



Ming Fay's switched-on, tripped-out installation at the Kresge Gallery on the Ramapo College campus consists of a dozen candy-colored capsules suspended from long, vine like branches made of wire coated in papier-mâché dangling from the 20-foot ceiling. It looks like a hive of wasp nests in trees, a toxic watermelon patch, or the Hanging Gardens of Marzipan.

Inspiration for the installation, *Ramapo Garden of Desire*, comes from the family of South American trees -- chiefly Amazonian - known as *Monkey Pots* after their pot-shaped capsules that hold tasty nuts that monkeys crave. In fact monkeys are so keen on the nuts that their heads sometimes become stuck inside the pots when they are trying to retrieve them.

"I was very inspired by this metaphor, and have created my own version of the Monkey Pot as a symbol for humans who are caught by their own desires," Mr. Fay, a Chinese artist living in New York, says in the exhibition room brochure. The metaphor seems apt, when more Americans than ever before are struggling with addiction and obesity.

Mr. Fay's pots are made from a frothy, marvelously messed-up cocktail of puddles of brightly-colored compressed foam. The material gives them a lurid, garish sheen, but also makes them light enough to sway ever so softly in the dispersed air as you move in and around the room. To touch or not to touch is the question, but a glaring wall sign puts an end to doubt.

Augmenting the garden atmosphere are budding coin-shaped leaves made from slivers of crumpled painted paper stretched over wire, along with clusters of delicious-looking grapefruit-size cherries made from wire, gauze and pulp. Gwa flowers, butterfly twigs and other symbolic plants are the inspiration for the foliage, which brings a touch of spring indoors.

The foliage also gives the installation the appearance of a Chinese money tree, artificial trees (often made of bronze) that sprout symbolic coins and notes from branches. The trees were popular in the Han dynasty, when they were often placed in tombs to provide ready cash for the tomb occupant in the everlasting afterlife. They were like a cosmic A.T.M.

But money trees, as a source of easily obtained or unlimited wealth, are also a potent symbol of human avarice, of our unending desire to acquire and consume. Even in death, Mr. Fay seems to be saying, we still hunger for prosperity.

And what of the complex relationship between humans and nature that this installation points up? Mr. Fay's crafty display of control over nature (his ability, say, to mimic tree branches, fruit and leaves) suggests we have begun to remake the world in our image, as a garden of desires.

*Ramapo Garden of Desire* is one of the most tough-minded, brain-expanding artworks on view anywhere right now. That it is at a college gallery is especially good news, for it shows that long-standing (if long-slumbering) traditions of campus radicalism are alive, awake and kicking hard.