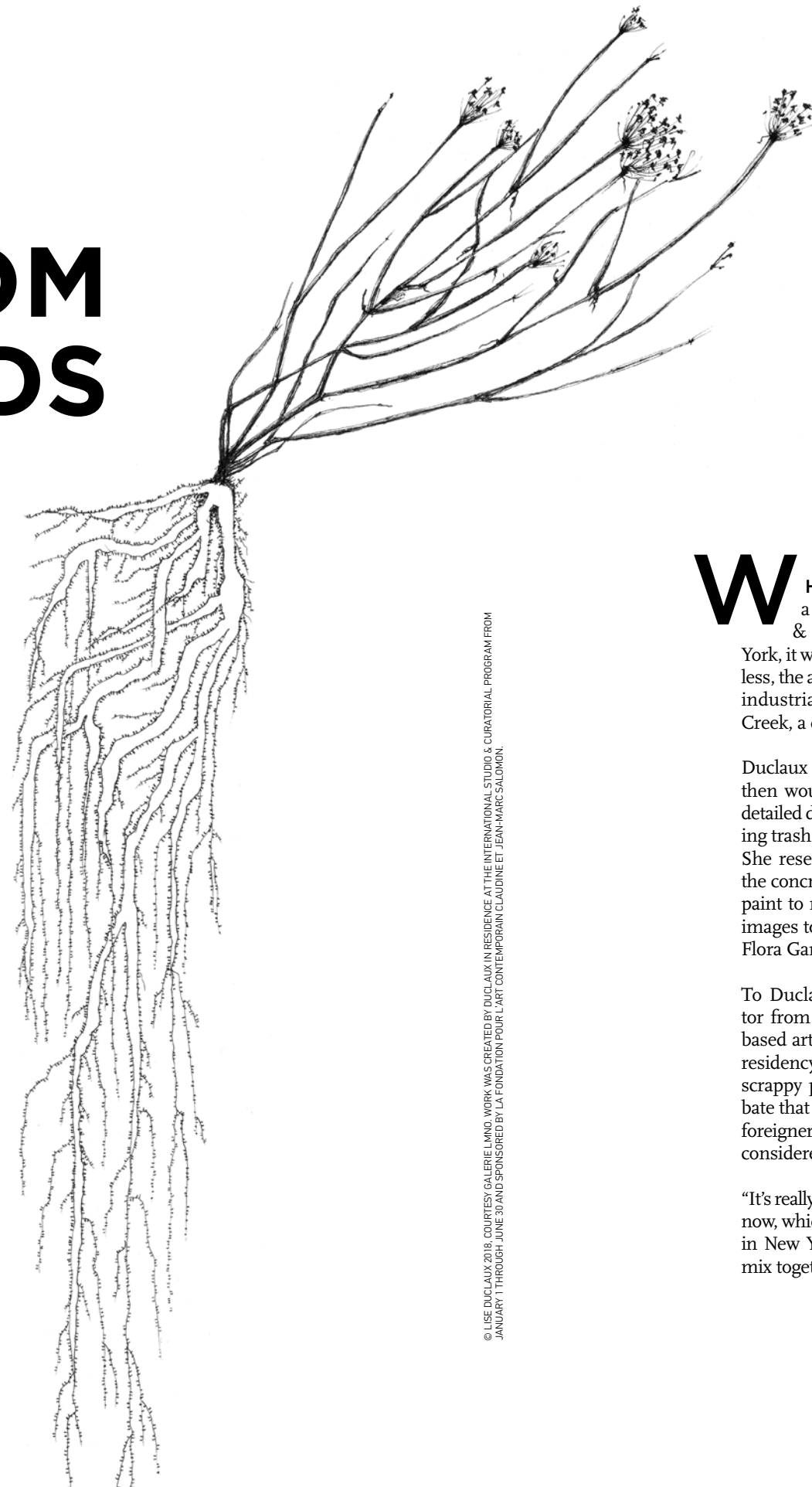


THE FREEDOM OF WEEDS



THE BELGIAN ARTIST LISE DUCLAUX'S BROOKLYN RESIDENCY REVELS IN THE FREE SPIRIT OF UNLOVED PLANTS.

BY TOM STOELKER



LEFT
WILD CARROT (ALIEN, COSMOPOLITAN),
INK ON PAPER, 2018

WHEN LISE DUCLAUX ARRIVED for a residency at the International Studio & Curatorial Program in Brooklyn, New York, it was a particularly harsh winter. Nevertheless, the artist frequently walked the streets of the industrial neighborhood bordering Newtown Creek, a designated Superfund site.

Duclaux photographed weeds along her walks, then would go back to her studio and execute detailed drawings of the captured images, including trash that wove its way into the composition. She researched the form of the roots beneath the concrete and then used Copic ink and Posca paint to record it all. She would often send the images to Uli Lorimer, the curator of the Native Flora Garden at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

To Duclaux, weeds are not unlike her, a visitor from a foreign land. Though the Belgium-based artist had no intention of overstaying her residency, which ended in June, she found the scrappy plants representative of an age-old debate that America returns to now and again: the foreigner who is at one point welcomed, but later considered a threat.

“It’s really fashionable to do the native garden right now, which is a little bit strange for me, especially in New York,” she says. “We accept that people mix together, but we don’t accept that plants can

mix and change. For me these [drawings] are images of tolerance, of acceptance, and of diversity.”

She calls the weeds “spontaneous,” “autonomous,” and “cosmopolitan.” She notes, though, that few weeds can be found amid the canyons of Manhattan during the winter.

She says that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the first laws written to forbid invasive plants also happened to coincide with laws that limited immigrants from entering the country.

“I want to work with plants that are not behind the fences, like they are in jail, where humans decide where they want the plants, which can stay, and which must go,” she says.

Weeds decide for themselves where they will grow, like homesteaders settling in undesirable areas, or hardscrabble New Yorkers making do.

“We all the time speak about freedom, freedom of speech, and then the plants can’t have the freedom?” she asks. “We know that it’s a weed, and we decide that it’s not pretty. In a way, nobody looks at these as wild plants. But who decides what is pretty?” ●

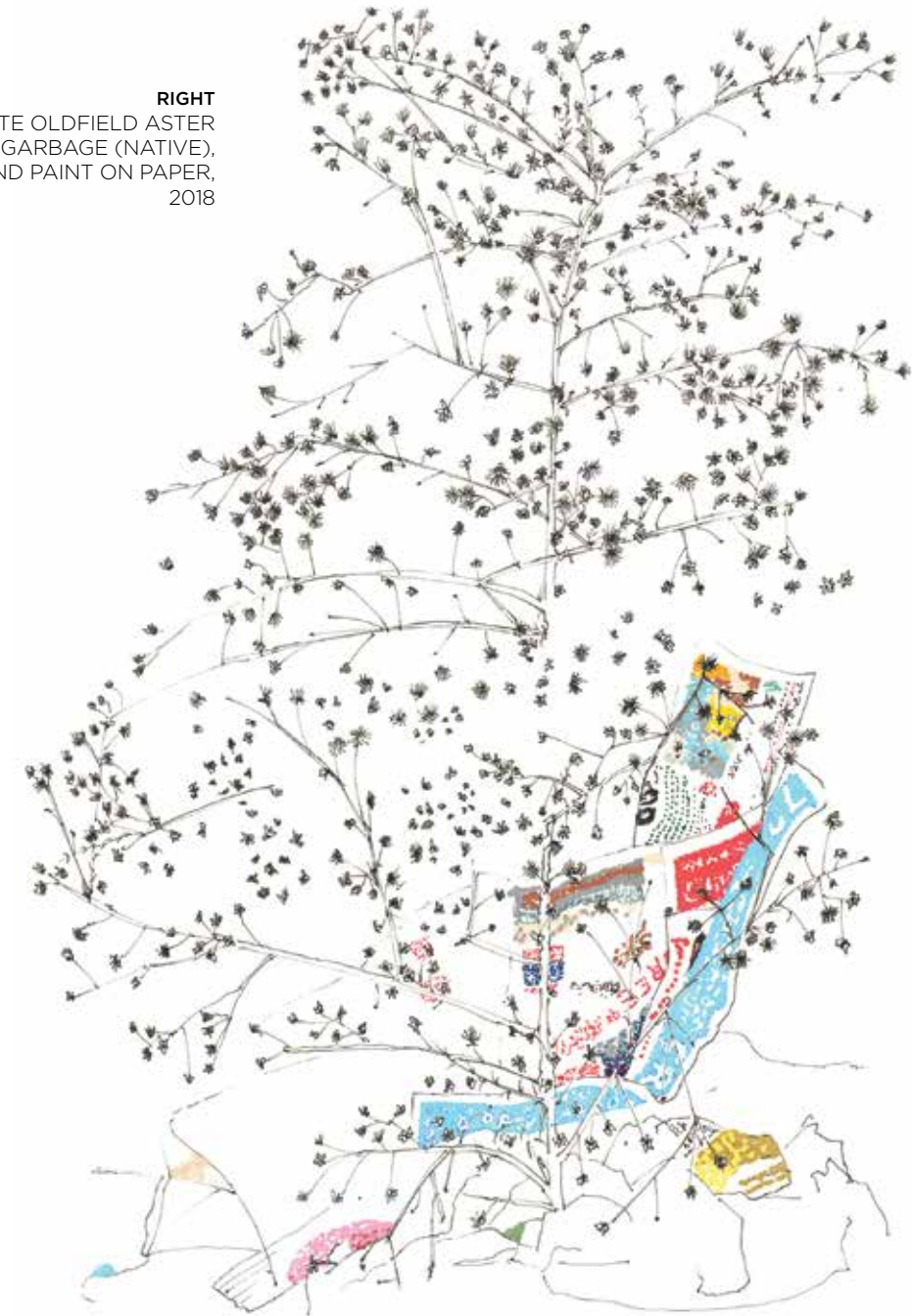
TOM STOELKER WRITES ABOUT ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND ACADEMIA. HE LIVES IN NEW YORK CITY.

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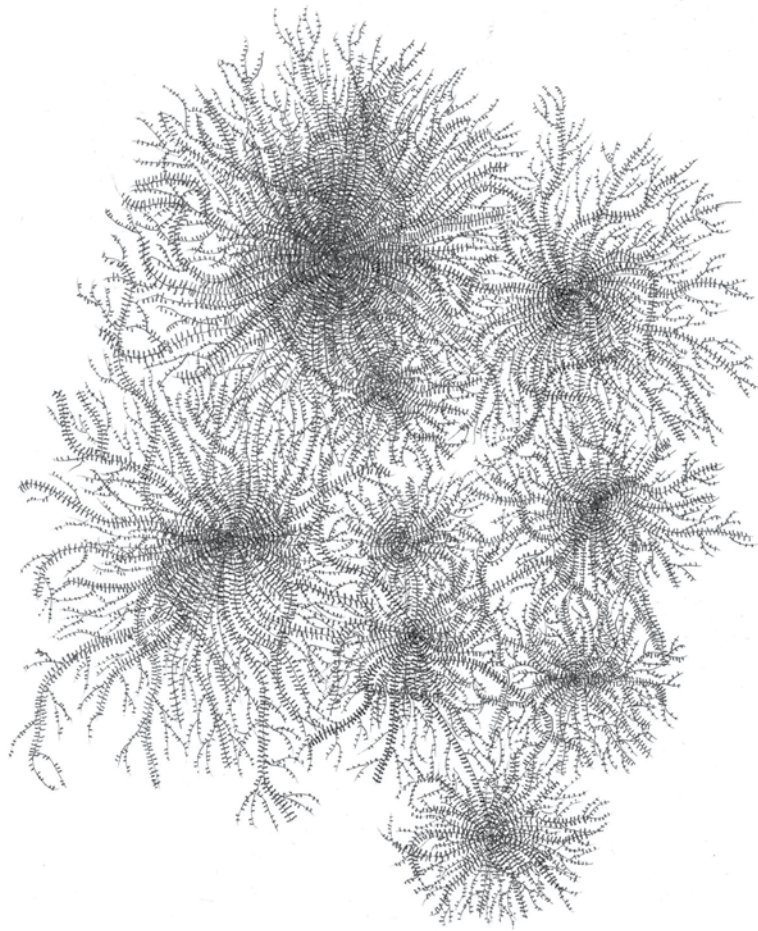
RIGHT
COMMON REED AND OTHERS
WITH GARBAGE (ALIEN,
INVASIVE, COSMOPOLITAN),
INK AND PAINT ON PAPER, 2018



RIGHT
WHITE OLDFIELD ASTER
WITH GARBAGE (NATIVE),
INK AND PAINT ON PAPER,
2018



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ABOVE
GOOSEGRASS ROOTS
BIRD'S EYE VIEW
(ALIEN, COSMOPOLITAN),
INK ON PAPER, 2018

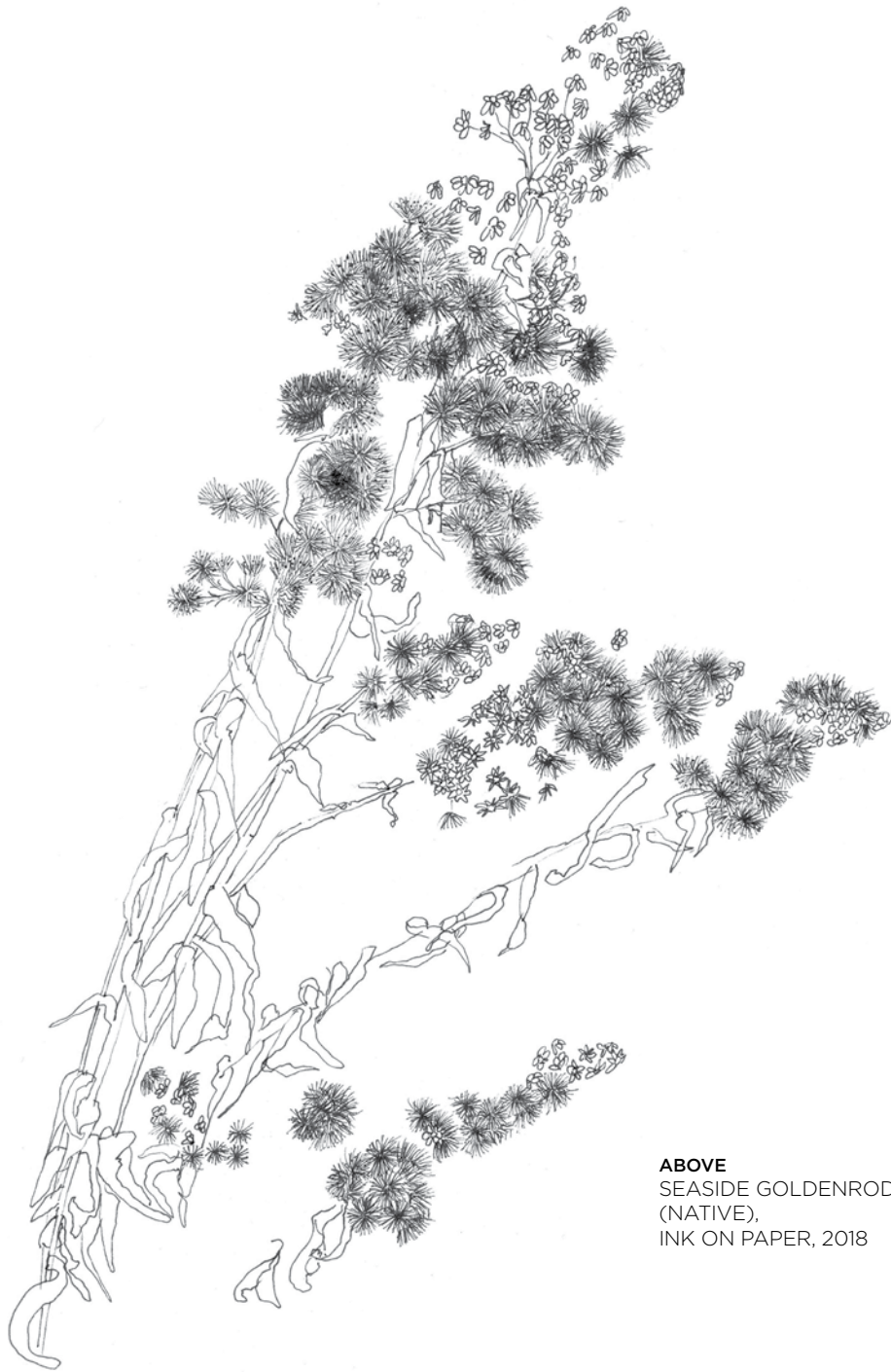


RIGHT
WHITE MULBERRY
(ALIEN, COSMOPOLITAN),
INK ON PAPER, 2018

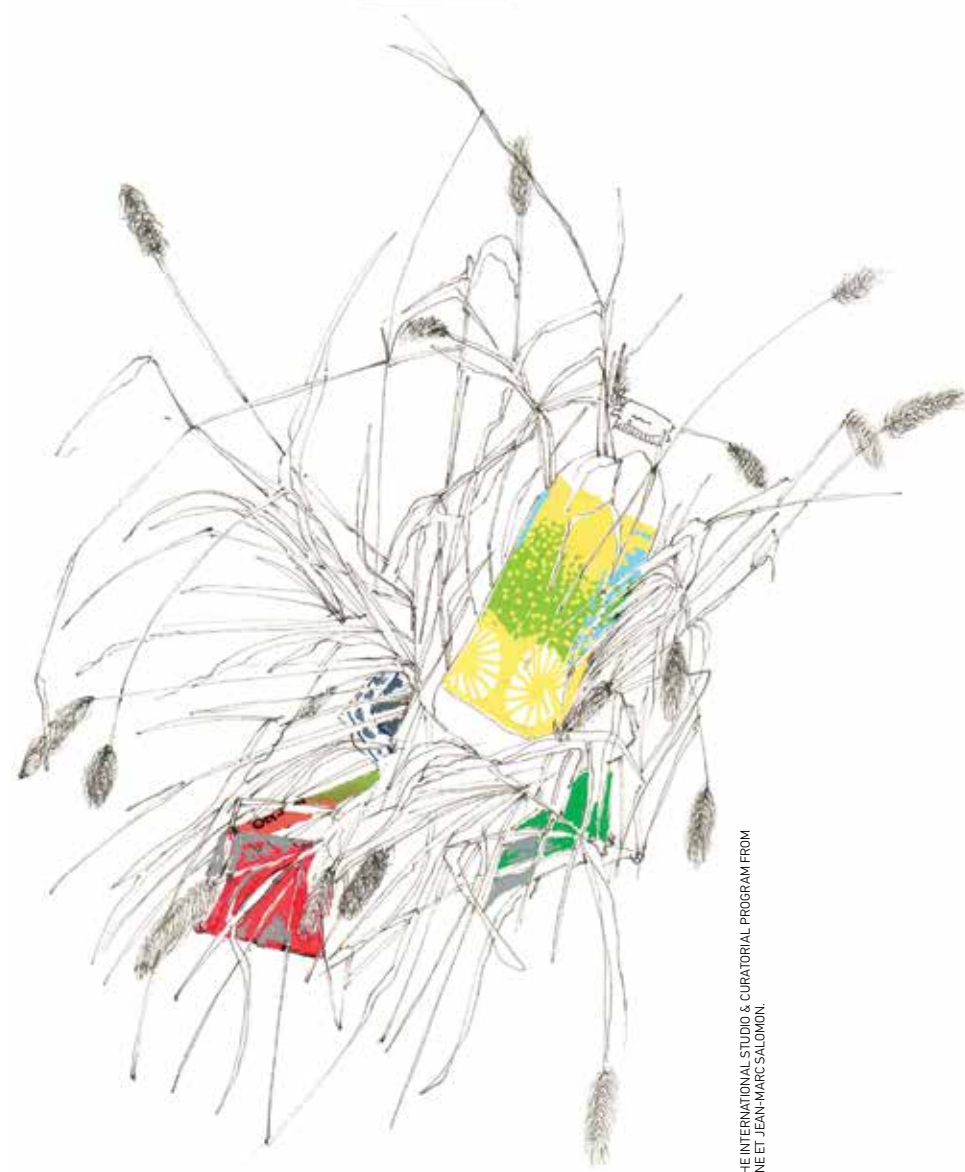
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LEFT
COMMON REED AND OTHERS
WITH GARBAGE #02 (ALIEN,
INVASIVE, COSMOPOLITAN),
INK AND PAINT ON PAPER, 2018

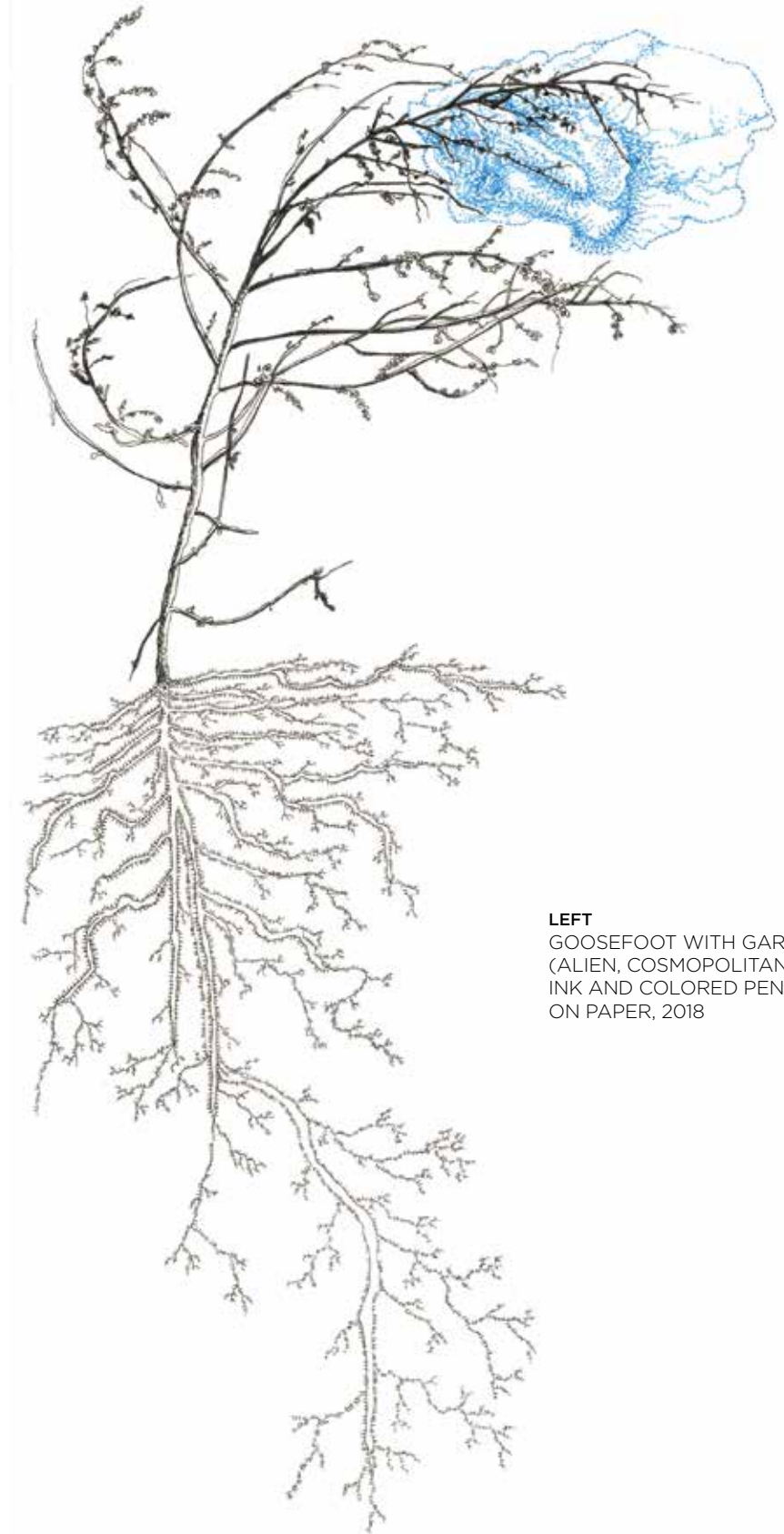


ABOVE
SEASIDE GOLDENROD
(NATIVE),
INK ON PAPER, 2018

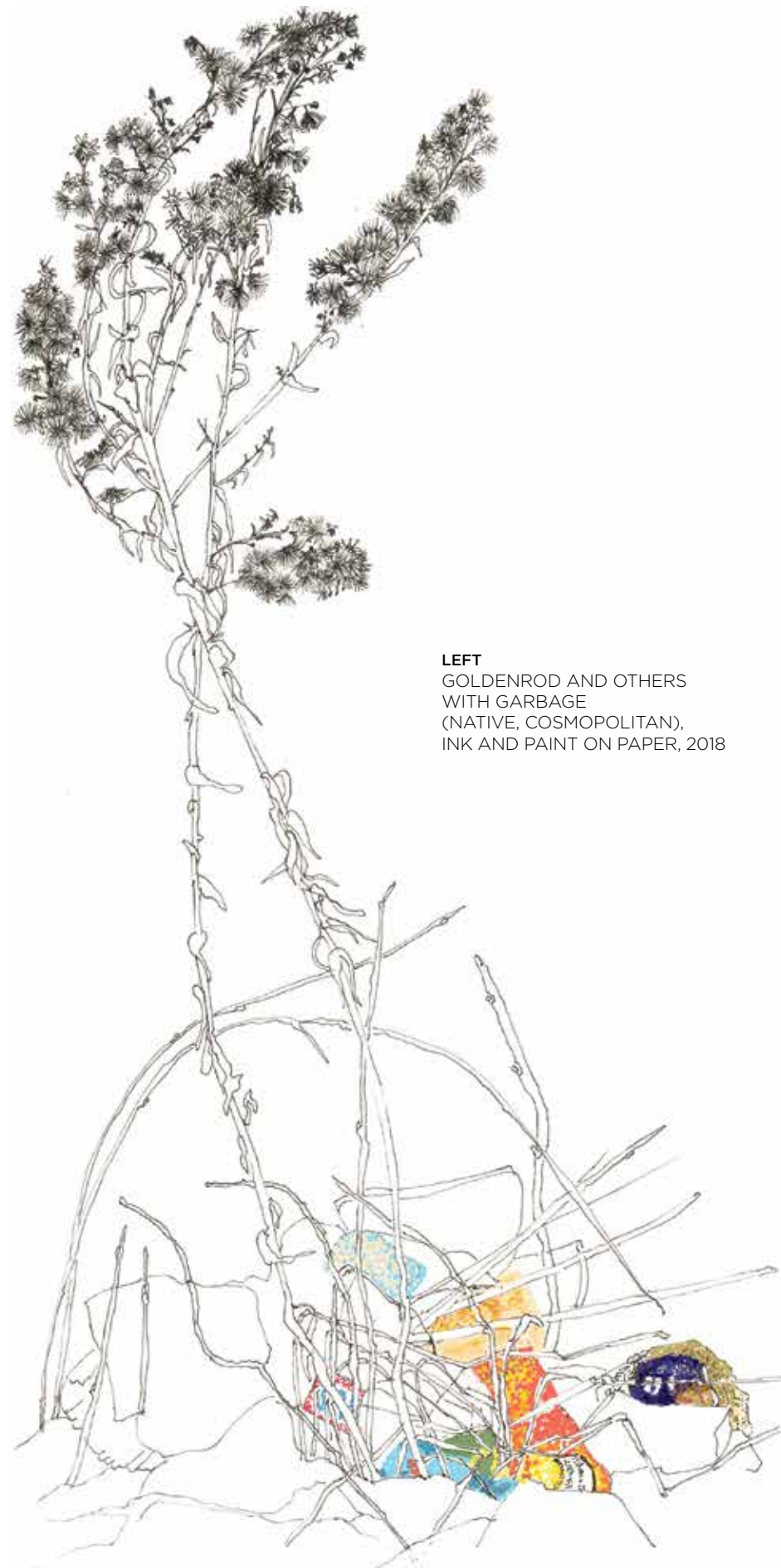


ABOVE
FOXTAIL GRASS WITH GARBAGE
(ALIEN, COSMOPOLITAN,
INVASIVE),
INK AND PAINT
ON PAPER, 2018

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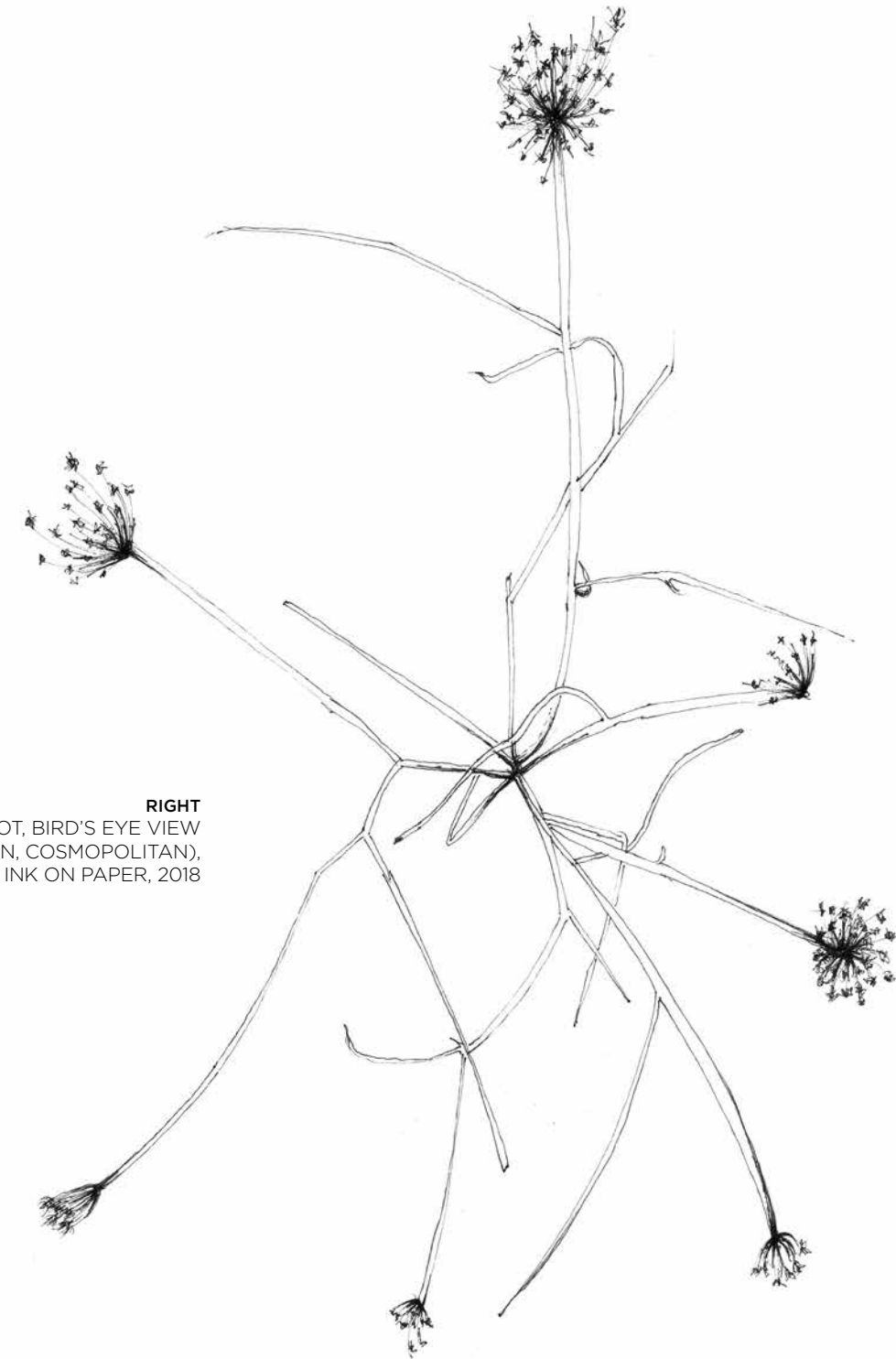


LEFT
GOOSEFOOT WITH GARBAGE
(ALIEN, COSMOPOLITAN),
INK AND COLORED PENCILS
ON PAPER, 2018



LEFT
GOLDENROD AND OTHERS
WITH GARBAGE
(NATIVE, COSMOPOLITAN),
INK AND PAINT ON PAPER, 2018

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RIGHT
WILD CARROT, BIRD'S EYE VIEW
(ALIEN, COSMOPOLITAN),
INK ON PAPER, 2018