**Art exhibit asks students to be part of “experiment of sorts”**

**KATHRYN GANFIELD**

[**ul5097yl@metrostate.edu**](mailto:ul5097yl@metrostate.edu)

A new art exhibition in the Gordon Parks Gallery at Metropolitan State transforms the space into a “temporal classroom” that invites viewers to ponder their educational experiences. “How Do We Remember?” features objects and mixed media works by Kinji Akagawa, a retired professor of sculpture at Minneapolis College of Art and Design. His artwork is also in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and the Walker Art Center.

Professor of Studio Arts and director of the gallery Erica Rasmussen noted this is an unusual show by Akagawa, who is best known for his outdoor sculptural installations. “I invited him to look at our space and asked what he would like to do,” Rasmussen said. “He’s been collecting desks and thinking about the role of education in our lives. He wanted to make an experiment of sorts.”

The result is an interactive, playful exhibition of vintage student desks and mixed media works on paper. To put visitors in a reflective state of mind, Akagawa altered the gallery signs to read “Gordon Parks Temporal Classroom.” He uses universal symbols and tools of education— desks, paper, pencil, ink, rulers, tape, thumbtacks—to explore how we educate and how we learn.

Visitors are encouraged to sit in the desks and investigate the words laser-etched into their surfaces. Akagawa plays with words, fonts and font sizes. Some words are written large and deeply cut into the desk surfaces. Some are tiny and broken into component syllables; “making” becomes “ma king.”

Rasmussen noted that the arrangement of desks will vary each week. “Kinji is asking us: what happens if we rearrange the structure of the classroom? It’s not a one way street. Learning happens in more than one way,” she said.

On the gallery walls, mixed media works show desks broken apart and tumbling in space. Rendered in colored pencil, watercolor, and neon highlighter markers, they represent “ruminations of Kinji’s,” said Rasmussen “He’s turning education on its heels. Look how he’s drawn desks from every angle and disassembled them.”

“I grew up with this,” said Timothee Ayigah, an accounting major who works as a gallery attendant. He sat in one of the vintage wooden desks. Raised in Togo, he moved to Minnesota four years ago. Memories of his childhood and education—a half a world away—poured from him as he toured the exhibition. “These desks remind me of my elementary school. Students would write on the desk surface – math formulas or little stories. Or they’d stick gum under the edge,” Ayigah said with a laugh.

The exhibition was installed by students in Rasmussen’s ARTS 302 group internship in exhibition practices. “The class gives students the chance to handle two-dimensional and three-dimensional works. I want to mix it up for them and give them broad experience,” she said. The interns will also rearrange the desks during the run of the exhibition. “Who knows what configuration it will take then?” Rasmussen said.

“How Do We Remember?” is on view until February 24, when it will be dissembled and every object sold for a flat fee of $50. “That’s a bargain! $50 for a Kinji Akagawa,” Rasmussen said. He’s an artist of the highest caliber. He’s collected by museums. But he would like you—students— to take something home.”

Rasmussen encouraged students to visit the exhibition to reflect on their own journey from childhood to Metro State. “Go sit in the tiniest desk. It takes you back. It makes you small again,” she said.

The gallery is located on the third floor of the Library and Learning Center; hours are 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday. Admission is free.