

NEWS RELEASE

For more information, contact:

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

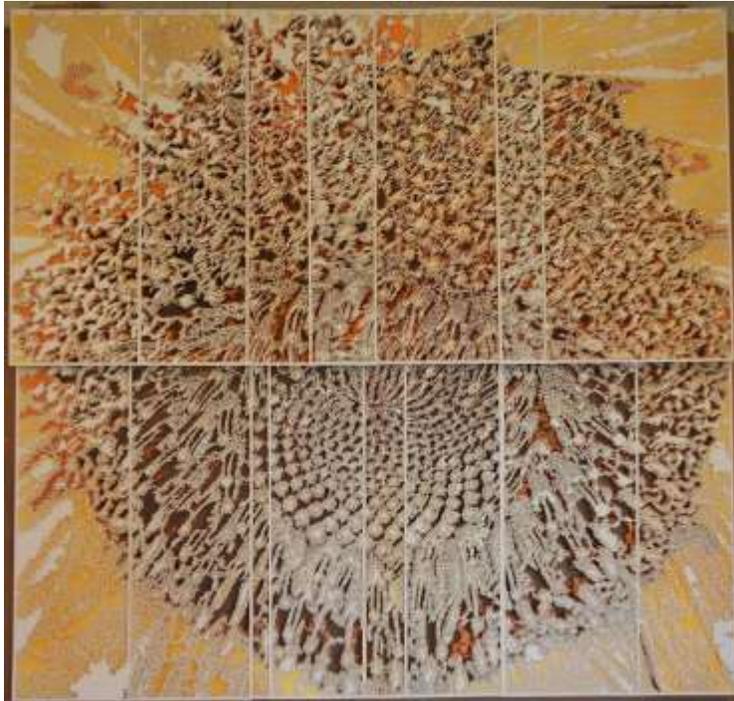


(RIDGELY, MD—October 6, 2016)

***Garden Abstractions*, Laser-cut Paper Sculptures by Blake M. Conroy, on View at Adkins Arboretum**

More intricate than antique lace, Blake M. Conroy's laser-cut images are beautiful and mesmerizing. On view at Adkins Arboretum's Visitor Center through Nov. 25, his extremely detailed images of corn, bees and sunflowers draw you in, yet close up, they dissolve into delicate webs of paper and holes. There will be a reception to meet the artist and learn about his fascinating method of working on Sat., Oct. 15 from 3 to 5 p.m.

Conroy's work hovers between drawing and sculpture. Working from his own photographs, he makes incredibly detailed drawings on his computer, sometimes creating three different drawings of the same subject. Then, instead of printing them, he uses a laser to cut the drawings out of paper and hangs them in layers, superimposed one in front of another.



"Sunflower (Sunspot)," laser-cut paper sculpture by Blake M. Conroy

Conroy, who lives in Sparks, Md., studied illustration at Syracuse University before earning a BFA in drawing at Maryland Institute College of Art. Although he works in a Baltimore foundry fabricating work for sculptors, drawing has remained his medium.

"It's been a progression," he explained. "I started out with pencil drawings, and then I went to cutting my drawings out of metal with a jeweler's saw, all by hand. My daughter got a job in the print shop of her art college and learned how to use their laser cutter. I had just spent nine months cutting a drawing out of metal, and she cut it out in paper in 90 minutes. So I got myself a machine."

This first laser-cut image is “Janus,” an image of a single butterfly shown from both the front and the back. Framed so that it hovers just above the matt board beneath, the drawing casts shadows as delicate as a pencil sketch. It’s a drawing, but it has a three-dimensional aspect and, like all of Conroy’s work, its extreme fragility echoes the fragility of nature itself.

Not long after, he was experimenting with creating a close-up image of a cornfield too large to cut from a single sheet of paper. Spreading it out over several sheets, he happened to overlap one above another and found the multiple shadows created gave the work extra dimension and depth. This led him to experiment with layering variations on the original drawing.

Conroy is fascinated with how we perceive images, how our brains make sense of the marks on a page, or, in his case, the paper and holes left by the laser. In his newer works, he finds incredible delicacy and complexity by zooming in on the complicated whorls of seeds in the center of sunflowers, drawing them so close up that they become almost abstract.

“I like playing around with that point where you know what it is but you don’t,” he said.

Just in the past three months, he has introduced color in works such as “Sunflower (Sunspot),” a large image with up to ten layers of overlapping paper cutouts that nearly fills one wall of the gallery. Shades of orange and buttery yellow show through layers of laser-cut white paper on top, giving this work a special depth and luminosity.

In a related series of works, Conroy reused the drawings he had made for “Sunflower (Sunspot),” cropping them differently and experimenting with dramatic combinations of colors in the lower layers of laser-cut paper. Orange tinges into red in “Sunspot Emergent Red,” while shades of white and pale blue-gray over dark, shadowy layers evoke ice crystals in “Sunspot Blue Haze.” In the mottled lichen green, deep blue, rose and brown of “Sunspot Polarized,” there seem to be secret levels of activity, almost microscopic in their complexity.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Conroy’s method of working is that he can use his remarkable drawings again and again in different ways to explore a wide range of moods and visual effects.

“I could get a hundred variations out of that image,” he said.

This show is part of Adkins Arboretum’s ongoing exhibition series of work on natural themes by regional artists. It is on view through Nov. 25 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