

NEWS RELEASE

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***Swimming in Eden*, Plein Air Oil Paintings by Cockeysville Artist Julia Sutliff, on View at Adkins Arboretum**

Like fleeting moments of pure joy, Julia Sutliff's small plein air paintings capture the sensation of being outdoors in a specific place at a specific moment in time. On view in the Adkins Arboretum Visitor's Center through July 3, her show, *Swimming in Eden*, is an exuberant collection of intimate encounters with nature.

This show marks the reopening of the Arboretum's indoor gallery, newly renovated during the Covid shutdown with fresh paint, new carpet and gallery lighting. A reception for Sutliff's work will be held on Sat., May 15 from 3 to 5 p.m. with refreshments under the outdoor pergola adjacent to the gallery to allow for social distancing.

Although its Visitor's Center was closed through the months of quarantining, the Arboretum's forest and meadows became favorite places for people seeking calm and rejuvenation in nature. Sutliff herself long ago realized that she feels better—and paints better—outdoors. Searching out whatever remaining pockets of nature she can find near her home in the suburban sprawl of Cockeysville north of Baltimore, she works in every season of the year.

One August day, she painted the dancing leaves of meadow plants reaching for the sky. In January, she captured the warm glow of sunlight shining through orange-red briers and, in February, the chill of snow on wintry trees. On a wet April day, she painted the spreading rings of raindrops falling into a pond in "Lily Pads in the Rain."



"Red Briers" is among the plein air oil paintings that comprise Julia Sutliff's exhibit on view through July 3 at Adkins Arboretum. Titled Swimming in Eden, the show marks the reopening of the Arboretum's renovated indoor gallery.

“It was pouring,” she said. “That’s why the lily pads are green in the middle. It’s water collecting in the middle and reflecting.”

Oil painting has been Sutliff’s focus for many years, but recently, she has been exploring the spontaneity she can achieve with pastels. Although the Visitor’s Center show is exclusively her oil paintings, a **companion virtual show on the Arboretum’s website** includes several of her pastels.

“Pastel is so much fun!” she exclaimed. “You know how they talk about the Impressionists’ love of pure color? Well, that’s what it’s like with pastel. Everything is pure color, so what you end up with is just sparkles of color.”

Sutliff was awarded an arts residency to teach pastel landscape painting in the spring of 2020 for the Young Audiences Arts for Learning program with Baltimore City Schools. Because of the Covid shutdown, instead of taking her 11th-grade students outside to work, she turned her residency virtual.

After sending a package of materials to each student, she showed them a video of her own hand speedily sketching a lively scene of a pond, and talked with them about how the Impressionists created a new way of looking at landscape painting by quickly capturing the emotional impact of light and color. Then she instructed them to make pastel paintings from photos of landscapes, completing them in only 45 minutes.

This quick, spontaneous method of working, which Sutliff calls “direct-response painting,” freed the students from any expectations of particular results and allowed their creativity free range. Fresh, vibrant and pulsing with color, their pastel landscapes were compelling, energetic reactions to what they were seeing.

“Most of them had never used pastels before,” she said. “The pieces they created were so amazing!”

“Part of my commitment to painting has to do with my commitment to nature itself,” she explained, “that it’s important to appreciate, respect and protect nature, both because our environment is an inestimable treasure and because it has the power to inspire, heal and rejuvenate us at all stages of our lives.”

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

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