

NEWS RELEASE

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Outdoor Sculpture Invitational—Artists in Dialogue with Landscape on View through September at Adkins Arboretum

Full of humor and surprises, Adkins Arboretum's eighth biennial *Outdoor Sculpture Invitational—Artists in Dialogue with Nature* is on view through Sept. 30. As you walk down one of the quiet, forested paths, you may see a flash of blue where Julia Bloom's stick sculptures cascade between the leafy green branches or delicate silver sparkles where Elizabeth McCue's spider webs nestle in the grass of a sunny clearing.

Inspired by particular sites on the Arboretum grounds, nine artists from the Mid-Atlantic region have created work in close collaboration with the landscape. There will be a reception and guided sculpture walk on Sat., June 25 from 3 to 5 p.m. in conjunction with the reception for John Ruppert's photography show in the Visitor's Center.

In addition to his indoor exhibit, Ruppert is showing an enormous aluminum pumpkin. Sitting under a tree near the Visitor's Center, it's a casting of a 700-pound prize pumpkin bred for its enormous size. A symbol of the bountiful harvest, it's fun and it's funny, but it's also a clever way of calling to mind how hybridizing and genetic modification are changing our agricultural systems.

The influence humans have on nature is a theme that runs through this show. Set beside a bend in the creek, Melissa Burley's "Ripple" evokes the glitter and splash of moving water. In a world



Clockwise from left: Eliezer Sollins, "Earth Feeders #1"; Melissa Burley, "Ripple"; Ashley Kidner installs "Swalevine."

where drought and pollution are all too common, its flashing mirrors and brilliant blue transparent disks call to mind the color, clarity and beauty of fresh, clean water.

Ashley Kidner, who works as a landscape contractor, takes on the problem of the introduction of non-native plants into the environment with his “Swalevine,” a huge twisting rope of vines collected from the Arboretum. Eliezer Sollins also gathered natural materials from the Arboretum’s grounds. Standing cheerfully at the edge of the forest, his “Earth Feeders” are made of everything from hollow logs to seedpods to goat’s fur and are meant to decay naturally, adding nutrients to the soil beneath them.

Such creative responses to the landscape both celebrate nature and invite thoughts about how its complicated ecology is too often upset by human intervention. Bridgette Guerzon Mills’s artist’s books tell stories about the beauty and fragility of the ecosystem. In a meditation on the challenges both plant and animal species face in adapting to our changing world, one of them has pages made from melted plastic grocery bags that look amazingly like the book’s bark covers.

While these artists are concerned with nature’s vulnerability, its amazing vitality is also an important theme throughout this show. In the folklore of many cultures, dragons are symbols of the earth’s energies. Tucked around the corner of the Visitor’s Center, Marcia Wolfson Ray’s “Dragon” doesn’t exactly look like a mythical beast, but there’s something about its twisting, turning line of open cubes of sticks encasing bristling bundles of dried plants that suggests a dragon’s dynamic strength and vitality.

Gary Irby conjures nature’s presence as something much larger than ourselves. You’ll get a start when the twin mirrored “eyes” of his “Nature’s Watching” suddenly glint at you from the side of the path. It’s comical, but there’s a message here. Standing on the forest path, you realize nature’s not only a very big thing, but you’re totally surrounded by it and, in a very real sense, it is indeed “watching” how humans treat or mistreat the environment.

This show is part of Adkins Arboretum’s ongoing exhibition series of work on natural themes by regional artists. It is on view through Sept. 30 at the Arboretum Visitor’s Center located at 12610 Eveland Road near Tuckahoe State Park in Ridgely. Contact the Arboretum at 410-634-2847, ext. 0 or info@adkinsarboretum.org for gallery hours.

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Adkins Arboretum is a 400-acre native garden and preserve at the headwaters of the Tuckahoe Creek in Caroline County. Open year round, the Arboretum is the region’s resource for native plants and education programs about nature, ecology and wildlife conservation gardening. For more information, visit adkinsarboretum.org or call 410-634-2847, ext. 0.

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