

NEWS RELEASE

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Earth Matters, Mixed Media Collages by Fran Skiles, on View through Sept. 26 at Adkins Arboretum

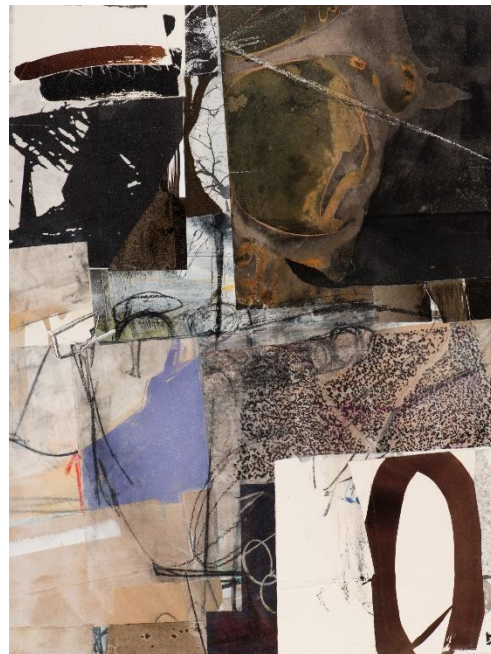
There's so much to look at in Fran Skiles's abstract landscapes that you'll want to linger over each and every one. On view through Sept. 26 at the Adkins Arboretum Visitor's Center, her mixed media collages are bold and energetic and full of fascinating intricate details. There will be a reception on Sat., August 16 from 3 to 5 p.m. to meet the artist.

With a masterful eye for composition, Skiles focuses on earth tones with occasional flashes of bright red, blue or purple as she deftly layers photos, paint, paper and fabric. She is deeply influenced by nature, especially the lush landscapes of Shepherdstown, W. Va., and Fort Lauderdale, Fla., where she lives. As she works, her images evolve, just as nature evolves. And just as landscapes are formed from a range of geological forces, seasonal changes and human activity, her collages incorporate many sources.

"It's intuitive," Skiles explained. "I don't start with an idea. I follow my instincts as far as color and shape, but my work is landscape based."

In the early 1990s, Skiles was creating art quilts. Intended to be hung on a wall, they were stitched together in a patchwork of different fabrics, some printed with photographs, some painted as one would paint a canvas.

One of these quilts, "Blue Fish," is included in the Adkins Arboretum show. A large fabric panel of glowing blue and shadowy black, it brims with activity. There are veils of color, scribbly marks



**"The Order of Nature," Fran Skiles,
mixed media/collage, 40" x 30"**

and sweeping gestures of creamy paint along with a wonderfully mismatched variety of textures. Some are visual—a photo of a fish with delicate scales, patterns of stenciled paint—while others are physical—neatly stitched seams, unfinished fringed edges of fabric stiffened with paint, and a section of coarse netting with metallic glints showing here and there.

The process of piecing quilts together naturally led Skiles to work with collage on paper, fabric or board. Although these multilayered works are abstract, they're full of animated movement. It's as if you had just caught a glimpse of the graceful slope of a hill, a bristling tangle of weeds, or an animal darting for cover. And they are full of mystery. Deep dark blacks give way suddenly to surprising patches of vibrant color or unidentifiable fragments of photographs. Semi-transparent Japanese rice paper half hides the washy stains and brushwork underneath. Everywhere, there's a feeling of solidity but also a sense of change that seems to speak of seasons and time passing.

When she works, Skiles has paint and drawing materials at the ready, but she also relies on a collection of what she calls "parts," different kinds of paper that she has already painted, printed or sketched on, along with photographs and pages from old books.

"I could spend a month or more strictly making parts," she said. "A really basic part of the work is to have this collection."

Pointing to a collage with a piece of semi-transparent Japanese rice paper spattered with ink marks, she continued, "I didn't create that for it. I went into my box of parts and found it and put it there. It's part no plan, part plan, but mostly no plan. I wait and hope the piece develops its voice so it will direct me what to do with it. I really depend on that, the piece itself asking for what it needs."

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. 26 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 offers educational programs for all ages about nature and gardening. Through its **Campaign to Build a Green Legacy**, it will build the **W. Flaccus and Ruth B. Stifel Center at Adkins Arboretum** and a "green" entranceway to broaden educational offerings and research initiatives promoting best practices in conservation and land stewardship. For additional information about Arboretum programs, visit www.adkinsarboretum.org or call 410-634-2847, ext. 0.*

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