

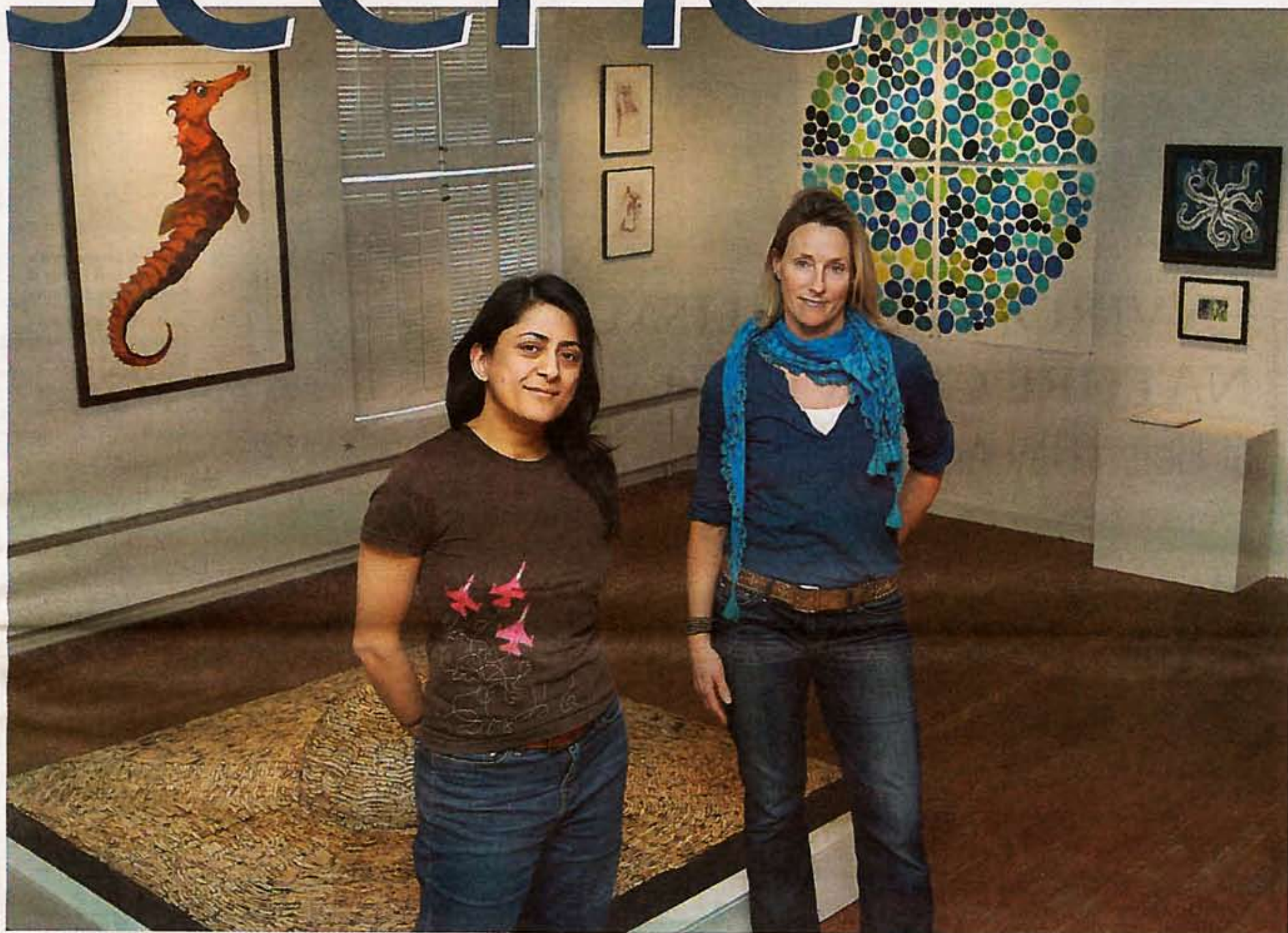
The region's best guide to fun, music, food, theater and art

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What's going on the week of **Thursday, March 10, 2011**

scene



ENVIRONMENTALISM, NATURE CONVERGE

at Helen Day
Art Center

Idoline Duke and Gowri Savor

March 4 - April 17

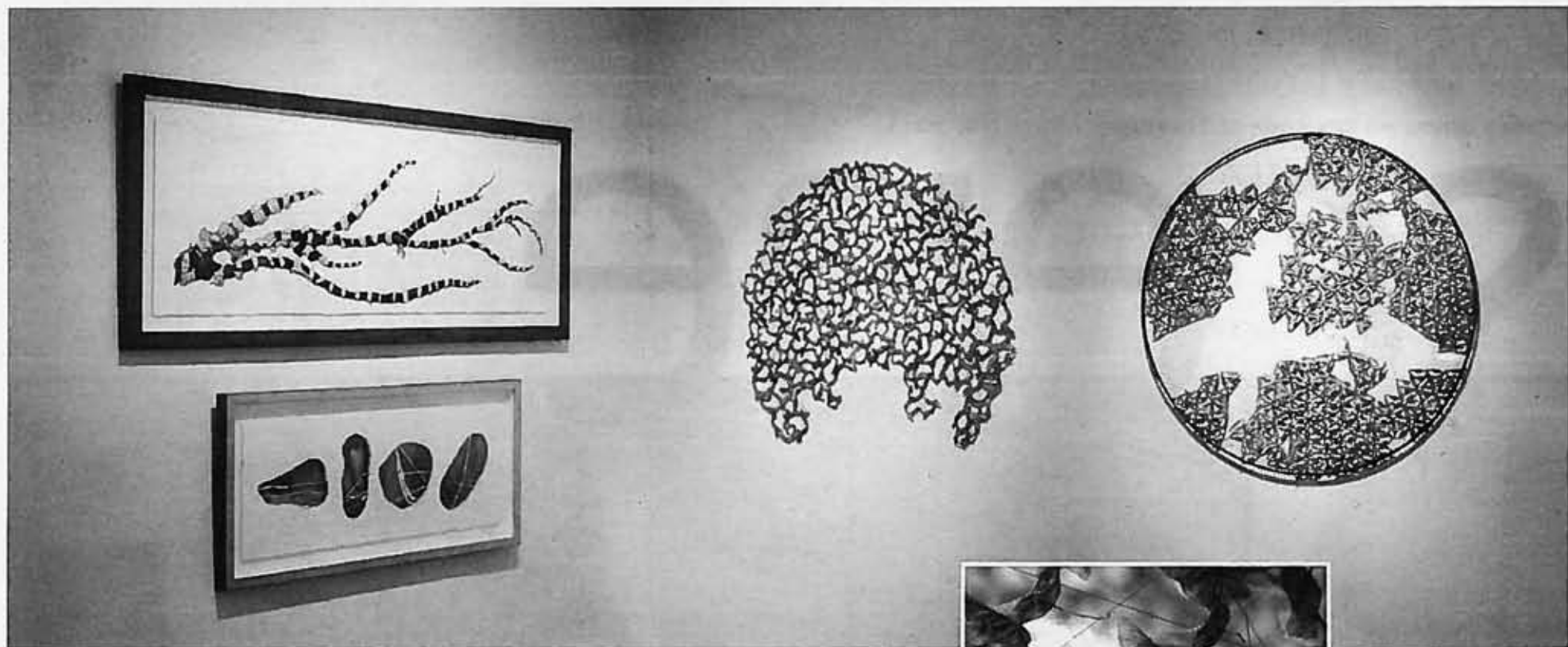
Gallery hours: Wednesday through Sunday, noon-5 p.m.,
and by appointment

Information: 253-8358; www.helenday.com



Photos by Glenn Callahan

Top, Gowri Savor and Idoline Duke, right.
Above, Savor's "My Acorn, My Oak" flanked by Duke's paintings.



Duke and Savor's work share the East Gallery of the Helen Day Art Center. Inset, maple seeds are connected with string and wire in this detail of a Savor piece.

ENVIRONMENTALISM, NATURE CONVERGE at Helen Day Art Center

By Lisa McCormack

The delicate scales of a seahorse. The fragile beauty of pine needles and acorn caps. The varied textures of limpet shells, maple seedlings and lotus pods.

All of these natural elements, some taken from the forest floor, others created with paint and pen, converge in the latest exhibit at the Helen Day Art Center.

Works by Stowe artist Idoline Duke and Gowri Savor are on display through April 17 in an exhibit that celebrates nature and offers subtle warnings about its vulnerability.

Both artists are passionate about the environment. Duke's love of the sea is evident in her wonderful watercolor specimen studies of aquatic life forms and her abstract paintings of flowers and water. While celebrating nature, her paintings don't have an overtly activist message in them.

"It's more of my emotional response to nature," Duke said.

Savor uses a variety of organic mediums, from locust pods to pine needles, which highlight the fragile and temporal quality of the natural world surrounding us.

Her drawings warn viewers of the destructive impact of an ever-increasing population on a dwindling supply of natural resources. In her "Tree House" series, figures sit below tree houses that become increasingly smaller, higher, and more difficult to access in each subsequent drawing, as the figures themselves grow larger.

In another, water towers are intertwined in tree branches, reflecting how even the most basic resources are becoming more difficult for much of the world's population to access.

Parallels

The artists first met in January when Helen Day Art Center Executive Director Nathan Suter thought the

common themes of their art — though divergent in materials and style — would fit well together in an exhibit.

"We just happen to be observers of nature and naturalists at heart," Duke said. "We have similar sensibilities and we like to be in nature."

Texture plays a heavy role in this exhibit, whether implied with a brush stroke or in the form of a sculptural piece comprised of organic materials.

Duke's lone sculptural piece, "Limpet Stacked," hangs from the doorway of the gallery. The white, gray, blue and brown shells are gracefully strung together and sway in the slightest breeze. Duke collects the ubiquitous shells during trips to the beach.

"Every time I collected more I had to restring and recreate it," Duke said.

Circles are also a common theme in the exhibit.

The shape features prominently in Duke's "Big Flowers," a series of three large 30 by 30-inch canvases with abstract flowers in vivid hues, and her "Summer Pools" comprised of bright azure, teal, turquoise, and green watermarked orbs that pull the viewer toward the canvas.

"I love circles," Duke said. "I don't think there's a more universal symbol — continuity, universality, God — it's endless. Drawing circles makes something settle inside of me. I go back to them again and again."

Savor uses circles — or variations of circles — in several of her works, too. In her sculptural piece "Adaptation," maple seedlings are bond together with cotton string and held in place with a circular wire frame.

"It's about man's relationship with nature," Savor said. "The whole thing is held in tension that reflects our role in nature."

Fragility

Themes of tension and the fragility of nature figure prominently in Savor's work. Most of her pieces are made from just three materials, usually a mix of manmade things she finds during nature walks.

"In themselves they're very fragile," she said, pointing to pine needles. Some are still green, others old, dried and brownish and glued to chip board to create a cube. "No matter what I do, the pieces will continue to decay. There's a human sadness as well, that everything will eventually die."

She describes her work "My Acorn, My Oak," comprised on hundreds of acorn caps glued to burlap on a steel base to form a womb-like sculpture as a "tactile, visceral experience."

"As a child, you'd stand close to your mother's womb for comfort," Savor said. "The tiny acorns have been abandoned. It's a warming and protective piece, but it's also sad as well."

Her most foreboding piece, "Burr," took two years to complete. It's comprised of black locust pods and seeds stitched together and attached to a piece of Typar, a material commonly used in landscaping to prevent weeds from growing.

"It's about poison," Savor said. "Lotus trees don't naturally grow here, but their seeds are transported by birds. The pods are ugly on the outside, but beautiful on the inside and poisonous."

The Typar does little to keep the pods from "growing" on the piece.

"It conveys the idea that there is this unstoppable force called nature," Savor said. "No matter how we try to harness it, we cannot."

Playful

Duke's work has a light, playful quality. Her specimen paintings — a graceful seahorse, the billowing tentacles of an octopus — aren't actual scientific representations drawn from natural studies, but rather interpretations of how she experiences the natural world around her.

"I look at photos and drawings and ask, 'How can I give this object a

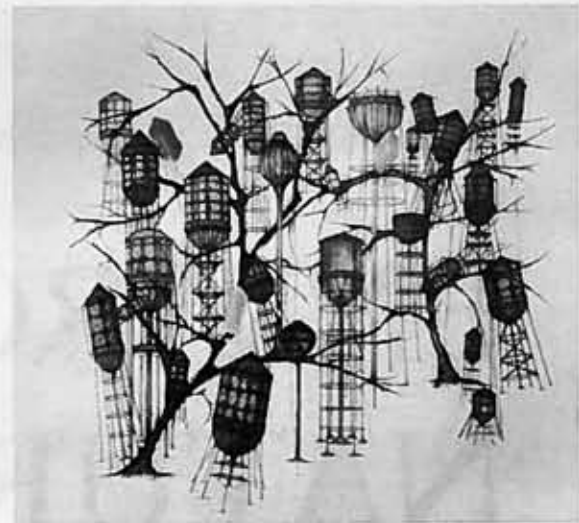
soul,'" Duke said.

The octopus, painted as if Duke were observing it from its underside, has an almost whimsical look.

"They're such strange creatures, so elusive," Duke said. "I was trying to capture some of the beauty of something that's not always thought of as a beautiful creature," Duke said.

Duke wants her art to reflect the peace and joy she experiences when she immerses herself in nature.

"We have enough agitation in our world," Duke said. "My art is more about creating peace and calm."



Top right, Savor's water-tower drawing. Bottom right, Duke's "Limpet stacked."