



Kazuo Kadonaga coaches students from Buton Middle School on sculpting with natural materials.

'EERIE BEAUTY'

Artist shows pupils how to sculpt twigs, rocks into art

By Ed Golder

Seventh-grader Robert Dean made his sculpture out of wildly twisted styrofoam strings that he stuck into a burr and perched on the end of a long twig. It looked like somebody's terribly unkempt head. He called it, "My brother when he wakes up in the morning." Although it wasn't one of the more aesthetic efforts at the Grand Rapids Art Museum Friday afternoon, Robert's mostly natural artwork made Kazuo Kadonaga smile. It is precisely the sort of thing the Japanese sculptor does himself. Kadonaga spoke to some 36 youngsters, representing all five of the middle schools in the Grand Rapids system, as part of the Artists' Profile Program, sponsored by Grand Rapids Public Schools. Kadonaga showed the students his unique artwork, and coached them in the fineries of sculpting with natural materials. He also brought along a sampling for the

museum's gallery. His sculptures consist of a dozen or so wooden honeycombs, draped with silkworm threads, with the cocoons that spun the thread inside the combs. The worms did most of the work themselves, and Kadonaga killed them with heat when he thought the sculpture looked right. The fact that Kadonaga speaks no English emphasizes that "Art is universal," said Barb Lindquist, coordinator of the profile program. The way the seventh and eighth graders took to the natural materials laid before them proved her point. Speaking through an interpreter, "Growing Colder." Other creations were called "Chairman of the Board," "Woodmouse," and "Student's View of Teacher," which depicted an ugly face made from sticks and milkweed pods. "A lot of the teachers at our school are strict," explained sculptor Tongsop Kim, an

eighth-grader at City High-Middle School. Westwood Middle School art teacher Don Fontaine was impressed by his students' originality. "You just don't know what they're going to come up with," he said. "Look at how intent they are. These three right here are the most talkative in the building," Fontaine said, pointing to three girls engrossed in their work. "They're not Pat Sachen, art teacher at Iroquois Middle School agreed. "Everything is so plastic and bought today," Sachen said. "It's good for the kids to know they can find art materials just walking through the woods." Cindy Stewart, an eighth grader from Westwood Middle School, said that until the session with Kadonaga she had only a passing interest in art. After working with the Japanese artist, she said she's come to recognize the medium's creative possibilities.

"You can combine a whole bunch of stuff and it turns out nice," Stewart said. "It's really original... I like to be original." She made a sculpture out of pebbles and driftwood that looked like a Lake Michigan beach. Its name: of Tokyo. It was there, "surrounded by beauty," that the young artist-to-be fell in love with nature. When, in his mid-20s, he took up sculpting full time, he incorporated natural hallmarks of Japanese life like the silkworm down into his work. His sculptures, now housed in a Los Angeles studio, have met with critical acclaim in the United States. A Los Angeles Time review said his silkworm art is filled with an "eerie beauty." Another review from "Artweek" said, "Since the early 1970s, Kadonaga has been devising ingenious ways to reveal the essence of natural materials."