

off the bay. Tall flatsedge, yellow primrose, and wild sweet pea—normally invasives—behave themselves in a cultivated patch alongside a rain ditch. Traffic control bulb-outs serve as mini gardens for the medicinal-smelling mugwort and sea-urchin-like spiny rush. For the first time, I walked along the high ridge, the “unkempt” end of the park that slopes down to Visitacion Valley, a neighborhood of modest homes and government housing projects. From a distance, I could see the nine-hole Gleneagles golf course, which a friend told me is one of the most challenging in the city as the green was built on a slope. As I descended the hill into the valley and walked along the street, a woman sitting in a car opened her window and shouted, “Are you lost?” a bit concerned, I think, with suspicious characters, but when I answered, “No I’m from the other side of the hill,” she smiled. We were neighbors after all. I had just checked out the community garden coming off McLaren Ridge, a garden it turns out, that her husband had cultivated for years. The weeds looked pretty dismal, snarling up the broken-down planter boxes, but the zucchini flowers optimistically blossomed in splashes of yellow, waiting for the garden’s slated renovation.

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Now they all come. The hipsters in their tie-dyed T-shirts for the Jerry Day concert, the early-morning walkers who clap their hands to get the blood flowing, the tai chi group who sweep over the tennis courts with long swords, the dog people who rescue the strays dumped in the park, the exhausted Asian parents with their two autistic sons holding small radios to their ears, listening to Latin music sung in Chinese. Blue herons, no longer skittish, wait patiently for me to jog past. The Canada geese break into the mallards’ pond home, eat, poop, and move on to the next migratory party scene. It’s true most who traverse this part of the city don’t directly appreciate the ingenuity of invasives. I was one of those people, until I met those who knew the virtues and faults of these botanical wonders. Now I see open spaces, especially McLaren, as a reflection of those of us who walk along the untamed paths.

Kathleen de Azevedo’s nonfiction has appeared in many publications including the *Los Angeles Times*, *Américas*, *Urban Mozaik*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Under the Sun*, and *Broad Street*. Her fiction has been published in magazines such as *Gettysburg Review* and *Boston Review*. Her novel of Brazilian immigrants in the United States, *Samba Dreamers*, won the 2006 Pen Oakland Josephine Miles Award, given to work exploring diversity and human rights issues.

HEARNE PARDEE

Corner, 2016

Acrylic and collage on paper, 19 x 25 in



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