



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Laura Vlahovich, Communications
lvlahovich@adkinsarboretum.org

From Grief to Repair: Mixed Media Fiber Art and Watercolors by Heather Kerley on View at Adkins Arboretum



Heather Kerley, detail from "Mourning Our Kin (23 Extinct)," redwork quilt, 77" x 63"

(RIDGLEY, MD—May 14, 2025)

Pale green and white stitching curls around a trio of beechnuts in a tiny hand-embroidered quilt in Heather Kerley's exhibit, *From Grief to Repair*, on view in the Adkins Arboretum Visitor's Center through June 27. Playful and gently colorful, it's just one of the many intricate textile artworks and energetic watercolors that she has created as meditations on loss and healing in the natural world. There will be a reception to meet the artist and learn more about her work on Saturday, May 10, from 2 to 4 pm.

Kerley moves easily from painting to embroidery to quilting as she experiments with color, texture and patterning. Her lively series of watercolors, “Re-Kinning,” explores the cycles of birth and death. With spreading washes and casually brushed shapes that suggest bundles of frog’s eggs, seeds, lichens or tiny blossoms, these small paintings are fresh, improvisational studies of the continual changes that characterize life on earth.

For the past several years, Kerley has twinned her work as an artist with the creation of a wildlife-friendly, native plant garden in her own yard in Bowie, MD. Most of the seeds and nuts stitched into her small “Seed Bank Quilts” were gathered there just as, for thousands of years, farmers and gardeners have saved seeds for the next year’s crop. Lovingly incorporated into the patchwork layers of patterned cloth and embroidery in her tiny quilts, they speak of regeneration and the continuity of natural cycles.

Kerley’s deep love of nature grew from childhood summers spent camping, canoeing and hiking with her family. Her parents’ involvement in conservation efforts sparked her interest in environmental issues, but although she had an early interest in art, she became a full-time artist focusing on nature just 15 years ago.

“It was only in the past few years that I became very involved in climate activism and combining my art with my passion for preserving a livable planet,” she said. “This rebounds on my work by inviting the use of found and upcycled materials and overlapping my art practice with my native gardening.”

The centerpiece of the show is her large quilt, “Mourning Our Kin (23 Extinct)” featuring 23 extinct species including a pair of perky Bachman’s warblers and a Little Marianas fruit bat hanging upside-down from a leafy twig. Taking her impetus from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife’s 2021 proposed delisting of 23 species from the Endangered Species Act due to extinction, she “drew” these animals and plants in stitches of red thread in the tradition of “redwork” quilts. A form of decorative needlework popular in the late 19th century that often featured nature-related imagery stitched with red thread on white or off-white cloth, redwork was an especially appropriate choice because the color red, a symbol of warning and danger, as well as of life’s blood, directly conveys her alarm at the accelerating decline in biodiversity worldwide.

As a child, Kerley learned to sew and embroider from her grandmother and mother. Her skills are evident throughout the show, including in her outdoor installation of a string of quilted and embroidered “Prayer Flags” with their crisp leaf prints and fragments of paintings on paper or fabric and in several small embroidery hoops filled with multi-colored clusters of embroidery very like the animated forms in her watercolors. In all these works, she evokes a tender attention to the inborn wonder and fragility of the natural world.

“For me, choosing to use stitching to explore our relationship with nature brings in ideas about mending, repair, connection, and healing,” she explained. “Quilts, especially, can be important and sometimes subversive holders of meaning that disarm rather than harden viewers due to their comforting associations.”

This show is part of Adkins Arboretum’s ongoing exhibition series of work on natural themes by regional artists. It is on view April 29 through June 27 at the Arboretum Visitor’s Center located at 12610 Eveland Road near Tuckahoe State Park in Ridgely.

For gallery hours or more information, contact Adkins Arboretum at 410-634-2847, or visit adkinsarboretum.org.

A 400-acre native garden and preserve, Adkins Arboretum provides exceptional experiences in nature to promote environmental stewardship.

###

Adkins Arboretum
12610 Eveland Road Ridgely, MD 21620
410-634-2847 • adkinsarboretum.org