenge set forth by Anna Lise Jensen 's "A Lot of Possibilities #2." The context is complex, dense and alive: a community garden in the heart of New York City.

My thought was to explore the worlds suggested by the site: the Office and the Garden. Both are compact places of social interaction, confined by definite boundaries, one by a chain-link fence, the other by walls of glass, mortar and steel. Both are work places, both are integral parts of urban life, both engage the waking thoughts of New Yorkers.

The 9-to-5 (or in New York, longer) routine of the office consumes most of our waking hours, threatening to overwhelm our lives. Despite this - or perhaps because of it - many people manage to have a relationship with nature - plants, soil, animals, the weather.

To be fulfilled, we need to engage in both worlds, to create a balance between work and play, the manmade and the natural, electronic and organic, the virtual and the real.

To explore this balance, I decided that each piece should consist of items from both worlds, day-to-day objects found in the workplace or the garden: from one, computers, cables, keyboards, paper, pencils; from the other, seeds, leaves, soil, pots and tools.

The results are varied: sometimes the two worlds are juxtaposed, sometimes they overlap, sometimes they meld. Each work represents a fusion of the man-made and natural worlds, a tension that we all live with.

As you stroll through the garden, I hope that you think about the two worlds that we all experience. Sometime the world of the office - business as usual - takes over and we become stressed. My hope is to remind viewers of how important nature is in our lives, and to urge people to give the natural world more time and space in their lives.

I'm also making a statement about community gardens, particularly those in New York. I am urging people to consider the garden as an important site, a work of art in and of itself. The works I have produced directly involved the community, staring with getting permission from the gardeners to make the exhibition, then working with the gardeners, who contributed ideas, concepts, materials, and go-fer enthusiasm. All of this is part of the community spirit that makes community gardens so important to the life of the city.

Why do we put art in the garden? I m not sure that I can answer this, but making interventions in these community gardens may have an impact on the city politicians, leading them to realize that these gardens - and the sense of camaraderie they inspire - are as important as Wall Street's corporations in creating a vital and luxuriant city. Just as their downtown counterpart, gardens are the source of an important green currency.

The ultimate aim of an artist is to try to make a difference. In @workinthegarden.community I hope to make visitors aware of the multiple worlds they live in - the corporate world and the natural world, the corporeal and the surreal. With luck, the exhibition will help the local authorities realize the importance of community gardens. These small bits of green are not just pieces of real estate; they are precious spaces of contemplation and contention, places that to be safeguarded and preserved, saved from development - New York's own World Heritage Sites.

CLIPPED TREE

1,400 paper clips, existing tree.

We don’t usually give paperclips a second glance, perhaps because they are so ubiquitous in day-to-day life at the office. Outside the office, however, and attached to something other than paper, these clips suddenly take on a festive flair, like decorations on a Christmas tree.

ED PATCH CABLE

STILL LIFE

White ceramic vase, computer wires and cables.

Ever since they decorated the walls of Egyptian tombs, artists have painted still lifes, depicting inanimate objects (often flowers, plants, food) in an artificial environment. Often these still lifes brim with symbolism, subtly commenting on the artist's society. At the entrance to the community garden, Attard places an arrangement of computer cabels and wires, a bouquet of electronic "flowers"- a reminder, he says, that technology should - indeed must - become more eco-friendly.

FLORN

TIME IS MONEY

Clock, marble slab, desk pen set, flowers.

Benjamin Franklin's quote has become the password of the 24-7 global economy. The title can also serve as a metonym for Wall Street - the epicenter of American finance, just eight miles south of the garden. The clock in the desk set signifies this credo, while the flowers that substitute the pens (and the vine that creeps on the wall above) suggest that we give equal time to nature.

EVE TO ADAM

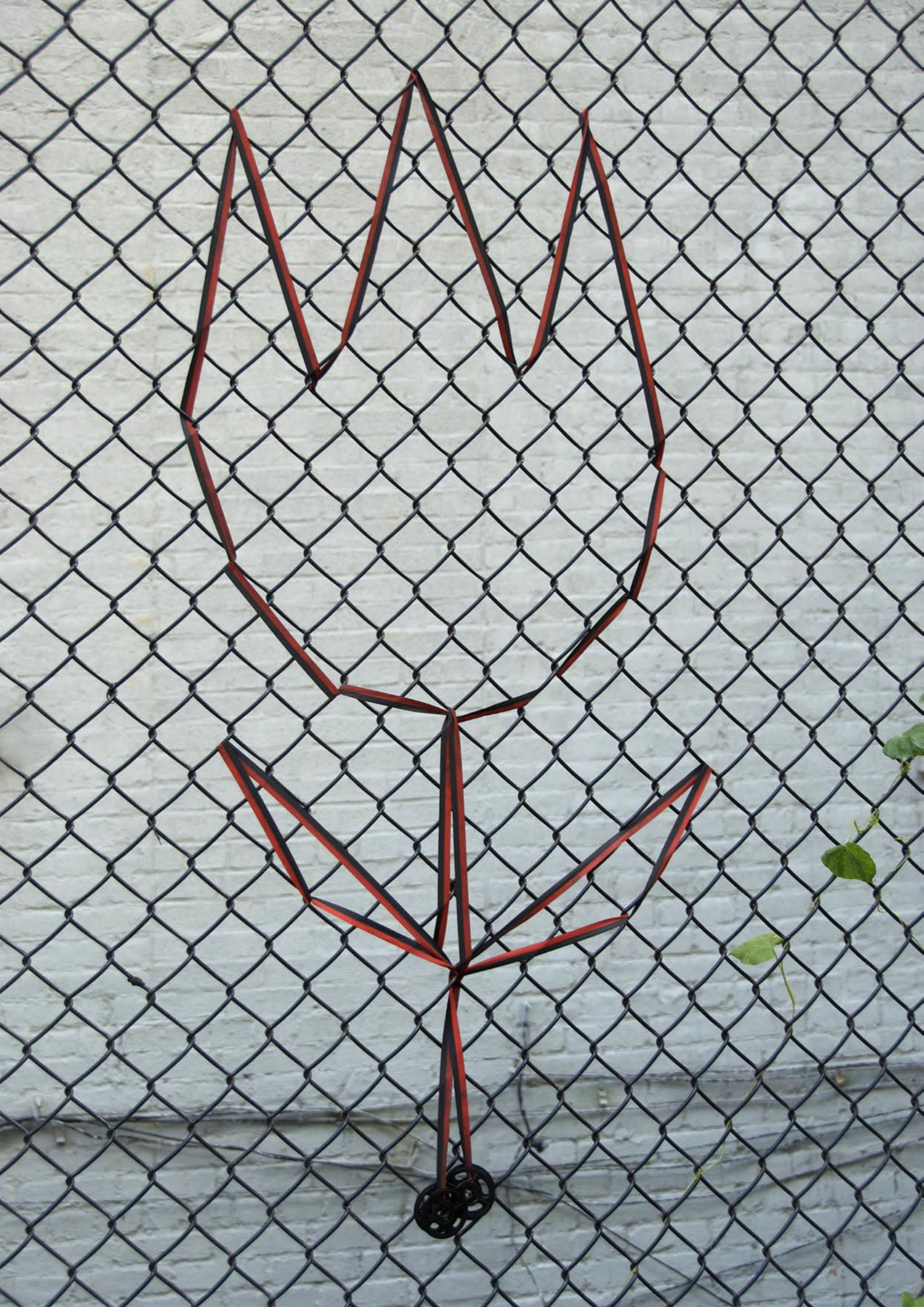
Portable typewriter, fig leaf.

According to Genesis, after succumbing to the Serpent's temptation to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Eve tempted Adam with the fruit. With this came the fig leaf to cover their shame. God cast the couple out of the Garden of Eden for going against his will - and ever since, humans have had to work hard to live. Today, Attard notes, like those first "Stewards of the Earth" we continue to commit a grave sin by destroying nature.

TYPE OF FLOWER?

Typewriter ribbon.

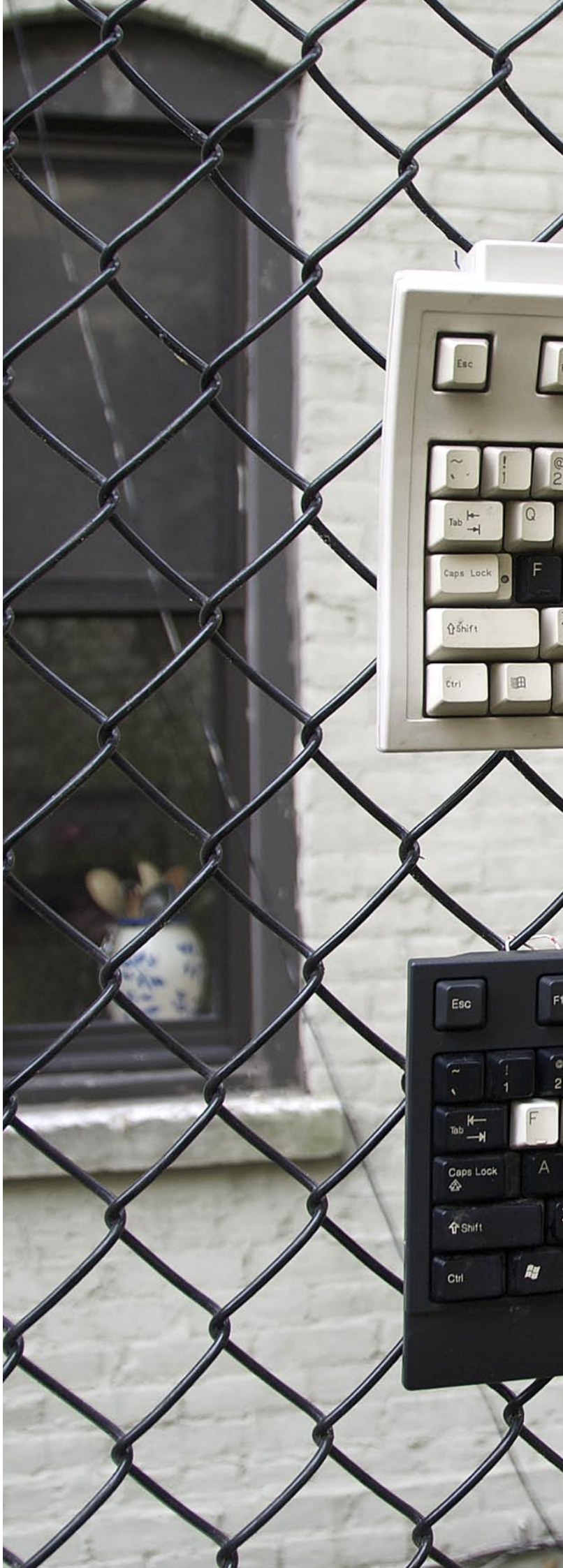
Attard playfully weaves a typewriter ribbon in and out of the chain-link fence that surrounds the community garden. The outline has a child-like quality, and even the youngest of visitors can guess what “type” of flower it is. Attard explains that the piece also refers to his homeland: “It reminds me of lace-making, which is part of the cultural heritage of the Maltese Islands.



FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Two keyboards, random keys.

The metaphorical phrase forbidden fruit refers to the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. (See Eve to Adam.)
Here, two keyboards - one black, the other white - suggest two separate beings (Adam and Eve, Man and Woman), while the contrasting colors of the two words “forbidden” and “fruit” on the keyboards suggest separate and yet combined responsibility for the Fall from grace and the loss of Eden.



IBM

BAR-B-QUED MICE

Grill, computer mice, utensils.

In this work, Attard takes a more humorous and ironic tack. At their leisure - away from work - gardeners often enjoy a bar-b-que. But it isn't always so easy to get away from the daily grind and thoughts of the office: hence grilled computer mice. Quips Attard: "Most humans do not eat mice, but we do seem to be 'digesting' a lot of the computer world."

Sun
DELL

DELL

WORK VERSUS PLAY

Snow shovel, garden trowel, keyboard, random keys.

As the words spelled out on the keyboard suggest, one of the hardest things for urbanites to achieve is the delicate balance between work and play. Here, a garden trowel and a keyboard are placed at opposite ends of a snow shovel. With the wire mesh fence serving as the fulcrum, it's clear that such a state is possible.

WATER COLORS

Two plastic watering cans, colored pencils.

Artists have long worked in watercolors. Here, colored pencils become the water, which is vital to all forms of life. “When we pour water out of a can, we sustain the life of plants,” says Attard. The piece suggests that we should pay attention to our precious reserves of water. “It is estimated that by 2025 over half the world population will be facing water-based vulnerability.”

SPROUTING THOUGHTS

216 wooden pencils, plastic planter, soil.

The 216 wooden pencils take the shape of a bush, just beginning to grow in a pot. Like plants, the best thoughts can sprout when we are out experiencing nature - and these ideas will grow and multiply when carefully nurtured.

LAPTOP LUNCH

IBM laptop, thermos and cup, homemade zucchini bread, office chair.

Many of us don’t manage to get out of the office for lunch: we scarf down a quick sandwich and drink coffee while sitting at our desk, staring at our computer. Here the only break from the office is the zucchini bread, made by one of the garden members from zucchini grown in the community garden - a delicious reminder of the garden.

TOSSED SALAD

Wheelbarrow, shredded paper, computer cables, rake, shovel, tomatoes, basil.

Shredded office paper and wire cables are literally mixed together with tomatoes and basil grown in the garden, providing a humorous look at the wild combination of the office and natural worlds.

POWER SURGE

Laptop, water hose, rain-harvesting barrel.

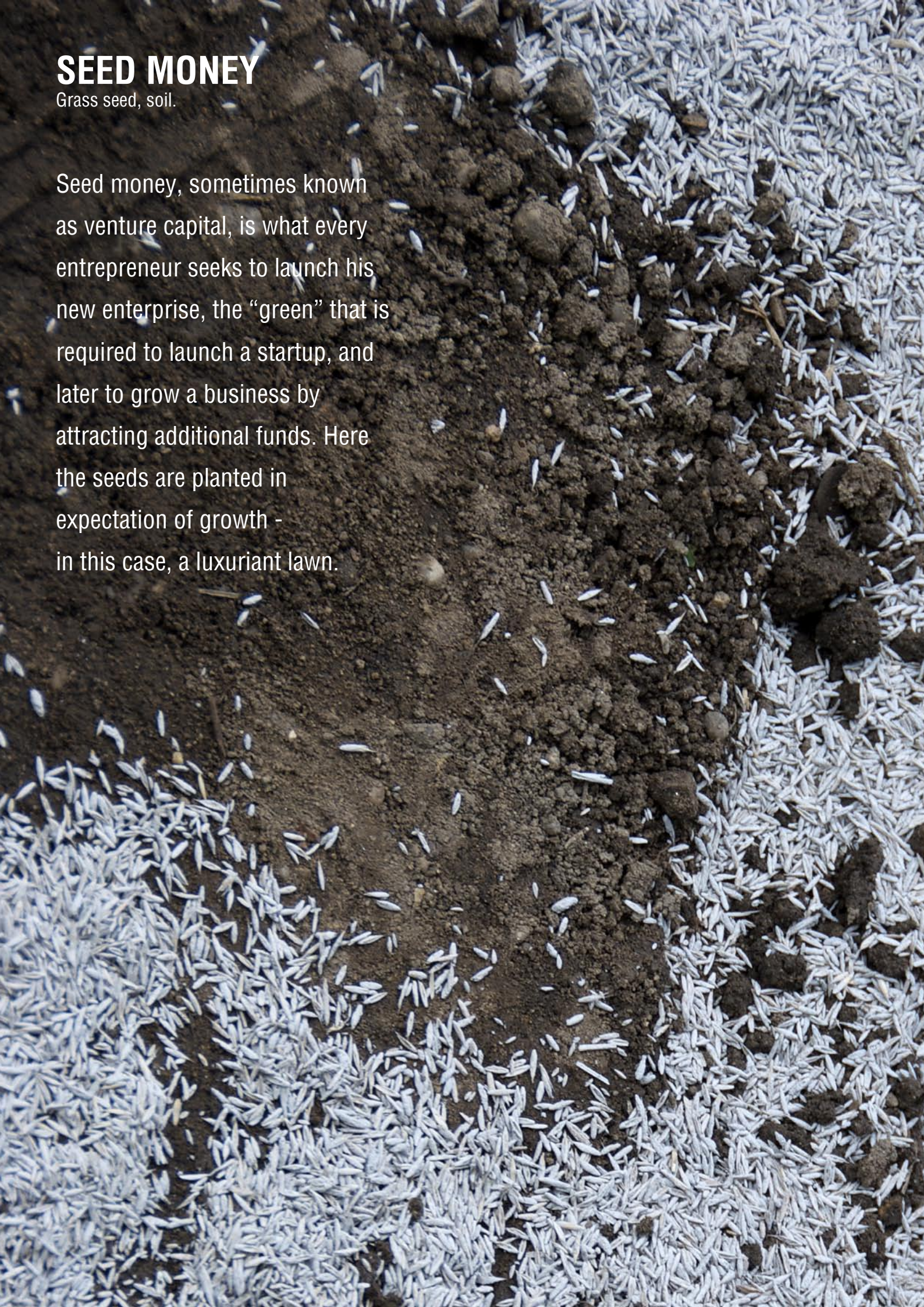
Attard plays with the idea of power in this piece in which a laptop is hooked up to a water-catchement barrel by a garden hose. Unrealistic - we all know what happens to electronics when they come in direct contact with water. And yet, water is the ultimate source of life: without water, there is no life, and certainly, no computers. By using runoff water from a neighboring building, the gardeners make a small step in putting the power of water to use. On a more basic level, the piece urges us to think about alternate forms of energy.

COMPAQ

SEED MONEY

Grass seed, soil.

Seed money, sometimes known as venture capital, is what every entrepreneur seeks to launch his new enterprise, the “green” that is required to launch a startup, and later to grow a business by attracting additional funds. Here the seeds are planted in expectation of growth - in this case, a luxuriant lawn.



PINK SLIP

Construction paper, garden clippers.

Over the past two years, almost 10 percent of all New Yorkers have received pink slips - notices that they've lost their jobs and been cut out of the workforce. Here, the pink slip takes the shape of a flower being cut by a rusty pair of clippers, a poignant reminder of the perilous state of today's economy.

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