

NEWS RELEASE

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***Wild Lines*, Environmental Sculpture by Howard and Mary McCoy, on View Through September at Adkins Arboretum**

Twirled around trees or swirling up from the forest floor, vines are the only materials environmental artists Howard and Mary McCoy used to create sculptures for *Wild Lines*, their outdoor show on view through Sept. 30 at Adkins Arboretum. On Sat., June 22, as part of a reception from 3 to 5 p.m. in conjunction with painter Lani Browning's exhibit in the Visitor's Center, the McCoy's will lead a sculpture walk and talk about how their work was inspired by the vines growing in the Arboretum's forest.

"We came day after day with a ladder and some tools to cut vines and pull them out of the trees," said Mary McCoy. "Instant art materials. You see them everywhere, sweeping up into the trees and doing twists and turns from one branch to the next, just like 3-D drawings or writing. We've picked up on that and turned them into sculptures that mimic nature's creativity, but in some slightly different ways."



Howard and Mary McCoy, "Scribble 1"

These two Centreville artists have been making site-specific sculptures in the Arboretum forest every other year for the past 20 years. In their recent shows, they've come to use only the materials they can find in the forest itself and chose this year to use vines exclusively.

Howard McCoy explained, "We work with the natural shapes of each vine, letting the curves and angles dictate how the piece proceeds or evolves, so it's a real collaboration with nature. The

way we've used them says something about the characteristics of the vines, like the grapevines are so thick and sturdy, you can't bend them too far or they'll break, but with bittersweet or honeysuckle, you can create some pretty tight curves."

Standing right beside one of the wooden bridges spanning the Arboretum's creek, "Scribble 1" is a three-dimensional doodle of bittersweet vines whirling back and forth around the twin trunks of an ironwood tree. Farther down the trail, several muscular grapevines form "Loop-de-loop." Curved and twisted like giant knots, these dark brown vines contrast with the pale bark of the triple-trunked white oak where they are nestled.

The McCoy's are fascinated by how natural forces are made visible every time a vine begins to grow up a tree. Even as it climbs a trunk, stretching up toward the sun, gravity is pulling it downward. Swirls and loops develop as the vine reaches to find one branch, then another where it can secure its hold. As it grows, its linear shapes evolve into a dance between gravity, stability and the urge for sunlight.

"Some of the visitors walking by when we were winding all these vines up into sculptures seemed to think we were a bit eccentric," said Mary, laughing, "but nature does some even more bizarre things with vines. Sometimes they wrap all around themselves in incredible tangles, sometimes they make beautiful huge sweeps up into the trees, sometimes they wrap around the trees so tightly they actually distort the way the trees grow."

Vines can take on phantasmagorical shapes, but they also threaten the life of the trees that support them. Their leaves can shade the tree's leaves so that it can't adequately photosynthesize, and their weight often breaks branches and pulls whole trees to the ground.

"We're doing two things," Howard said. "We're helping the trees by getting those vines out of them, and then making sculpture with that material, so it's a win-win situation. The trees are saved, and we get to make art."

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. 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 offers educational programs for all ages about nature and gardening. For more information, visit adkinsarboretum.org or call 410-634-2847, ext. 0.

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