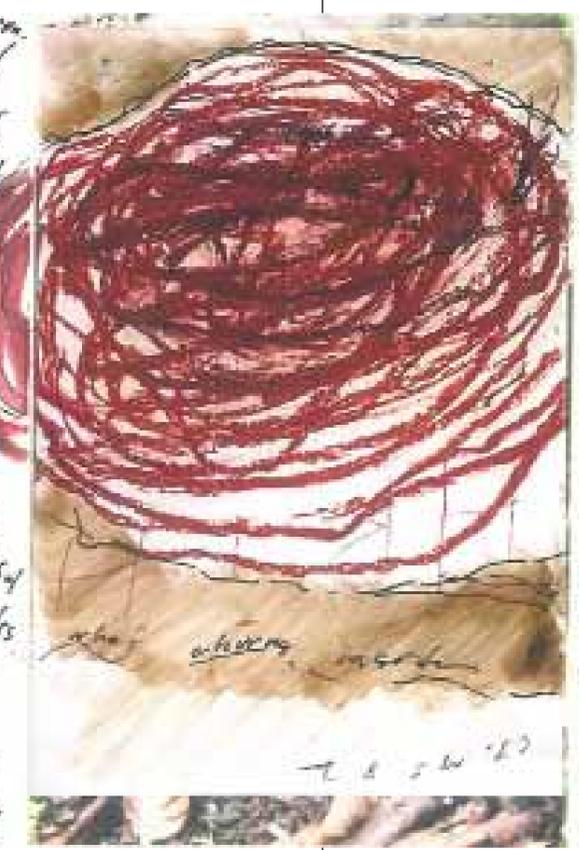


... area ... interaction ...
 ... facilitation or repressing ...
 ... dispersal vs. predator ...
 ... outplant cacti in different ...
 ... conditions ... new cacti ...
 ... impact zone - mechanical ...
 ... flattening ... could other break ...
 ... what happens ... for ...
 ... small areas ... add ...
 ... area of tortoise ...
 ... persistent ...
 ... cacti ...
 ... passage ...
 ... what tortoises are ...
 ... how well can they ...
 ... dropping ...
 ... of ...
 ... thermal logs ...
 ... movements ...
 ... everywhere ...
 ... big ...
 ... (beef) ...



Field Books

Working the liminal space between art and science

ART BY HARA WOLTZ
 TEXT BY ERIK REECE

ABOVE: Field Book 7. Giant Tortoise. After Twombly. 2007.
 BELOW: Field Book 6. Road Crossing Structures for Amphibians and Reptiles. Field Site. New York, 2006.



SCIENCE, I SOMETIMES THINK, is a language of explaining, whereas art is a language of belonging. These are complementary endeavors, not exclusive ones. Explaining is, after all, a way of belonging. And art, like science, is a way of understanding the world. However, it increasingly seems that the sciences and humanities are retreating into specialized vocabularies that make each discipline foreign to the other and both of them inaccessible to the general public, who nonetheless must be moved by science and art if we are to have any chance of forestalling catastrophic changes in the natural world. Now more than ever we need those rare individuals who can navigate both disciplines, the artists and scientists who can observe, represent, and call our attention back to the living world.

Hara Woltz is a conservation biologist who has studied the endangered waved albatross and the giant tortoise in the Galápagos archipelago, and she is an artist who has exhibited her photographs and paintings at Sotheby's in New York City and at the



ABOVE: *Field Book 15. Waved Albatross. Airports for Albatross. Galápagos, 2008-2009.*

FOLLOWING PAGE: *Field Book 15. Waved Albatross. They Fly to Peru for Breakfast. Galápagos, 2008-2009.*

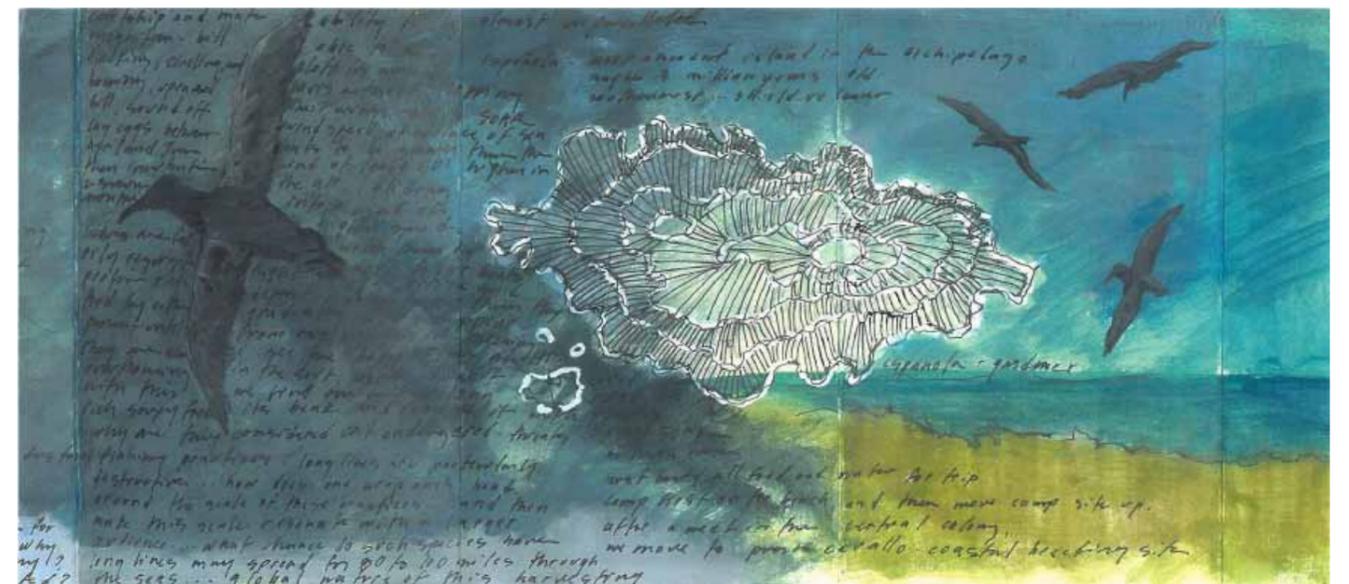
offices of the Union of Concerned Scientists in Washington DC. She has also worked as a landscape artist on several continents. All of her work seems to rise out of the understanding that we are witnessing, and often looking away from, the Sixth Great Extinction.

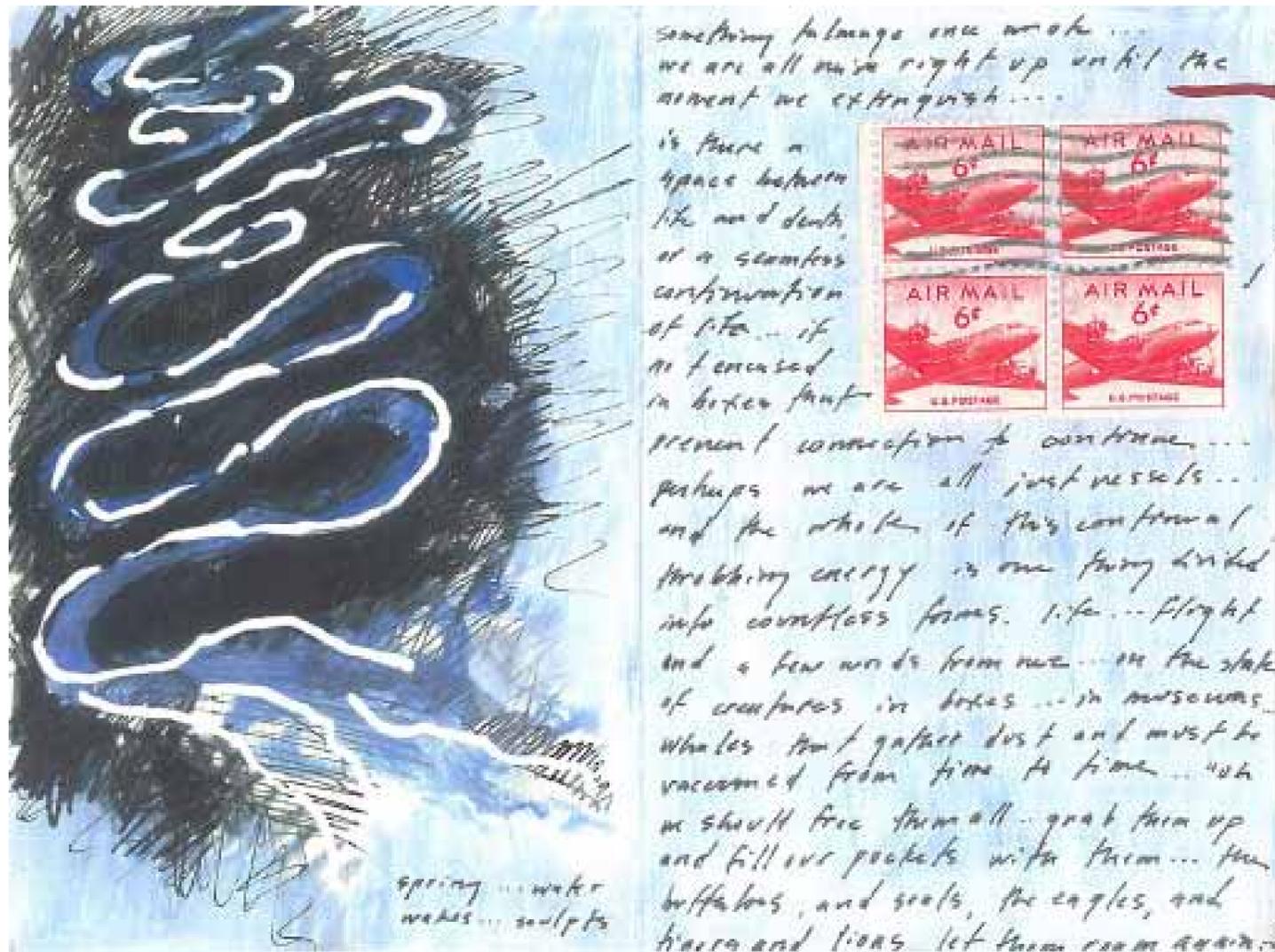
In her paintings, collages, and site work, Woltz is collapsing, or at least complicating, the boundaries between art and science in a way that is at once beautiful and useful. She moves easily between her scientific field books and her artist's sketchbooks, merging them into a new kind of text that dramatizes the liminal space between art and science, the sacred and the mundane. For this, Woltz uses Moleskine Japanese pocket albums, or accordion books, the pages of which unfold into sixty panels, allowing her to extend her thoughts and images along that continuous horizon. Each book is dedicated to a single subject—flight, decay, tortoises, stillness.

Recently, in the journal *Conservation Biology*, James Tolisano called on fellow scientists to stop dismissing art as “irrelevant” to their own work, and to instead recognize artists as “the new

naturalists.” It is the artist’s power of observation, he goes on to say, that “can lead to interesting ideas.” Certainly Charles Darwin was first a brilliant naturalist whose powers of observation, on full display in *The Voyage of the Beagle*, ultimately led to the insights of natural selection. It seems fitting, then, that much of Hara Woltz’s fieldwork has taken place in the Galápagos and has been supported by the Charles Darwin Research Station there. Woltz says that because both art and science “involve acute and careful observations of the surrounding world,” it makes sense that they coexist so easily within her own field books. In her works *Airports for Albatross* and *They Fly to Peru for Breakfast*, for instance, these observations take the form of field notes about the nesting behavior and flight patterns of the albatross, as well as careful drawings of the birds and the island they inhabit.

To understand Woltz’s accordion books, I think it helpful here to recall Roland Barthes’s distinction between a classical *work of art*, and a contemporary *text*, which cannot be classified under traditional genres or definitions. Rather, the hard-to-define, protean *text* relies, as Barthes said, on “the activity of associations, contiguities, [and] cross-references” that coincide with “a liberation of symbolic energy.” Woltz’s texts are challenging in this same way, asking reader-viewers to make, on their own, the connections and associations between the liberated symbols within her palimpsests. Woltz uses whatever is at hand—found material like maps, quotations, photographs, even the image of her own echocardiogram. Brought together within the same text, within a new context, these languages and imagery from art and science cross-pollinate in a way that poses questions a single discipline, or even a single form of





ABOVE: *Field Book 5. Notes on Decay.*
New York, 2007–2009.

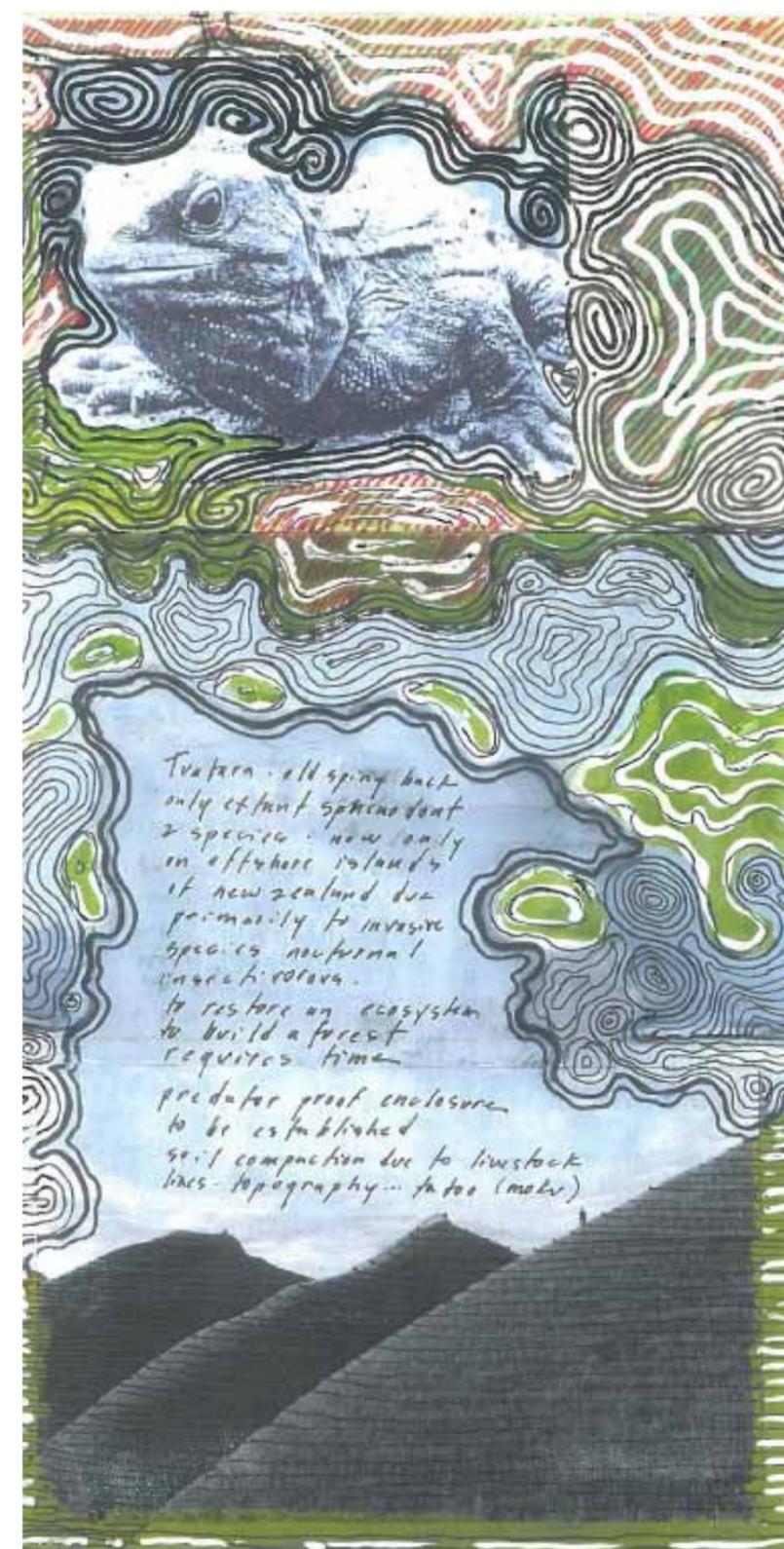
RIGHT: *Field Book 4. Tuatara.*
New Zealand, 2009.



representation, cannot fully answer. And the text is fundamentally about asking questions that the viewer must answer and act on.

Like a broken line painted down the middle of a road, these words, “more than 1 million vertebrates killed/day—American roads,” run vertically up the left side of *Road Crossing Structures for Amphibians and Reptiles*. To the right is the bloody image of a dead snapping turtle and the notation, “some run over intentionally . . . why?” More red is smeared across the background of the next two panels, and in the foreground we see an aerial image of Baldwinsville, New York, where Woltz worked on a site project to mitigate roadkill by installing tunnels that would lure amphibians and reptiles into safe passage below the human routes.

By moving her work off the page, onto the actual landscape, Woltz extends the definition of *text* even further to include the





LEFT: *Field Book 11. Notes on Flight.*
New York, 2009

physical world, where the artist might effect actual, physical change. Then that world gets translated back into the collapsible microcosm of the accordion book.

On the most elemental level, Woltz describes these books as her “mode of occupying the world.” It is a mode that employs the imagination to call us back to that world—to pay better attention to it, to better understand it, to better inhabit it. Near the end of his book *The Creation*, E. O. Wilson writes, “To be a naturalist is not just an activity but an honorable state of mind.” It is honorable, Hara Woltz suggests in her art, because such a state of mind is attentive, curious, reverent—capable of wonder and empathy. ☞

Like Orion? Visit orionmagazine.org to give a gift subscription to a friend.

BELOW: *Field Book 6. Road Crossing Structures for Amphibians and reptiles. Designing a Behavioral Choice Experiment.* New York, 2006.

