

# Nature comes indoors

## Artist Jim Hatley uses nature's materials to present ideograms

The idea that art "imitates nature" or represents an idealized "reality," first formulated by the ancient Greeks, continues to influence people's thinking about art. James Hatley, a professor of philosophy at Salisbury University, challenges this idea. His concept of art is similar to that of the great Swiss modernist, Paul Klee, who said, "Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible."

Instead of representing nature, Hatley uses the materials of nature — tree branches, vines, and rocks — to create sculptures whose forms evoke ideograms (abstract representations of concepts or symbols) as well as

writing, such as the characters in Japanese or Chinese

calligraphy, or the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. According to

### If You Go!

**WHAT.** "Ideograms: Trees, Stone, Air. Recent works by James Hatley"

**WHEN.** Through Oct. 6

**WHERE.** Garden Room, Bellavance Honors Center (corner of Camden and Loblolly Avenues), Salisbury University. (Entrance is in the wing at the back)

**HOURS:** Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**CALL.** 410-546-6943 or 410-543-7635

Hatley, such abstract signs or marks transcend nature, expressing the essence of the thing for which they stand.

His sculptural assemblages, Hatley says, "are about how earthly things call for the artist's touch, and how the artist's touch revises and so renews the significance of earthly things." By removing these branches, vines, and stones from the outdoors, where we don't even notice them, and bringing them inside, Hatley calls our attention to their physical properties (their shapes, textures, and colors), as well as to the new relationships — in short, the work of art — that he creates from these materials.

In the exhibition brochure, Hatley briefly discusses each of the nine works. A naturalist as well as a philosopher, Hatley focuses primarily on the



Brice Stump photo

"Single Branch"

identification and origins of the materials, which come from such varied sites as his garden, the Appalachian trail, the Rocky Mountains, and various regions of his native Montana.

These works are infused with memory. Besides recalling where he gathered his materials, Hatley also refers to childhood memories associated with these places, to the friends with whom he traveled and the people he met, and to the history of these sites.

Hatley also repeatedly notes

"On the Eastern Front"



the relationship of the configurations of his sculptures to certain Hebrew letters, especially the letter "Shin," the penultimate letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which is imbued with varying degrees of sacredness, depending on whether it has three or four prongs.

"Branches Holding Air," for example, resembles a four-pronged "Shin." Consisting of four intertwined branches of mountain laurel inserted into a horizontal chunk of granite, it evokes a sacred landscape. Another piece, "Single Branch," which consists of a branch inserted into a rock, evokes both an elemental landscape and the archetypal symbol of the "tree of life," unifying heaven and earth.

Other works evoke the human or animal form, or nature seen close-up. The interlocking branches placed over a large rock in "Branches Flowing over Black Stone," for example, capture the effect of water in a swiftly moving stream.

Despite the rudimentary materials and techniques of these works, Hatley's sculptures are steeped in meaning. They are both deeply personal and "universal" in the materials they use and the connections they make between nature, ourselves, and the thought systems, both religious and philosophical, that guide the human quest to find meaning in the larger world.