

NEWS RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Jodie Littleton
Communications Consultant
Adkins Arboretum
410.490.6930
jlittleton@adkinsarboretum.org



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Unnatural Nature, Works by Howard and Mary McCoy, on View at Adkins Arboretum

Public reception is Sat., June 6

A young boy on a preschool field trip at Adkins Arboretum thought it was a dinosaur nest. A man riding by on a bike remarked, "If that's a bird's nest, it must be a mighty big bird." The "nest" they were talking about is actually a sculpture created in the Arboretum's forest by environment artists Howard and Mary McCoy of Centreville.

On view through Sept. 30, *Unnatural Nature* is the McCoys' ninth outdoor sculpture show at the Arboretum since 1999. Using only natural materials collected in the woods, they have created ten site-specific sculptures, each inspired by a particular place in the forest. The artists will lead a sculpture walk during the show's reception on Sat., June 6 from 3 to 5 p.m.



"Accumulation," as the nest sculpture is titled, was inspired by the way pine trees tend to let their lowest branches die back as they grow upward through the forest canopy to catch sunlight. The McCoys were fascinated by how many of the Arboretum's pines have stubs of old branches protruding from their lower trunks. It seemed to them to be an invitation to make a sculpture, so they gathered fallen pine branches and laid them across the broken stubs along a pine tree's trunk, creating something resembling an enormous nest.

"Accumulation" is among the works of Centreville artists Howard and Mary McCoy on view through Sept. 30 at Adkins Arboretum. The artists will lead a guided sculpture walk during a public reception on Sat., June 6.

“It’s a little mischievous,” Mary McCoy said. “We like to make you smile.”

There’s humor in many of the McCoy’s sculptures, particularly “Topped.” The two artists noticed part of a tree trunk stuck upside-down in the earth next to the gently winding stream of the Arboretum’s Blockston Branch. Realizing that it had broken off and fallen from high up in a dead tree still standing nearby, they decided to call attention to what had happened. They inserted branches gathered from the forest floor into the main tree trunk, pointing them upward as if they were growing there, but to show that the tree’s top had flipped over as it fell, the branches they inserted in that section point downward.

The show’s title, *Unnatural Nature*, comes from the McCoy’s practice of altering what they find in nature just slightly so that you often have to look twice before you realize you’re looking at something that’s not quite what nature would do. A woodpecker wouldn’t drill holes in a straight line and certainly wouldn’t make them all a uniform diameter. Vines wouldn’t grow in the shape of a cloud around a tree trunk. Consequently, their sculptures are gentle, low-impact works that will decay and disappear naturally with the passing of time.

The two artists started creating their works in March.

“It’s cooler then, and you don’t have to worry much about ticks and poison ivy,” said Howard McCoy. “And it’s especially good because the understory plants haven’t grown up yet, so you can see way back into the woods, plus there’s less chance of harming things underfoot.”

“By the time the show opens, the woods are full of new growth,” Mary McCoy added. “Which, of course, is one of the fun things about making sculpture here. Whenever you come to visit, the sculptures and the forest around them will look a little different. They just keep changing.”

This show is part of Adkins Arboretum’s ongoing exhibition series of work on natural themes by regional artists. It is on 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 additional information about Arboretum programs, visit www.adkinsarboretum.org or call 410-634-2847, ext. 0.

Adkins Arboretum 12610 Eveland Road P.O. Box 100 Ridgely, MD 21620
410.634.2847 www.adkinsarboretum.org info@adkinsarboretum.org