
CAPTURING THE
SCENT OF RAIN

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Photo Credits:
Site Installation Images: Takashi Hatakeyama
Detail Images: Colin Conces

Printed in the United States

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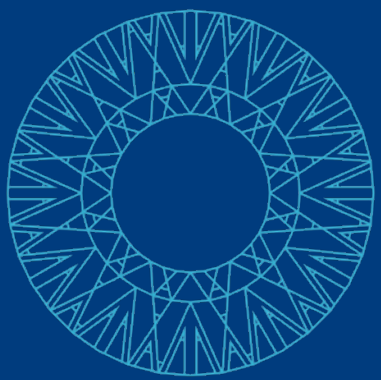


CAPTURING THE SCENT OF RAIN

This exhibition is curated to maximize the relationship between Jun Kaneko's sculpture and Frank Lloyd Wright's David Wright House as one visual experience and explore their dynamic interactions in the desert's infinite variations of light — experimentation in erasing the boundaries between art, architecture and nature.

"To make a visual object out of any material involves two basic concerns. One is the energy to make the object– the other is craftsmanship to construct the ideas... It is my hope, someday, that I would become as close to the material so there would be almost no distance between the material and myself. I hope to become one with the material, to feel what the material is feeling."

— Jun Kaneko

RAINING INDIGO

History is largely a story of human migration. Centuries of our physical movement blend our cultures and customs, philosophies and aesthetics. One can find parallels in the ideas of Frank Lloyd Wright and Jun Kaneko. With a drive for personal challenge and an appetite for experimentation these two bold creators constructed their personal migrations to span their inherited and appropriated cultures to form a new personal creative vocabulary.

Their respect for the raw quality of material and express it honestly in their work. Both creators understand the meaning and history of their materials and in the end transcend its defining qualities and elevate it into a new unified concept. Their works are immediately recognizable in their distinct visual vernacular yet maintain complete conceptual freedom to respond uniquely to each individual project. Guided by singular uncompromising vision, dedicated technical mastery, driven work ethic and an open mind these two artists embrace diversity and amalgamate it in a personal crucible of their craft like a self portrait.

They both pushed the limits of their materials and concepts to realize their vision. Since moving to the United States Jun has melded his Japanese heritage with his immersion in contemporary western ceramics and his origins as a painter with his development as an artist. His sculptures push the limits of what it is possible to do with clay and perform as his abstract and figurative canvases. The Dango forms are actually built upside down initially, so where they touch the ground is almost invisible, like a horizon. Their top presents a similar infinity and their ovoid shape invites you to explore the other side creating a spiraling observation pattern. Jun's hope is this feeling aligns with Frank Lloyd Wright's design for people's movement through the David Wright House.

This raining blue indigo glaze is the result of 20 years of development. While his ceramic body and glazes are very technical his use is to encourage their free expression in the kiln firing process. Different formulas, layers and applications each reveal unique results. Each piece is glazed and positioned in the kiln to play with gravity and chemistry while the slips and glazes are alive & molten. For him this is an intriguing way to work with and capture the fascinating potential and essence of the materials.

During his 1996 residency at European Ceramic Work Center in the Netherlands, Jun encountered some new low-fire glazes. In the seventeenth century the Dutch, maritime world explorers, returned from China with these blue and white porcelain glazes. The Chinese developed the glazes during the sixth and seventh century where they were treasured by the emperor, his court and the elite of the era. This passion for the glazes migrated to the Dutch artists who in turn applied them to their ceramics in the exacting representational scenes that grew into their signature Delftware pottery style.

Jun was fascinated with these ancient glazes but chose to break their rules of use to encourage their inherent propensity for movement during the firing process due partially to the presence of lead. He performed extensive tests pushing its qualities with layering, thicknesses, formulas and positioning the artworks during the firing to achieve many unique expressions of sheeting and color separation. He did everything you were not supposed to do.

At the end of his residency, he wanted to bring these glazes to his studio in Omaha, Nebraska to continue working with them but it was illegal to import this heavily leaded glaze into the United States. Unfortunately, soon after, the company that made it ceased production due to the presence of the element. Over 20 years of recurrent experimentation Jun developed his own lead-free indigo formulas and his efforts are culminating in these sculptures.

Jun's broader creative philosophy posits that nothing exists alone in its environment. All objects exist in balance or contrast with one another and space is a primary element of their connection. Static objects are actually very dynamic in their relationship to their environment, changing light and shadow, seasons and people's movement.

Shakkei, an important concept in Japanese garden design, means "borrowed scenery" and is the principle of "incorporating background landscape into the composition". The design must also acknowledge the viewer's movement within and outside the site and from various architectural perspectives. The composition should equally invite mental contemplation and flow from distant and intimate proximities.

When Jun first visited the David Wright House he said "this feels like a traditional Japanese home." Japanese architecture blurs the boundaries between nature, architecture and

sculpture and Wright's design is so beautiful as it is, the challenge for Jun as an artist is to make a strong exhibition without disturbing that existing beauty. He needed to do as little as possible to make a statement with this amazing environment; to have a minimal impact while engaging everything. Trying to stay simple was a challenge.

One of Jun's curating goals is for the house and the sculptures to invite views that reciprocally frame each other. The approach from the garden entrance is of particular importance; how the placement of the pieces relate to everything as you move through the grounds towards the house as a focal backdrop. Each step gives the viewer a different angle and visual relationship with the David Wright House, landscaping and mountains. Rather than position the sculptures as heroic focal terminations, they respond organically with the architecture's flowing dynamic angles and with it accept the shifting color and intensity of light throughout the day and into evening.

The relationships that emerge while viewing the exhibition are as infinite as the vectors of a circle. Architect and artist's unique personal cultural hybrid, exquisite use of scale, sweeping awareness of perspective, appreciation of raw materials, immense energy and work ethic enable them to realize visionary site sensitive works that seem to effortlessly elevate aesthetics and natural order to a new understanding.

— *Susan Schonlau*

"How to Live in the Southwest"

Frank Lloyd Wright, viewed by many as America's greatest architect, observed that creative artists could both learn from nature and from past cultural traditions, even as they experiment with new technologies. His early work in the Chicago area was a celebration of the strong horizontal lines of the prairie, the geometric forms of the native plants, and the natural materials of stone and wood present in the surrounding area. Simultaneously, Wright drew upon aesthetic traditions in both Asia and Europe that he felt were sympathetic to these ideas. Japanese art and architecture specifically were subjects of great interest for Wright, as he noted the timeless beauty of Japanese gardens, the simplicity of well-crafted materials, a connection to distant "borrowed" landscapes, and a sensitivity towards nuances in atmospheric conditions.

Years later, when designing the 1952 house for his son David, Wright used this project to investigate the inherent characteristics of building and living in the desert Southwest. Titling the plans "How to Live in the Southwest," Wright viewed the design's unorthodox geometry and elevated position within the landscape as a new way of thinking about architectural space and human comfort in an environment that had traditionally been viewed as forbidding, even hostile. Wright sweeps the building off the hot, dusty ground in a broad spiral gesture, creating a shady, oasis-like garden in the center of the spiral. By doing so, Wright also choreographs a sequence of views gradually unfurling – views towards the nearby Camelback Mountain, and of distant landmarks such as the Papago Buttes and South Mountain. Wright experimented with

the humble concrete block material, exploring rounded forms and geometric patterns that could elevate these materials into a dynamic sculptural composition.

In 2013-14, Jun and Ree Kaneko took up residence at the David Wright House while working at the Mission Clay Arts and Industry organization in Phoenix. A conversation about the long-term importance of an artist residency program to the David Wright House and the potential for an exhibition of Kaneko sculptures began then. "Capturing the Scent of Rain" is the product of that residency and Jun's response to the experience of the David Wright House and its ever-changing desert climate. The exhibition is the debut of a new body of work for Kaneko using Dutch glaze, which the artist has developed during two decades of experimentation. The movement of the deep, often reflective, blue on white glaze reflects the atmospheric quality of the Sonoran Desert, transforming Kaneko's iconic dango forms into extensions of the Wright House landscape. Like the relationship of a traditional Japanese building to its garden, the sculptures are sited to create a dialogue between the art and architecture. At times the sculptures frame the building and at others they are framed by the building's open garden bays and windows.

— David Wright House Collaborative Fund

Jun Kaneko: the Surface Figures; the Figure Surfaces

by Glen R. Brown,

Published in Ceramics Monthly, March 13, 2016

An artist's acumen is often measurable by the degree to which his or her work is apparently straightforward, even elementary, yet impossible to imitate without invoking that artist's presence. Who could paint a composition of three vivid, nested squares without instantly referencing Josef Albers or a trio of stratified rectangles of feathered color without simultaneously conjuring Mark Rothko? And who could create anything approaching a Dango, reductive as it may appear, without immediately calling to mind Jun Kaneko? Uniting the vertical grandeur of an ancient stele, the mysterious polished purity of a Shiva lingam, and the flat, bold, and patterned compositions of Color Field painting, Kaneko's Dangos are, despite their affinities for minimalism, among the most immediately recognizable of contemporary ceramic sculptures – indeed sculptures in any medium. Such monopolizing of otherwise unremarkable form takes a certain genius. Like the late paintings of Matisse, the Dangos are deceptively simple, but there is simply nothing else like them.

To describe Kaneko as a master ceramist might seem to belabor the obvious, but in fact it obscures to the point of misrepresentation the complex sensibility that accounts for his work. If his glazed surfaces offer occasional allusions to the decorative schemes of historical pottery they are inseparable from the innovative current of non-objective painting that swept from late modernism not only the remains of representation but also the last vestiges of intimacy of scale. If his monumental Dangos can be compared to oversized vessels, albeit ones in which function falls to an autonomy of form, they are engineering feats more typical of architecture than of pottery. If his sculptures are physically composed of clay, they are constituted conceptually as much in the

immateriality of space as in the physicality of three-dimensional form. Kaneko is – like Isamu Noguchi, the great modernist murmurer of poetry in stone and void – as attuned to,,the tremulous energy of landscape, literal or figurative, as to the ponderous stillness of the,,monolith that stands within it. His art transcends any particular medium to embrace the deepest sources of effectiveness in all media, whether he is working in clay and glaze, glass, paint, or even stage-set design.

Kaneko's early biography has been well picked over in the quest to expose his aesthetic roots, but it is worth returning to if for no other reason than to emphasize the degree to which clay has been only one vehicle for and not the indispensable terra magna of his art. Born in Japan in the throes of the Second World War, Kaneko grew up with a rebellious streak that turned him away from the conformity necessary for success in academics but sparked an interest in his mother's pastime of painting. Displaying an aptitude for drawing while still in his teens, Kaneko bargained with his parents for daytime lessons with the contemporary painter Satoshi Ogawa in exchange for hisdiligent completion

of high school through evening classes. Ogawa, who recognized Kaneko's talent, saw an opportunity for the burgeoning artist to develop though study abroad. Drawing on his acquaintance with American ceramics professor Jerry Rothman, who had completed a project in Japan in the 1950s, Ogawa arranged for Kaneko to travel to Los Angeles in 1963.

Although this was the time and place of the so-called West Coast revolution in clay, Kaneko had come to the United States to study painting. Only serendipity would divert him from that path and into a career that wed his aptitude for expression in two dimensions to a new interest in three-dimensional form. Immediately after meeting Kaneko at the airport, Rothman deposited him at the home of mathematics professor Fred Marer and his wife Mary, enthusiasts of contemporary ceramics whose extensive collection would later become a mainstay of the Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery at Scripps College. Three weeks spent as a house-sitter among extraordinary works by such avant-garde California ceramists as Rothman, Paul Soldner, Peter Voulkos, Ken Price, Michael Frimkiss, and Henry Takemoto was sufficient to enamor Kaneko of objects in clay and inspire him to take up the medium in his own work.

In 1966, Marer introduced Kaneko to Voulkos, who accepted him as an assistant in his studio at UC Berkeley. Incited more by the general fire of Voulkos's creativity than by its specific manifestation in Abstract Expressionism, Kaneko produced some vaguely anthropomorphic sculptures painted with broad swatches of thin and dripping glaze but soon began to exhibit the rudiments of his own style in quieter monumental forms embellished with areas of opaque color and vivid patterns. Despite Kaneko's lack of an undergraduate degree, his obvious talent would secure him admission to the graduate program at Scripps College, where he earned an MFA under the tutelage of Soldner in 1971. That Kaneko could interact regularly with two such dynamic personalities as Soldner and Voulkos and still emerge from his studies without owing a crippling aesthetic debt to either is surely a testament to the clarity of his vision even at this early stage of his evolution as an artist.

That vision, concentrated on simple masses and well-defined areas of unmodulated color, was reified in a series of sculptures begun in the early 70s while Kaneko was serving as a faculty member at the Rhode Island School of Design. Known variously as "Chunks," "Stones," or "Potatoes," these relatively small and aesthetically terse solid ceramic objects were glazed in bright colors and bold patterns. Although conceived for the pedestal, they represented a significant step toward the later Dangos and slabs in terms of their aesthetic economy. In this phase of his career Kaneko was still coming to terms with simplicity, recognizing that the same range of expression that encompassed agitation equally embraced serenity and that any fraction of this range was open to the artist's exploitation as a means of touching something fundamentally human in the viewer. The uncomplicated givenness of the resulting sculptures, which stood only at a slight remove from the shape and size of wedged clay, proved a perfect pendant to the quiescent mind.

While achieving this kind of resonance with the viewer through such understated means can be extraordinarily difficult, Kaneko's true genius revealed itself as he began to exceed the intimate scale of his sculptures – in fact, augment that scale to the point of monumentality – without sacrificing the calming serenity of his forms. After accepting a position as Artist-in-Residence at the Cranbrook Academy of art in 1979, he embarked on the project of setting his sculptures free from the pedestal and providing them with the size to hold their own in the infinitely more complicated space of the world at large. The result was the first of the Dangos, rounded like the earlier Potatoes, but asserting a more obvious material presence. Their name, however, gave implicit assurance that, regardless of the physical heights that they might reach, their benign nature would not alter. A Dango, after all, is a ball-shaped Japanese pastry of sweetened rice flour often colored with the cheerful hues of red bean paste or green tea.

A 1982 part-time residency at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha and the concurrent opportunity to use one of the enormous beehive kilns at the Omaha Brickworks provided the means to experiment with a radical jump in scale. The pioneering Omaha Project consisted of four Dangos, 6 feet tall and 7 feet wide, and four gigantic Slabs, each weighing about 3,000 pounds. The opportunity to pursue an even more ambitious project arose ten years later when Kaneko was granted access to some out-of-service beehive kilns at Mission Clay Products in Fremont, California. Accompanied by three assistants, Kaneko brought the necessary equipment from Omaha and proceeded to mix a ton of clay every other day for nearly three months. Consisting of 24 Dangos ranging in height from 5 to 11.5 feet, the project saw technical advances that included a shift from a single firing to one involving two cycles.

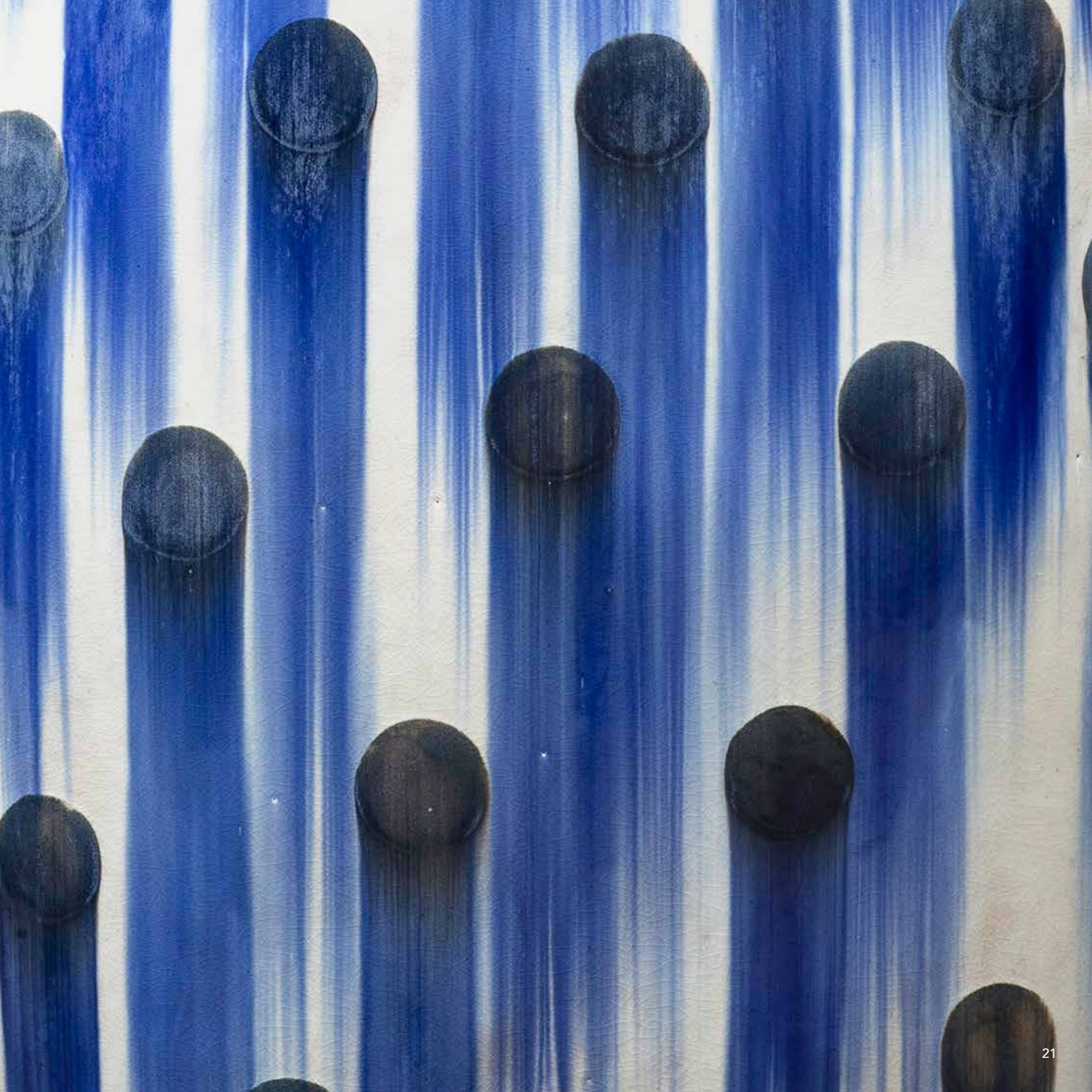
The Dangos of the Omaha and Fremont Projects established what might be described as the tentative grounding of an archetype in matter. Like the motifs of Willem de Kooning's Woman series or Robert Motherwell's Elegies to the Spanish Republic the Dango is a primal form to be explored through variation of detail rather than metamorphosis. Consequently, proportions have fluctuated, with shoulders sometimes parallel to bases in lozenge-like symmetry and sometimes broadening to form wedges, but the feeling of the Dango, the impression it conveys as a touchstone for something intuited but ineffable has remained constant. Its bulk, which might have moved the viewer to apprehension – especially in the case of examples more than 11 feet in height – has always constituted its primary link to the corporeal and the instinctive. Its patterns, whether linear or planar, are its ties to the cerebral and the rational. In the unity of physical form and surface pattern, the Dango is like a Pyrenean boulder incised with ancient petroglyphs: a harmony of the eternal and the ephemeral, of geological epochs and biological lifetimes, of the persistence of inanimate matter and the fleeting, nebulous nature of the living.

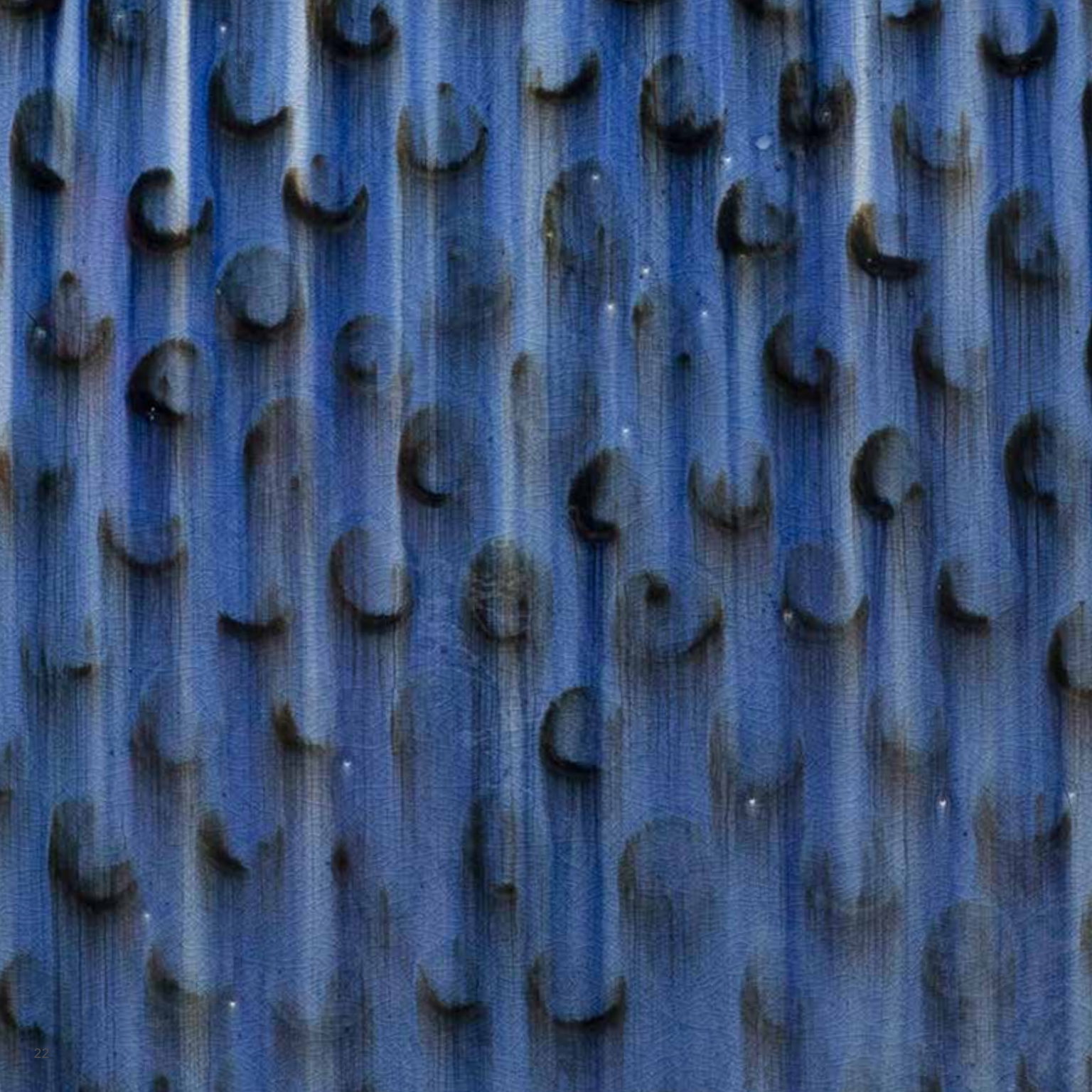
The Dangos, though universally regarded as Kaneko's signature works, define only one front of what has been a concerted advance into largely unprecedented scale for ceramic art. While still at Cranbrook, Kaneko, like Voulkos, took up the platter form, negating its utility through cumbersome size and a vertical orientation of display. Evolved from the equivalent of large test tiles, the Ovals became occasions for cultivating synergy between painted designs and concave, elliptically delimited surfaces. The Wall Slabs – decedents of examples first made at Cranbrook as well as tiles produced for a mural during a three-month 1986 residency at the renowned Arabia Factory in Helsinki – are the most obvious indicators

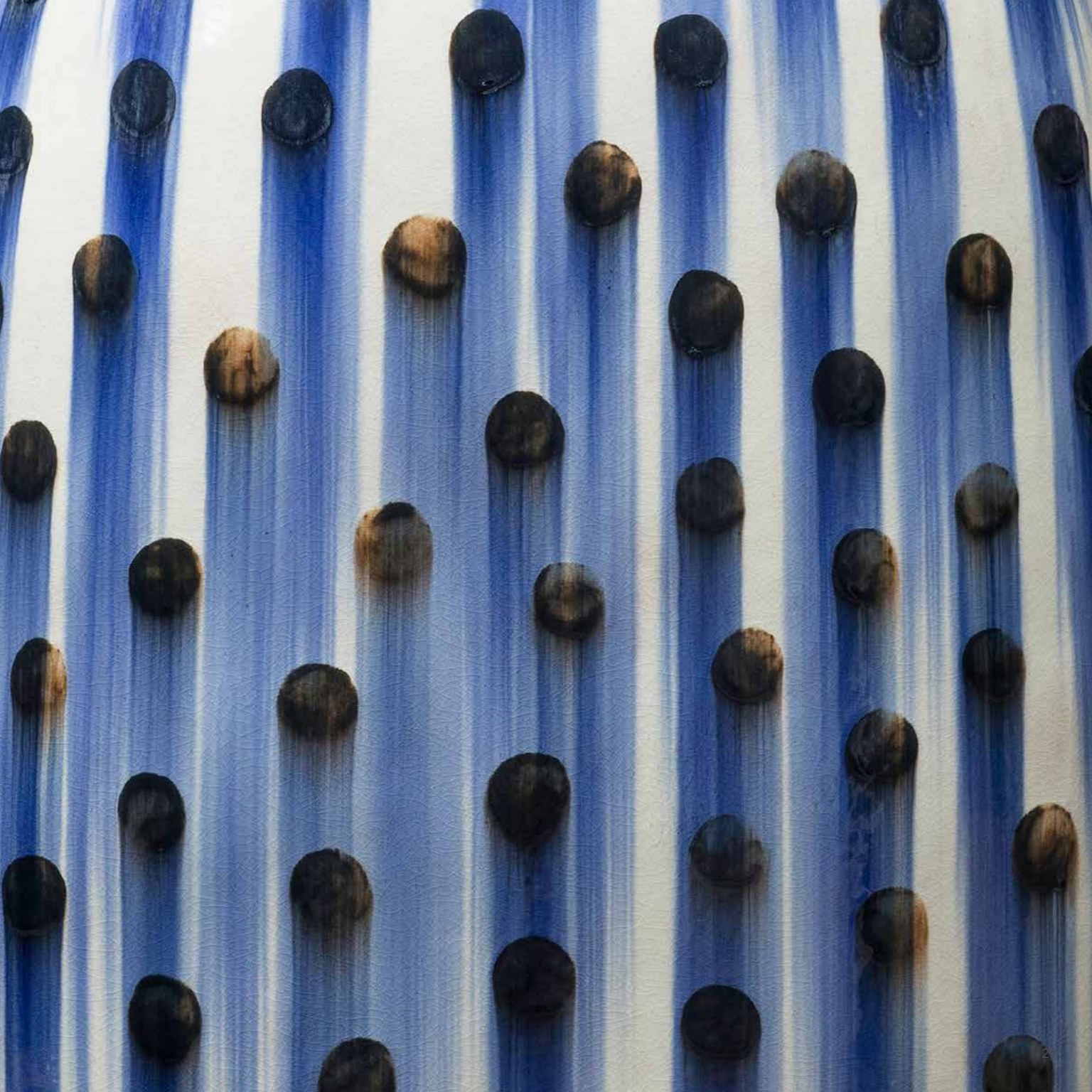
that Kaneko's early experiences as a painter in oils on canvas have never ceased to inform his relationship with clay. In these works pictorial depth is shallow, with motion emphasized primarily through vertical, and sometimes horizontal, line. Bearing flat pattern, the surfaces are effectively both figure and ground.

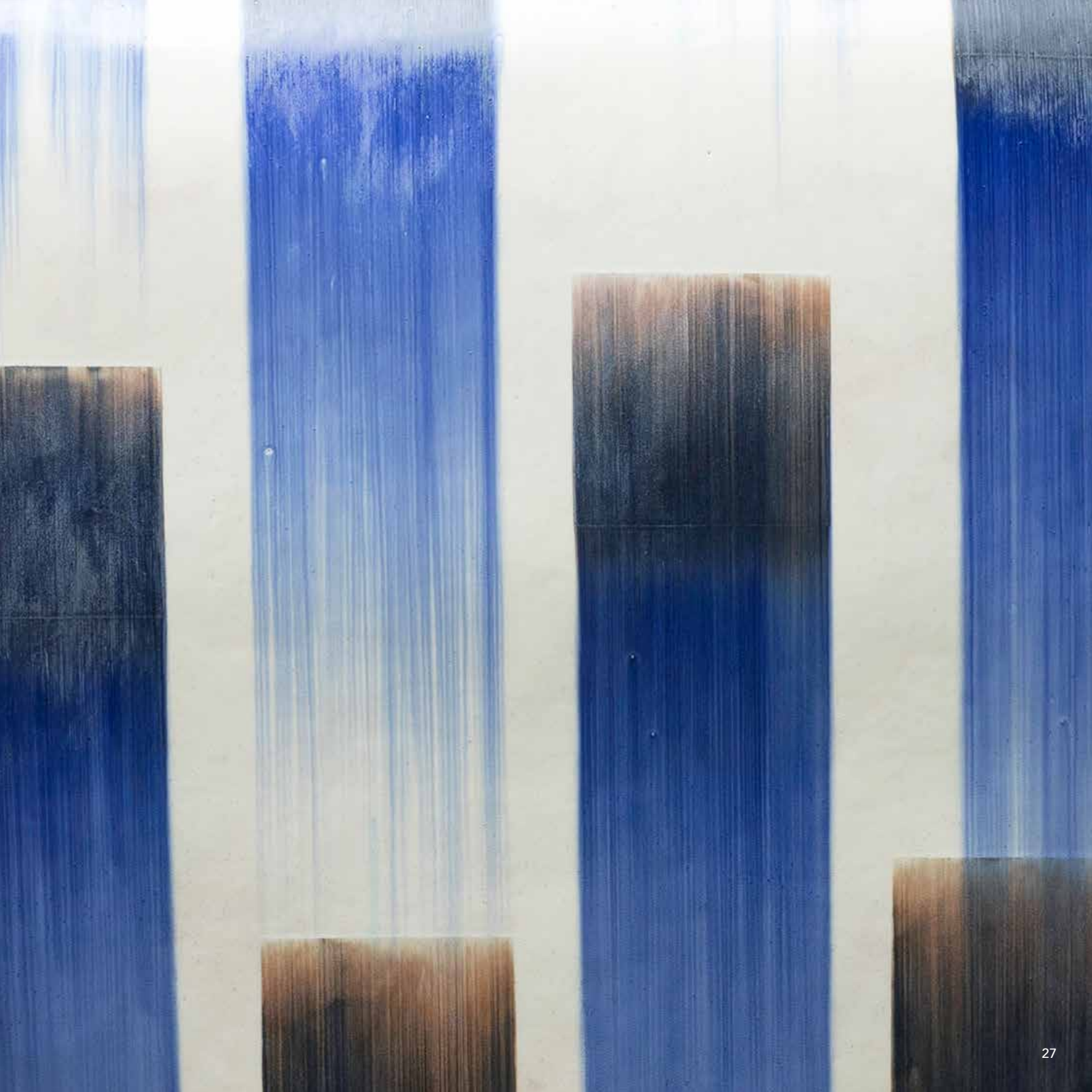
The figure in a more literal sense surfaced in Kaneko's work – unexpectedly at the time though, in retrospect, as a logical scion of his investigations of matter and energy – in 1993 in the first of a series of gigantic paired Heads. Given the scale of these sculptures – like that of the marble portrait of Constantine on the Capitoline Hill or the heads of the Great Buddhas at Nara and Kamakura – comparison with the Dangos is perhaps inevitable. Like the Dangos, the Heads seem enveloped by an invisible field, not emptiness but rather the strange, immaterial fullness of the void. In a state of supreme serenity, they face one another in suggestion of a mute conversation that holds them, as if bound by gravitational attraction, to a symmetry of form, presence, and energy.

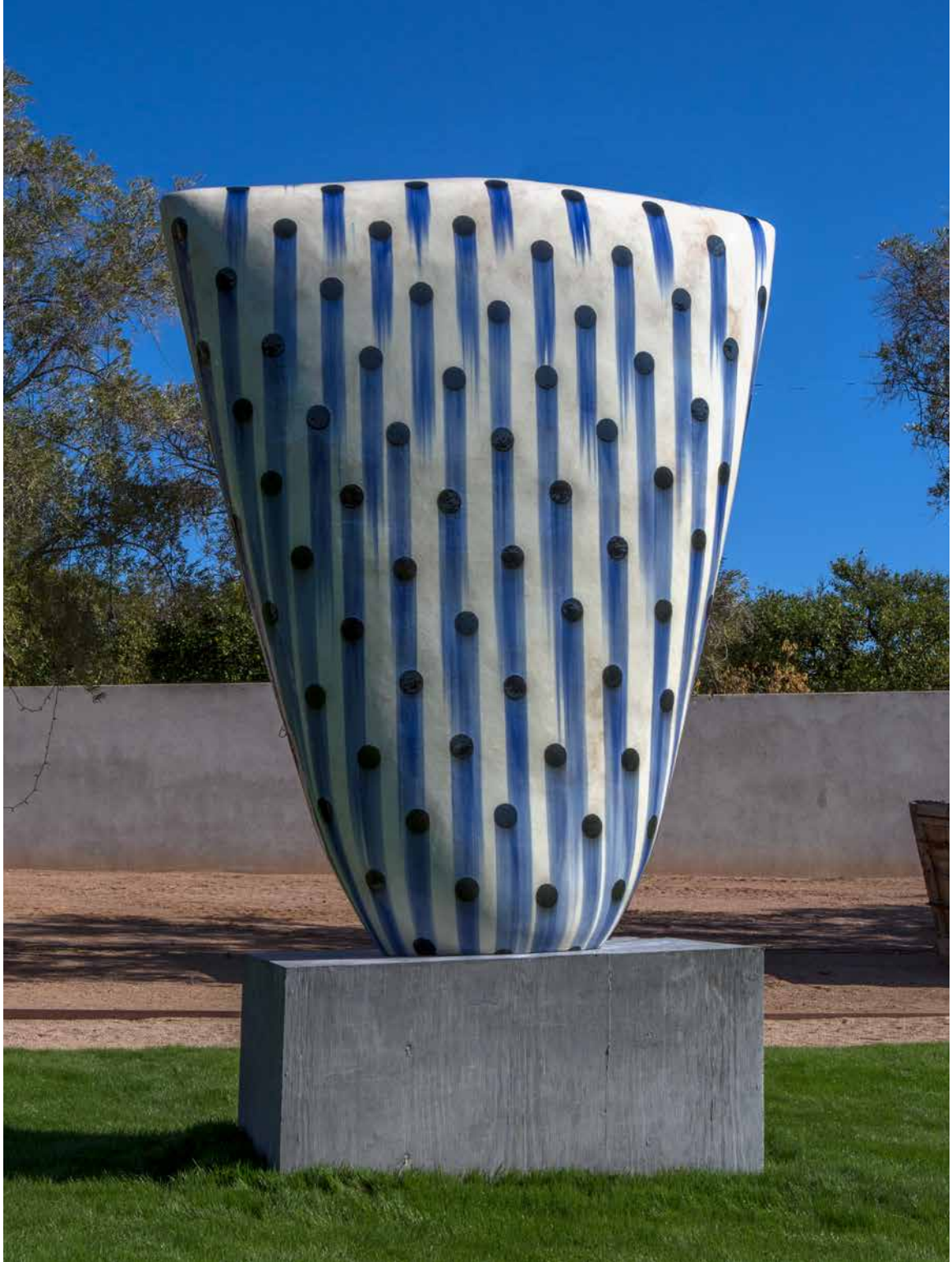
Aberrations from a previously non-objective art, the colossal Heads might have acquired an unfortunate explanatory status with respect to Kaneko's Dangos – might, in fact, have come to serve, like the revelation at the end of a B-grade mystery, to deflate an allure of the inexplicable that would have been better left alone. Kaneko, however, would not be pinned down or, worse still, inflict that fate on his art. In apparent antithesis of the timeless, detached, and profoundly cerebral Heads, he recently introduced a series of figural sculptures based on the Tanuki, the raccoon dog that is both an actual mammal native to Japan and, like Coyote in Native American folklore, a mythical trickster. Originating in the multitude of ceramic tourist trinkets made and sold at Shigaraki, Kaneko's rendition of the Tanuki seems a fugitive from anime, a sprightly embodiment of the contemporary that jolts the universal and eternal gravitas of his earlier work. Gathered in brightly colored and boldly patterned packs in public spaces, perhaps most appropriately Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo, the Tanukis seem to express the playful, spontaneous, childlike counterpart of the reserved and disciplined rationality of the mind. That the Dangos, somewhere beneath their serene exteriors, harbor both the wellspring of the Tanukis and the origin of the colossal paired Heads clearly speaks for an aesthetic complexity to Kaneko's art that runs far deeper than relations of surface and form.

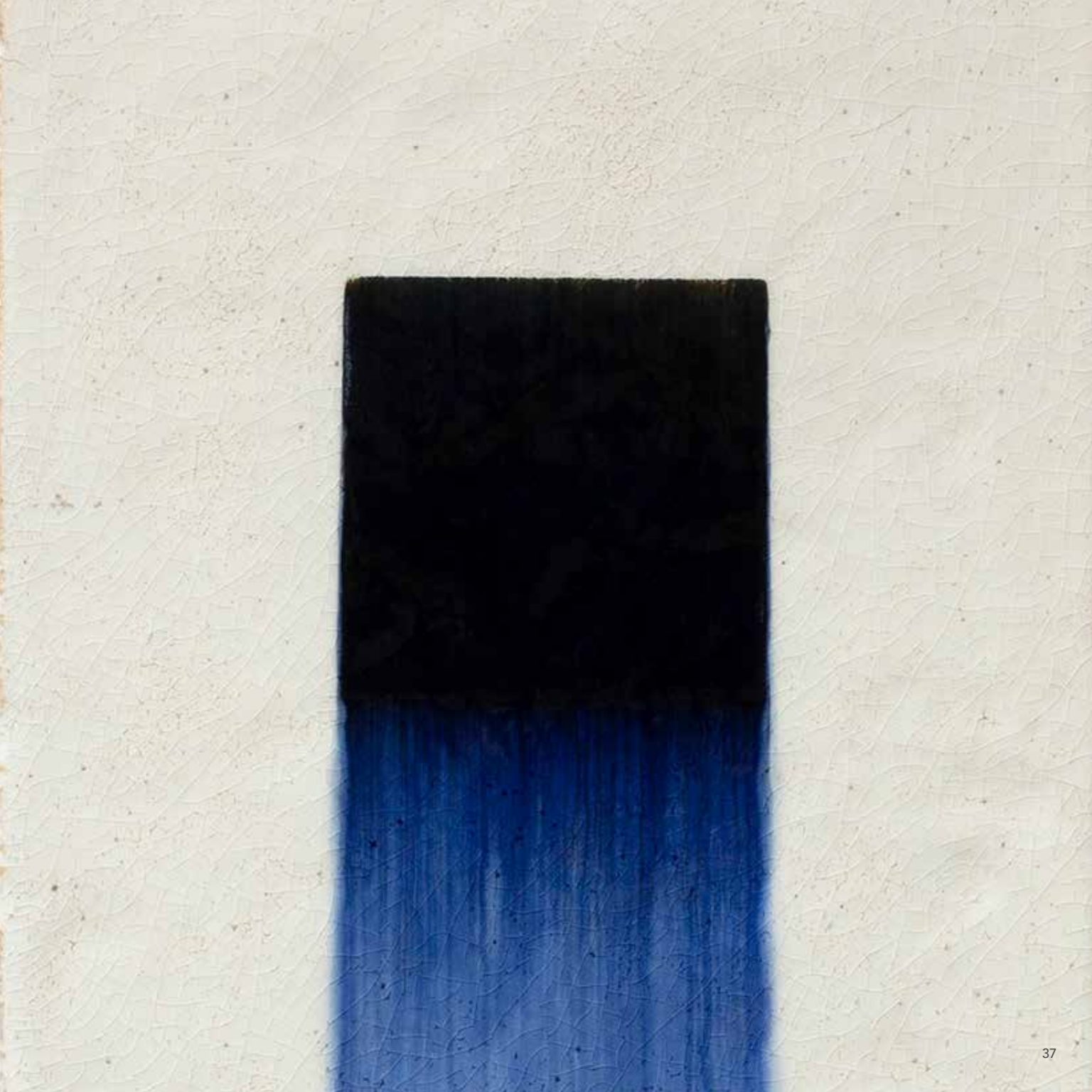












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The Dimensions are in order by Height x Width x Depth - All of the dimensions are in inches.

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Page 6 *Dango*, 2017, 82" x 67.75" 24"

Page 7 *Dango*, 2017, 81" x 71.5" x 26"

Page 8 *Dango*, 2017, 108.5" x 54.75" x 34.75"

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Page 12 *Dango*, 2017, 48" x 25.5" x 13.5"

Page 13 *Dango*, 2017, 48" x 24.5" x 14.5"

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Page 26 *Dango*, 2017, 61" x 64.5" x 17.5"

Page 28 *Dango*, 2017, 82" x 67.75" x 24"

Page 29 *Dango*, 2017, 81" x 71.5" x 26"

Page 31 *Dango*, 2017, 108.5" x 54.75" x 34.75"

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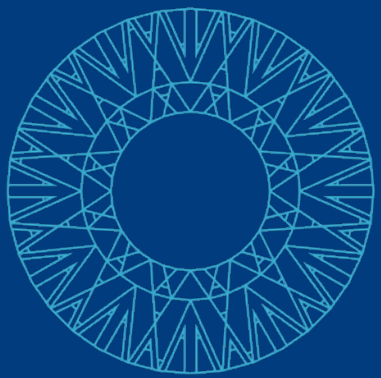

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