

JORDAN WEBER'S *PROTOTYPE FOR POETRY VS RHETORIC (DEEP ROOTS)*

ARTWORK GUIDE
FOR TEACHERS

ON VIEW FROM
MAY 1, 2021

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OFFICIAL COMMUNITY
OPENING JULY 10, 2021

2308/2310 LYNDAL
AVENUE NORTH,
MINNEAPOLIS, MN

WALKER



INTRODUCTION

Educators can explore Jordan Weber's *Prototype for poetry vs rhetoric (deep roots)*, the Walker's newest public art commission, with their students using this guide. Inside you'll find contextual information and images as well as helpful prompts for discussion and research.

The artwork is scheduled to officially open to the public on July 10, 2021. Updated information and images will be added to this guide at that time.

ABOUT THE ARTIST & HIS PRACTICE

"I have worked and learned collaboratively with communities defined by geographic and economic disadvantage, and I work against this to help create healthy regional landscapes of resilience and sustainability through the arts, supporting social programs that operate within oppressive systems. My projects seek to collectively open up community landscapes in restricted environments."

—Jordan Weber

Based in Des Moines, Iowa, Jordan Weber is an interdisciplinary artist who explores themes of community and social justice. Working primarily with sculpture and installation, Weber is often motivated by young people and their energy to drive social change.

During his childhood, Weber was inspired by the civic and social engagement of his parents. His father was active in civil rights causes and cofounded the Fort Des Moines Museum and Education Center, which is dedicated in part to preserving and promoting the history of African American service in World War I. His mother directed a youth center in Des Moines and introduced art-making workshops to youth and the community. These aspects of his parents' work were foundational to the formation of Weber's interest in art and social justice. The artist received a college basketball scholarship to Simpson College, however his sporting aspirations were dashed by injury. He left college and returned to making art, supporting himself financially by working in construction in the day and painting at night. At the same time Weber also worked with youth in Des Moines and across the country on art-making, social justice, and mural projects.

Much of Weber's practice links back to his experiences in his home state of Iowa. He explains, "Iowa is the most biologically altered land in the United States. Less than 1 percent of its indigenous biological land remains, most of the landscape has been terraformed by mass industrial agriculture. Additionally, Iowa ranks in the top three states nationally for male, black-to-white incarceration discrepancies within the US prison system." Weber's artworks reflect and respond to pressures inflicted upon communities of color in Iowa and beyond—particularly Black and Indigenous communities—by the prison industrial complex, land degradation, proximity of polluted industrial environments, and the lack of green space as well as places for spiritual, emotional, and psychological respite.

above: Jordan Weber. Courtesy the artist.

THE ARTWORK: *PROTOTYPE FOR POETRY VS RHETORIC (DEEP ROOTS)*



Early garden proposal featuring pyramid shaped garden. Courtesy Jordan Weber.

Jordan Weber's *Prototype for poetry vs rhetoric (deep roots)* was developed over the course of a yearlong residency at the Walker. Each month the artist met with individuals from nonprofits, environmentalists, activists, neighborhood associations, and arts organizations to discuss their work, priorities, and needs. He collected research examining ways the institutional practice of redlining historically prevented residents of color from moving into certain parts of the city. Additionally, he explored how polluting industries have sprung up adjacent to neighborhoods where Black residents and recent migrant populations primarily reside.

Weber's final artwork takes the form of an urban farm, with a design inspired not only by the artist's sporting past but with the aim of attracting young people to the site also with visual forms that they would recognize. The garden is laid out so that it looks like a basketball from above, and two structures resembling basketball hoops sit at either end of the garden. They are bent over on their poles so that the backboards are parallel to the ground. Additionally, the garden incorporates many elements that respond to the research collected over Weber's residency. Two rain gardens are positioned underneath the hoop sculptures, addressing the high pollution in North Minneapolis. The shapes of the garden beds themselves create the basketball court lines. These features also point to the idea of boundaries that dictate where people can and cannot move.

The most significant part of the project is the deep collaboration with the local community. Many different individuals were involved each step of the way, including young people, landscape architects, and organizers, all invested in making healthy food available to North Minneapolis residents.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Weber worked with several local partners to bring the project to life. Youth Farm is a development organization that teaches young people leadership skills through farming and provides communities with access to fresh produce grown on small plots rented from the city. Several young people from the group joined Weber to install and prepare the site, including moving tons of soil, installing the foot-paths, and planting all the trees, shrubs, and vegetables.

Weber also connected with Marcus Kar, the director of North Minneapolis Farms. Kar helped develop the planting plan and determine the types of vegetables and herbs that would most thrive in the space. Landscape architects Aune Fernandez applied their design expertise to select fruiting trees and shrubs that would survive in an urban environment with lots of sun.



The artist and Youth Farm (left to right: Calvin Battle, Jordan Weber, Marcus Kar, and Antonio Hamilton). Photo: Dylan Nelson.



Jordan Weber installs rain-catching hoop sculptures. Photo: Nisa Mackie.



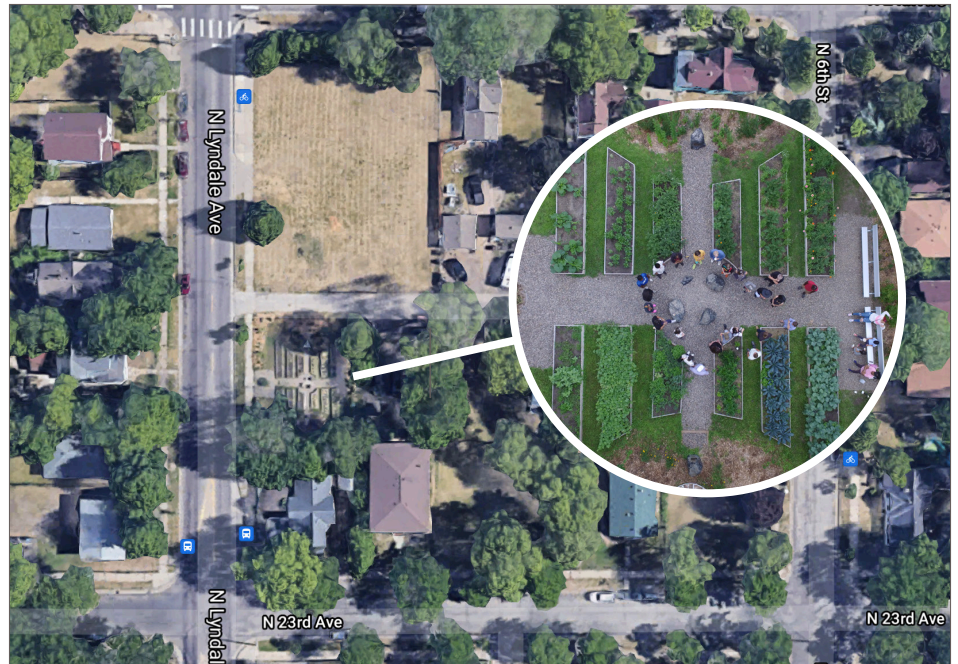
The installation of the planters. Photo: Nisa Mackie.



Youth Farm volunteer helps with planting. Photo: David Pierini.

THE LOCATION

Located at 2308/2310 Lyndale Avenue, the artwork/farm/garden is ultimately a community resource designed to be used by residents and Youth Farm to access fresh produce during spring, summer, and fall. The site of the work was chosen because it is heavily trafficked by pedestrians, not too far from West Broadway—a busy thoroughfare in North Minneapolis—and near schools and resident families who might make use of the space.



2308/2310 Lyndale Avenue N

Location of the deep roots garden in Hawthorne.
Image captured from Google Maps.



Jordan Weber, *Prototype for poetry vs rhetoric (deep roots)*, Opening 2021. Photo: Aaron Graves

THE DESIGN

The project is designed in the outline of a basketball court, a nod to Weber's past career aspirations, but also a purposeful choice to attract youth. The strangely bent over basketball hoop structures at each end of the site are particularly eye-catching. Instead of actual hoops, the sculptures function like water catchers. They direct rainfall to the garden below, which is filled with grasses native to Minnesota that help reverse pollution.

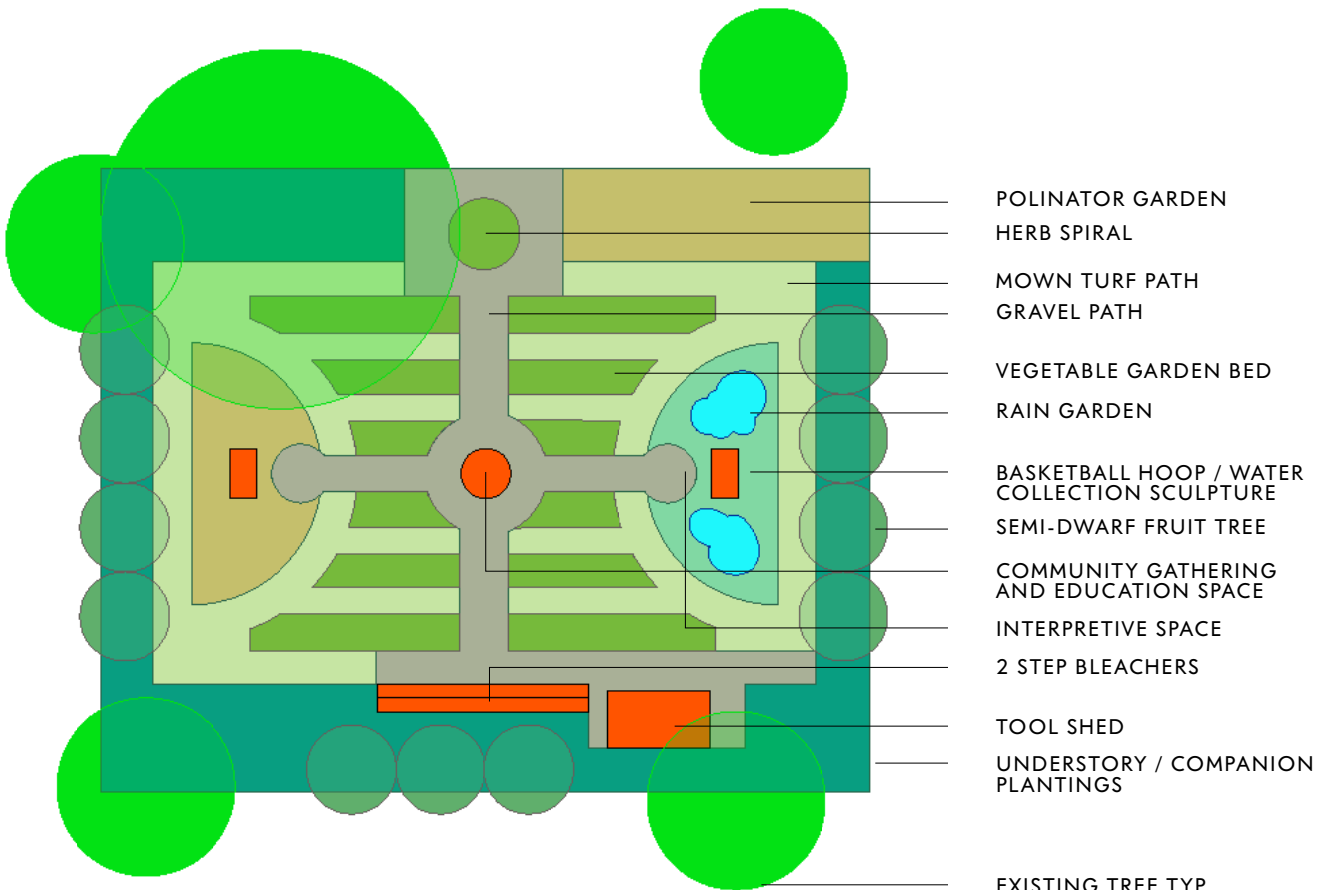
This includes tree fertilizers and pesticides washed into soil as well as acids that can be found in rainwater in industrial cities. All other plants found in the garden are edible in some way, including the berries, cherries, pears, and apples produced by hardy shrubs and fresh vegetables cultivated by Youth Farm volunteers in the wooden planter beds. Finally, the obsidian rocks beneath the hoop sculptures and in the center of the "court" were chosen by Weber to celebrate Blackness.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Weber's work explores how communities both shape and are shaped by the spaces/places they live. How is your own identity and experience shaped by where you live? What makes the land and spaces of your neighborhood unique?
- Weber explains that with this project he is seeking to "self-heal land in order to self-heal our bodies." What do you think he means by the term "self-heal"? What are some ways that the *deep roots* farm can help heal the environment where it's located? How might the farm lead to healing people?
- As part of his artistic practice, Weber dedicates extensive time and energy getting to know the communities he works with and building relationships with local organizations. Why do you think this part of the process is so important to him? Imagine if Weber built the *deep roots* community farm without meeting with anyone from the local community first—how might people react?



Jordan Weber, *Prototype for poetry vs rhetoric (deep roots)*, Opening 2021. Photo: Aaron Graves



Garden layout. Courtesy Aune Fernandez.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

RESEARCH PROMPTS

For another site-specific living artwork, Weber designed a greenhouse on the site of Malcom X's birth home in Omaha, Nebraska, describing the project as a space where "environmental justice, social justice, and arts all ball into one." Watch the following video to learn more about the project: <https://www.pbs.org/video/jordan-weber-ydg54s/>. What are the four pillars on which the artwork is built and how do you see them reflected in its design?

Both deep roots and the 4MX Greenhouse engage closely with the concept of environmental justice, or fair and equitable access to a healthy environment for all people. What are some of the key goals of the environmental justice movement? Research on your own to find out more about the environmental justice concerns specific to your city. How do Weber's artworks contribute to conversations around environmental justice?

While this artwork is specific to the environment of North Minneapolis, it addresses a number of issues that negatively impact communities of color throughout the United States. One such problem is redlining, which has long determined where Black families have been able to live. What is redlining? Research how redlining works and learn about its history in your city/town. In what ways are the effects of redlining still visible today? (For Twin Cities residents, you may wish to check out the Mapping Prejudice project: <https://mappingprejudice.umn.edu>)



Jordan Weber, 4 Malcolm X Greenhouse, 2018.
Photo courtesy the artist.

RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

Resources about redlining and environmental racism:

- “How Decades of Racist Housing Policy Left Neighborhoods Sweltering,” *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/08/24/climate/racism-redlining-cities-global-warming.html>
- Mapping Prejudice Project, University of Minnesota Libraries, <https://mappingprejudice.umn.edu/about-us/index.html>

Resources about *Prototype for poetry vs. rhetoric (deep roots)*:

- “Walker Art Center Commissions Jordan Weber to Create Community Farm,” *Art Forum*, <https://www.artforum.com/newswalker-art-center-commissions-jordan-weber-to-create-community-farm-83086>
- “Is it a farm or a sculpture park? Both,” *MPR News*, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2020/05/27/is-it-a-farm-or-a-sculpture-park-both>
- “Jordan Weber Commissioned to Create Community Farm by Walker Art Center,” Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation, <https://dsmpublicartfoundation.org/jordan-weber-commissioned-to-create-community-farm-by-walker-art-center/>
- “Minneapolis north siders work the land as an act of healing,” *The Mankato Free Press*, https://www.mankatofreepress.com/news/local_news/minneapolis-north-siders-work-the-land-as-an-act-of-healing/article_2cd0139e-b4b5-11ea-8720-d7726616ec49.html

Resources about Jordan Weber:

- “Jordan Weber,” *Art at a Time Like This*, <https://artatatimelikethis.com/the-life-instinct/jordan-weber>
- “Black Self-Determination: Jordan Weber,” PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/video/jordan-weber-ydg54s/>
- “Unite court mural,” Group Creatives, <https://groupcreatives.com/unite>

Other related artists/artworks:

- Sweet Water Foundation, <https://www.sweetwaterfoundation.com/>
- Project Row Houses, <https://projectrowhouses.org/>
- Mel Chin, *Revival Field*, <http://melchin.org/oeuvre/revival-field/>
- Rain garden projects by Seitu Jones

JORDAN WEBER'S *PROTOTYPE FOR POETRY VS RHETORIC (DEEP ROOTS)* ON VIEW FROM MAY 1, 2021

ABOUT THE WALKER ART CENTER

The Walker Art Center, located across from the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, is an interdisciplinary contemporary art center committed to supporting the creative expression of artists and the active engagement of audiences. Walker Education supports learning for people of all ages, abilities, and familiarity with contemporary and modern art.

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