



Sam Van Aken, "Trees of 40 Fruits," acrylic containers, soil, aluminum, stone fruit trees.

### **Sam Van Aken works with living material**

From Staff Reports

Through a process of sculpting by way of grafting and pruning, each tree on exhibit, part of an ongoing series titled "Trees of 40 Fruits," has the capacity to grow 40 varieties of fruit from the family of stone fruits including peach, plum, apricot, nectarine and cherry.

The "Trees of 40 Fruits" are allegorical sculptures. Like the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, these trees represent the beginning of a narrative that transforms the site in which they are located.

The far-reaching implications of these sculptures include issues of genetic engineering, biodiversity versus food monoculture, and, ultimately, the relationship of humankind with nature.

One of the most challenging aspects of the work is the planning or envisioning of how each graft, time of blossom, and fruiting will change the aesthetic and balanced quality of the tree. It is at this point the process becomes sculptural.

In speaking of his project, Sam Van Aken said, "Nature poses a challenging collaborator. Where a bronze sculpture would provide an easier ally, working with living material can be temperamental. But it is this living quality that I feel gives the tree its greatest impact and potential."

Born in Reading, Pa., Van Aken received his undergraduate education in communication theory and art. Immediately following his studies, he lived and worked in Poland under the auspices of the Andy Warhol Foundation and the United States Information Agency. Returning after several years in Europe, Van Aken received his master's degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2001. Since then, his work has been exhibited nationally and internationally receiving numerous honors, including a Joan Mitchell Award, Association of International Curator's of Art Award and a 2009 Creative Capital Grant. Van Aken is currently an associate professor in the art department at Syracuse University in New York.

The exhibit is at Schmucker Art Gallery, Gettysburg College, 300 N. Washington St. in Gettysburg, Pa., through Dec. 10. For more information, call 717-337-6300.