

NEWS RELEASE

For more information, contact:

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



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Close to the Big Pond, Paintings by Kathryn O’Grady, on View through Sept. 29 at Adkins Arboretum

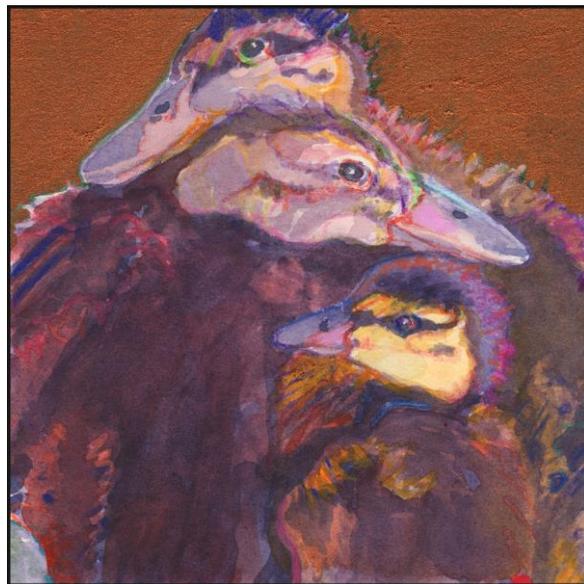
Artist Kathryn O’Grady will make you think differently about the flocks of blackbirds that are such a familiar sight in the Chesapeake region. In “Four and Twenty,” a series of blackbird “portraits” on view in Adkins Arboretum’s Visitor’s Center through Sept. 29, every bird is an individual with its own quirky personality.

In *Close to the Big Pond*, her show of oil paintings and watercolors augmented with crayon and metallic pigment, O’Grady zeros in on nature’s mind-boggling diversity and its irrepressible energy. There will be a reception on Sat., Aug. 12 from 3 to 5 p.m. to meet the artist and learn how she became so entranced with Maryland’s birds and rural landscapes.

O’Grady has always been in love with color.

“It’s a deep-seated obsession,” she admitted. “I remember when I found out that Crayolas came in more than eight colors when I was two or three, I felt like my mother had been holding out on me.”

Exhibiting at the Arboretum courtesy of Baltimore’s Steven Scott Gallery, O’Grady earned her BFA from Michigan State University and an MFA from the University of Texas and has shown her work widely in the U.S. In 1997, she moved from Texas to the tiny, rural town of Tracys Landing, south of Annapolis, where she has been painting the landscapes and birds near her house ever since.



“Panic, Mayhem and Ullabee” is among the paintings by artist Kathryn O’Grady on view through Sept. 29 at Adkins Arboretum.

“When we first moved here from Texas, my first overwhelming impression was I’ve got to find more colors of green paint,” she said.

As it turned out, she began to discover the many colors that underlie the green of plants and make it so lively. Like an Impressionist artist, when she painted an old tobacco barn sagging under the weight of a complicated tangle of vines, she did it with thousands of tiny strokes of scarlet, maroon, yellow, lime, pine green and shadowy blue. A riot of color and activity, it brilliantly captures how plants reclaim any building or field left vacant.

“I like seeing the plants take over,” O’Grady explained. “In Texas, it’s so hot and dry, it takes a lot longer for the plant life to reclaim the structures. Here it happens as soon as you turn your back.”

O’Grady had already been keeping chickens and peacocks when her daughter rescued a lost mallard duckling eight years ago and brought it home. Less than a day old, the exhausted bird fell asleep in O’Grady’s hand. Rather than put it in the aviary with her other birds, she raised it in the house until it was old enough to move to a nearby pond. Not long afterward, the duck returned, bringing along a new mate that she presented to O’Grady. The pair soon nested and began an extended family that still lives near the artist’s home.

“It changed the way I look at all birds,” O’Grady said. “I learned from my ducks that birds are individuals.”

In several portraits she has painted of her ducks, there’s no doubt of this. Each bird has its own distinctive personality. To make it even better, some of the portraits are accompanied by the ducks’ own stories engagingly told by writer Peter Guttmacher.

Throughout her paintings, O’Grady has a knack for capturing the vivacious energy of birds and plants, amiably conveying her awe of the indomitable spirit and incredible complexity of the natural world.

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. 29 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.

Adkins Arboretum 12610 Eveland Road Ridgely, MD 21620
410.634.2847 adkinsarboretum.org info@adkinsarboretum.org