

Veneciano

PLAY'S THE THING Reading the Art of Jun Kaneko

Sheldon Museum of Art



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Jun Kaneko

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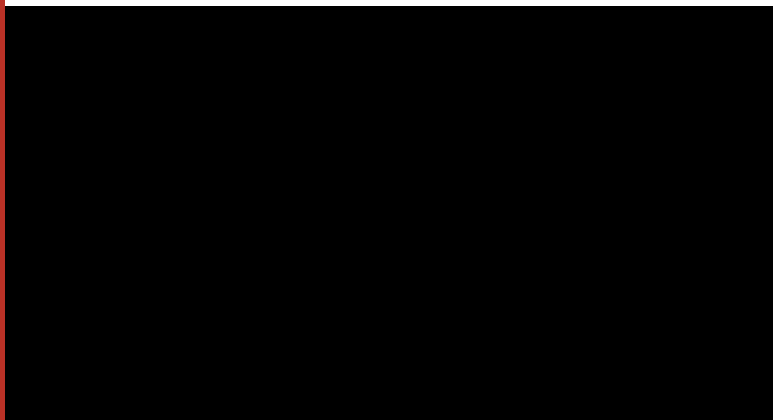
Reading the Art of

Jun Kaneko

All art lives in the world, in the world of associations coloring our lives. Art lives in no other world.

“Reading” art is the activity of tracing those associations, which branch out in rhizomic directions—not a neat linear path, not a progressive history. The readings in this volume illuminate the symbolic world of Jun Kaneko’s interlacing art forms. Reading constitutes a form of engagement with art, a way to amplify the cultural contexts in which to think about an artist’s work. It provides a way of co-creating the significance of artwork.

Readings rely more on the performance of meaning than on its pronouncement, more, that is, on *our exercise* of meaning in thinking through an object at hand than on discovering or pinning down its meaning. So readings lean, by design, more toward analysis, speculation, and interdisciplinary criticism than art history. They may be likened to *play*—reasoned, linguistic, intertextual, even agonistic play—going back and forth, tussling with the “texts,” the *things* in question: the artwork of Jun Kaneko.



There are so many different roads to get where I want to go and there are countless roads where I do not want to go. But the places I wish to be and not to be change frequently. Therefore, my personal map ends up having a trail that looks like tangled-up string.

— Jun Kaneko, *Dutch Series, Between Light and Shadow*



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University of Nebraska–Lincoln

In association with
University of Nebraska Press

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THE ART OF READING

Preface and Acknowledgments

Sheldon's curator Sharon Kennedy informed me last year, my first year at the museum, that she had planned to show a few Kaneko sculptures in Sheldon's Great Hall. I was delighted with the prospect, and she invited me to visit Jun and Ree Kaneko at their Omaha studios. There, we were dazzled by an array of brilliant work in several media. On our return to Lincoln, we became determined not only to show the breadth of Kaneko's work but also study the relationship among his many media.

Thus occurred the first of several reversals in curatorial practice. Typically exhibitions are preconceived: they exist on paper before they're scheduled. This show was *reconceived*. Exhibitions have a thesis around which selections are made and displays are organized. We, instead, chose work from what was available and let the work suggest the thesis. Exhibition catalogs begin production sometimes a year before installation. We had neither budget nor time to produce one in the year for which the original display was scheduled. This study is therefore a consequence of the exhibition rather than its cause. The exhibition *Play's the Thing: The Paintings and Objects of Jun Kaneko* is not the illustration of a curator's thesis, as is usually the case.

Why is this significant? Traditional exhibitions are *deductive*: that is, they're designed to prove the thesis with which they begin—moving from the general to the specific, from thesis to illustration. We learn what they teach us. Our exhibition, by contrast, is *inductive*: lending itself to *be read*, to be opened and interpreted, and to invite new thinking and learning on our part, as curators. We start with the works of art rather than the thesis—moving from the specific to the general. Thus, this catalog study resulted from the exhibition rather than determining it. Perhaps this is what museum scholarship can look like when distinguished from art historical studies. We call it *the art of reading*—an approach I develop later in this volume—in contrast to the art of historiography.

I wish to thank the contributors to this book: Arthur Danto, who has held a sustained critical dialogue with Kaneko's work over the years; Joel Geyer of NET Nebraska for his insightful interview resulting in Jun Kaneko's statement,

transcribed in this book; and Sharon Kennedy, who provides biographical context for Kaneko's work. Our first debt of gratitude goes to Jun Kaneko for his sustained work, a lifetime of unyielding commitment and resolute vision as an artist. I also wish to thank Ms. Kennedy for initiating this project, and Ree Kaneko for helping us to realize this exhibition and study and to edit this publication. The Kanekos were masterfully aided by Troia Schonlau and Stephan Grot, whose generosity of effort and time to this project magnified our delight in pursuing it. Dirk Bakker produced the exquisite object images, and Takashi Hatakeyama, a brilliant photographer visiting from Japan, orchestrated a series of installation shots for this publication. We thank them and James Wawrzewski, a gifted graphic designer in New York, for his patience and dedication to the publication.

The exhibition *Play's the Thing* was organized by Sharon Kennedy and myself, and made possible with generous financial support from Dean Giacomo Oliva of the Hixson-Lied Endowment, and Steve Wake of the Wake Charitable Foundation, for which we are sincerely grateful. The Sheldon receives program funding support from the Sheldon Art Association, the Museum's dedicated support group. General operating support is also provided, in part, by funds from the Nebraska Arts Council and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Harvey Perlman, Chancellor, and Susan Poser, Associate to the Chancellor.

The Sheldon Museum of Art has a staff of dedicated professionals who make projects like this possible. They include Development Director Laura Reznicek, Education Director Karen Janovy, Operations Manager Lynn Doser, Curatorial Assistant Meghan Gilbride, Associate Registrar Genevieve Ellerbee, Senior Gallery Technician Edson Rumbaugh, Gallery Technician Neil Christensen, and Monica Babcock, Associate to the Director, who keeps us all on the right track. This book is published in partnership with the University of Nebraska Press, Donna Shear, Director, and Heather Lundine, Editor-in-Chief. We thank them for their collaborative spirit.

Jorge Daniel Veneciano, Ph.D.
Director, Sheldon Museum of Art





JUN KANEKO

A Biographical Sketch

Sharon L. Kennedy
Sheldon Museum of Art



Jun Kaneko in ceramics kiln at Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA, 1969

Giant ceramic heads sitting on palettes crowd Jun Kaneko's large warehouse studio, waiting for their turn in the massive kiln. Rounded forms that Kaneko calls "dangos" rest in varying degrees of production, some draped in plastic, others covered with glaze. Assistants ready the clay and maneuver the large pieces. Upon entering the space, one gets the sense of stepping into an industrial setting. Yet Kaneko's interaction with each work of art is an intimate encounter. According to the artist, the object has a spirit and therefore is treated with a gentle touch and thoughtful contemplation. Kaneko's artistic process includes sitting with the form and waiting to see what it has to say to him. Only then does he determine the marks and color he will apply. The intricacy of pattern and its incongruous relationship with the scale of the work adds to the complexity and enjoyment of Kaneko's art.

Born in Nagoya, Japan in 1942, Jun Kaneko was the first of three children. His mother recognized her eldest son's artistic potential at a young age and arranged for Satoshi Ogawa to provide art instruction. Ogawa gave Kaneko the freedom to experiment and develop his own style. In his late teens, his work had evolved from representational still life, landscape, and figurative work to abstraction. After graduating high school, Kaneko was ready to study abroad. Ogawa knew an artist from the United States, Jerry Rothman, who had sojourned to Japan in the 1950s to work on a design project. Today, the California ceramicist is recognized for his experimental nature and technical innovations, characteristics that may have served as a model for Kaneko.

Having no command of the English language, Kaneko landed in Los Angeles in 1963, where Rothman had arranged for him to stay with Fred and Mary Marer, two important ceramics collectors. The Marer collection impressed Kaneko and piqued his curiosity about the world of ceramics. Through their collection of artwork and other sources, Kaneko discovered widespread changes occurring in American ceramics, namely in size. The Marers were particularly fond of the work of Peter Voulkos, whom Kaneko credits as being one of the greatest influences in his life. Voulkos used an Abstract Expressionist approach in clay, and like many of the action painters he incorporated a combination of painting, drawing, and collage to create spontaneous and animated three-dimensional work. By approaching ceramics much like large-scale Abstract Expressionist painting, and disregarding all former rules, Kaneko imagined new possibilities and set out to learn about this new medium.

Beginning in the 1950s, California was a fertile place for ceramics. Glen Lukens, a well-known ceramics artist and teacher, had been at the University of Southern California since 1920. Other important ceramicists living in California included Marguerite Wildenhain, Gertrude and Otto Natzler, and Beatrice Wood. The University of California in Los Angeles, Scripps College in Claremont, and Mills College were also offering ceramics in their art programs. Voulkos had been hired to teach at the Los Angeles County Art Institute, now the Otis College of Art and Design. The year Kaneko arrived, Voulkos had moved to the University of California at Berkeley to develop a new art program. Other influential people were also in California, setting the stage for a young artist to flourish.

Kaneko enrolled in Chouinard Art Institute, now known as the California Institute of Art, in Valencia, California. He stayed for an additional three semesters to make up for his language deficiency. He started with slab-built vessel forms but quickly moved away from vessels and toward sculptural work like that of the artists with whom he felt an affinity, namely Voulkos and John Mason. Fred Marer had introduced Kaneko to Mason, who was working in large-scale ceramics, and they became friends. About Voulkos and Mason, Kaneko said: "I liked their ideas, their point of view, the way they looked at the clay. . . . They didn't do the same thing, they were very different in their answers." In 1966 he was given a studio at Berkeley where Voulkos was teaching. He worked as an assistant for six months, giving him an opportunity to watch and learn from the master.



Jun Kaneko drawing costume concept for *Madama Butterfly*.
Photography: Ree Kaneko



Jun Kaneko shaping 10-foot Head.
Photography: Takashi Hatakeyama

The following year Kaneko won an Archie Bray Foundation residency in Helena, Montana, where he developed his early signature “three-legged” sculptures. With the completion of his own studio, which included a large kiln, in Temple City, California, he subsequently began experimenting with scale. While continuing his exploration of ceramic sculpture, he perfected the skill of glazing and firing in his large kiln. His determination reaped benefits when he was offered a show with Voulkos at a Beverly Hills gallery, followed by his acceptance to graduate school at Scripps College in Claremont, California.

After completing graduate school in 1971, Kaneko returned to Japan to experience his homeland with a new perspective. There he researched Japanese ceramics and lectured in several cities as part of an exchange program with the American Cultural Center in Nagoya, Japan. Kaneko also offered a popular two-week clay workshop in Tokoname and curated a show of six Japanese ceramic artists for the annual exhibition at Scripps College.

The following year Kaneko returned to the United States, kept his California studio, and accepted a teaching job at the University of New Hampshire. Just as he was about to return to California, he was offered a teaching position at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). Kaneko and ceramics professor Norman Shulman built a dynamic program, one that was also productive and creative for Kaneko. Here he recognized the pattern in his mark-making. He began working with spirals and paying attention to the space between and around the work. According to Kaneko, the spiral is still influencing his work today. Before leaving RISD, he participated in a major exhibition at the Woods Gerry Gallery on campus.

After his teaching tenure in Rhode Island, Kaneko returned to Japan again, this time to build a studio in Nagura. In three and a half years, he built a two-story house and studio, using railroad ties and telephone poles. He returned to the United States in 1979 on a National Endowment for the Arts travel grant that he and his wife, Fumiko Hahioka, a fiber artist, had been awarded. He participated in a residency program at Clayworks Studio Workshop in New York City, followed by one at the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia. Given Kaneko’s fascination with patterns and the continuing interest he and Hahioka had developed in collecting antique cloths, the Fabric Workshop presented an opportunity for Kaneko to explore a unique avenue of creativity. Here, he made designs and fashioned clothes and bags still in production today.

Kaneko returned to teaching after being offered a position at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. This involved developing the ceramics department and designing a studio for himself. His interest in spirals continued to develop in Michigan where he stayed until 1986. During this time, he joined the Bemis Center's residency program in Omaha, Nebraska, founded by Ree Schonlau, his future wife. For four years Kaneko traveled between Michigan and Nebraska. The large beehive kilns in Nebraska gave Kaneko the idea of creating even larger sculptures. He borrowed the kilns for one year and brought three assistants with him. In 1988 he purchased a 38,000-square-foot building on Jones Street in Omaha and developed a studio, living quarters, and storage area, yet he continued to travel to experimental studios and residencies in Europe, Japan, Mexico, and the United States.

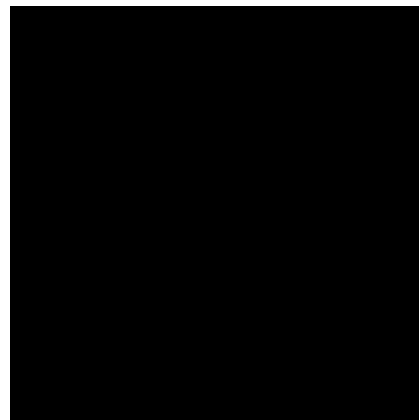
In 2005 Kaneko was awarded an honorary doctorate from the Royal College of Art in London, followed by ones from the University of Nebraska–Omaha in 2006, and from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in 2008.

Although Kaneko has achieved notoriety and success, he continues to challenge himself. He states: "Having a commitment to being an artist is to feel that I might have better things within me than what I had made up to this moment. . . . These feelings make me wonder, and give me energy and ideas to do the next work." This steadfastness has led Kaneko to design and fabricate new work in glass in partnership with Bullseye Glass Factory in Portland, Oregon. Kaneko also designed sets and costumes for Opera Omaha's new production of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, which premiered in 2006. More recently he took on the design work for Beethoven's *Fidelio* for the Opera Company of Philadelphia's 2009 season. During this productive activity, Kaneko's mammoth ceramic heads adorned Park Avenue in New York City for six months in 2008. In addition to a successful career in art, he and his wife, Ree Kaneko, formed a not-for-profit organization dedicated to research and nurturing creativity in the arts, sciences, and humanities. Programming has begun in the block-long warehouse space, with renovations to be completed in 2011. The creative space will be named none other than KANEKO.

Sources:

Susan Peterson, *Jun Kaneko* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2001)

Iwai Meiko and Yasugi Masahiro, eds., *Jun Kaneko, Selected Works 1989–2005* (Osaka, Japan: National Museum of Art, 2006)



Kaneko on Park Avenue, 2008
Head, glazed ceramic, 2005–2008



CHANGING BOUNDARIES AND SCALE

Jun Kaneko, from a conversation with
Joel Geyer of NET Television, Lincoln, Nebraska

The Concept of Ma

Ma is basically a concept that grew out of Shinto. It's a relationship between the piece and the surrounding space. If you're a painter, you make a mark. Then with that mark itself, you're creating a different concept around the space of the mark. Without that mark, the canvas has different meaning. Even though I'm making an object, I spend probably as much time thinking about space around the work. Hopefully, the piece has strong enough integrity to deal with different kinds of environments.

The Idea of the Dango

The idea of the dango sort of developed in a pretty natural way. Like with most of my ideas, I don't set and think and try to figure out a conceptual idea. It just grows out of me, doing work. Usually almost all ceramic artists start with wedging clay. But when you start wedging clay, it ends up in a round shape. One day I realized it's a pretty interesting shape. But it's so basic. I didn't have enough confidence to say, "Hey, this is good enough. Just leave it alone." It probably took about five or six years to convince me. I suggested to myself: make that as a piece, and see how I feel. And that's how it started.

Creating large pieces

If it's below my eye level, it's sort of still not threatening. But if I start passing my eye level and if it went like three or four feet up, then your physical feeling to the shape really changes. The scale itself has definitely power of its own. My interest in making big pieces is not a technical issue. But if I want to make a big piece that comes with it. So I have to deal with it.

Explaining the process

Ninety-five percent of it is planning—and engineering. Clay really should be soft enough that you could connect pieces but as you go up, it has to be stiff enough to hold the weight on top. So if you go too fast, obviously it collapses. If you go too slow, you have a hard time to connect it. During firing there are lots of ceramic changes happening. So if you don't go easy at that time, that could be the biggest cause of the piece cracking. It can happen on the way up, on the way down—the expansion and contraction of it.

Basically it is pretty much an intuitive decision that you have to make—through your past experience.

*Transcript of video interview conducted by Joel Geyer, *Jun Kaneko: Changing Boundaries & Scale*, on DVD courtesy of NET Television, accompanying the publication *Jun Kaneko: Special Project* (Omaha: The KANEKO, 2009).





OF MA AND MORALS IN THE ART OF JUN KANEKO

An Interview

Arthur C. Danto
Jorge Daniel Veneciano

Arthur Danto is Johnsonian Professor
Emeritus of Philosophy at Columbia
University and art critic for *The Nation*.

Jorge Daniel Veneciano: You've written about many artists over the years, representational and abstract in style. The first type lends itself happily to surveying from any number of intellectual approaches—such as history and psychoanalysis. Abstract artists like Jun Kaneko, however, are not so easy to write about. On a few occasions in your essays you've turned to Kant to help situate your thoughts about Kaneko. Do abstract artists more readily invite abstract thinking than do other artists? Is there a logical fit between abstract doing and abstract thinking?

Arthur C. Danto: Abstract painting, strictly speaking, entered the history of Western art around 1912, often accompanied by some fairly rich bodies of metaphysical theory. I tend to think that the pioneers—Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian—believed they were opening up new realities—spiritual in the case of Kandinsky, cosmic in the case of Malevich, and religious in the case of Mondrian—that could only be represented in new ways. There is certainly something deeply spiritual in Jun Kaneko's work, rooted as it is in Shinto theory, with unmistakable Zen overtones. This comes through in the concept of *ma*, which seems to me to be distinctively Japanese. Here is a passage from an essay I wrote in 2005:

In its original usage, *ma* meant "spirit." Each thing has—or is—a spirit. A stone, a tree, an animal is what it is in virtue of its *ma*; and I suppose that Shinto's philosophy was that to understand something, one must somehow grasp its spirit. Where Shinto speaks of spirits, Greek philosophy spoke of essences. A thing's essence is that which makes it the distinctive thing it is,



Detail of dango texture
Photography: Dirk Bakker

so that Aristotle, for example, speaks of science as the search for essences. Essence is a fairly abstract concept, something grasped by the mind. By contrast, spirit is somehow intuited or felt. It is the heart of something's being. Kaneko's insight is that not only do things have spirits—the space *between* things has *ma* as well. That space is not mere undifferentiated emptiness. Consider a parallel. A conversation does not just consist in the words that are exchanged. The silences between the words—the pauses between speeches—are also parts of the dialog. The space between the words inflects the way the words are understood and received. The speakers/hearers are caught up in a living field of discourse.¹

run out of counter-examples, as in Plato's *Republic*. In any case, his notion does capture the way science works, i.e., acceleration is change in velocity.

Ma is a matter of intuition, it seems to me. It concerns the space between things, rather than the things themselves. It involves judgment as well. I suppose a good example of *ma* is tuning an instrument, tightening a string until the sound it makes when plucked harmonizes with the sound made by an adjacent string. I am never secure in explaining the concept of *ma*. But think of adding or subtracting in preparing a dish—it takes judgment to know when one has added enough salt to make it perfect.

I do think that a piece by Jun does offer us an example of *ma* at work. One feels that a pattern is just right, by imagining how it would look if one made the lines thinner and the space between lines larger. There is something aesthetically satisfying when *ma* works for you.

Veneciano: You mean through intuiting a sense of space? Do you see a Western model of this?

Danto: In my own view, *ma* is related to the Buddhist concept of *mu*—the name of a character that stands for a certain saturated emptiness. It does not mean nothingness because it has a certain force and presence. The only Western metaphysician that I know of who wrestled with this idea was Heidegger and, in some degree, Sartre in his masterpiece *Being and Nothingness*. For Sartre, the absence of Pierre from a café is, for the person who expected him to be there, the most important fact about that place, but it would not be noticed by anyone else: just think if all the absent Frenchmen would have to haunt the café at aperitif time! Heidegger argued that nothingness—*Das Nichts*—is encountered in certain moments of extreme boredom. In a famous essay, *What is Metaphysics?*, he attempted to describe what the experience of nothingness reveals. He had to invent a word to do this with: *Das Nicht Nichtet*, which may be translated as “Nothingness noths.” This was received as a capital example of nonsense by the Logical Positivists, who asked what possible experience would verify such a proposition. But Heidegger furnishes that in his essay.

Veneciano: You seem to be implying an interesting reversal. If you're contrasting Aristotle's abstract concept of essence to Shinto's sense of *ma*, does that make intuition and feeling—our means of accessing *ma*—more accessible or tangible than Aristotle's “science,” which is fairly abstract as a search for essence? Does Kaneko's work offer this lesson, this insight into a non-Western sensitivity for space?

Danto: Aristotle thought of science as knowing the essence of things. That meant having a definition of what something essentially is. The notion of definition is not lexicographical—it is not a matter of how a word is used—but an account of what something really is. You get an idea of what the quest for definition is like in Plato, especially in the Socratic dialogs. It is dialectical. Someone makes a stab at a definition, someone else finds a counter-example, and this continues until we've

“The history of art is the history of dialogues.

Yet it is creativity when the form clay takes is

the outcome of a conversational procedure

between the artist and it. ”

—Arthur Danto



Untitled Heads, 2008, hand-built glazed ceramic, left, 100”h x 51”w x 56”d, right, 100”h x 51”w x 58”d
Photography: Jim Grot

The experience of *ma* is far from such encounters, and there is little in Western philosophy that really deals with it. But I think it emerges in music, in the silences between sounds, and it is vividly characterized in certain Taoist parables, such as this from the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tse:

When this carver Ting was carving a bull for the king, every touch of his hand, every inclination of the shoulder, every step he trod, every pressure of his knee, while swiftly and lightly he wielded his carving knife, was as carefully timed as the movement of a dancer. . . “Wonderful,” said the king. “I would never have believed that the art of carving could reach such a point as this.” “I am a lover of Tao,” replied Ting, putting away his knife, “and have succeeded in applying it to the art of carving.

I have reached a point where my knife never touches anything. Where part meets part, there is always space. And a knife blade has no thickness. Insert an instrument that has no thickness into a structure that is amply spaced, and surely it cannot fail to have plenty of room. That is why I can use a blade for nineteen years, and yet it looks as though it were fresh from the forger's mould.”²

It is in the crafts of butchers and wheelwrights that we learn about this concept, and of artists like Jun Kaneko.

Veneciano: I'd like to come back to the question of abstraction in art and thought. Does *ma* facilitate or resist the connection?

Danto: I think the distinction between representational art and abstraction is too abstract to capture Kaneko's



Dango in Locks Gallery rooftop sculpture garden
Photography: Takashi Hatakeyama

art. In a certain sense he is working with patterns, sometimes almost traditional Japanese patterns, like polka dots and stripes. But his stripes are entirely different from those of an artist like Sean Scully in, for example, his Wall of Light series. Kaneko is, for one thing, a sculptor. The patterns “suit” the form. The forms are sometimes like abstract ladies and gentlemen, and fit beautifully in gardens or in domestic spaces. Or, looking at a photograph of an array of large ceramic stele, displayed on a roof, just sent me from the Locks Gallery in Philadelphia, I thought that in the ensemble they had the look of a *jardin exotique*—cactuslike plants from an imaginary garden.

When I turn away from these marvelous objects to the somewhat barren discussion by Kant of what he calls “free beauty,” near the beginning of his text on aesthetic judgment, I am asked to consider them from the perspective of what he calls “mere form.” I am

reminded of Keats’s complaint: “How all charms fly at the mere touch of cold philosophy.” When I moved to New York, many decades ago, to study philosophy and experience the great painting that was being done by the masters of Abstract Expressionism, I was struck by the irrelevance of the canon of philosophical aesthetics to the greatest art America had produced. Not until I had a revelation at Andy Warhol’s second Stable show in 1964 did I see a way of connecting philosophy and art up in a meaningful, helpful way. I don’t think that *ma* is an abstract concept, any more than gravity is. Gravity can be represented mathematically, but it is a force that holds the universe together. There is nothing abstract about *ma*.

Veneciano: The exhibition *Play’s the Thing* borrows Hamlet’s famous line and something of its motivation as exhibition premise—to suggest that character is discernable or (more properly) *attributable* in Kaneko’s

work. The exhibition opens the question of character as a potential link among Kaneko’s various media. Though the exploration of character is appropriate to the work of opera, can you see its application to the dangos?

Danto: I love Jun Kaneko’s dangos, which are gigantesque presences, tall and bulky, that I saw from the outset as benign. I saw a photograph in which I think three immense dangos were loaded onto a flatbed truck, looking well-behaved, as if, because of their scale and bulk, they had to be good and kind to mere creatures of flesh and blood like ourselves. There is a program for children on public television which features a huge dog named Clifford, who happens to be red, and who teaches his fragile playmates the elements of good conduct. Clifford could easily squash them or swallow them whole; instead, he lives by his own gentlemanly code that he transmits by example. The Japanese word that Jun Kaneko appropriated to designate the genre—*dango*—is a sweet dumpling, which, like the English word “dumpling,” might be a term of affection. As a general rule, the colossal scale connotes power and disproportion to the human scale. As in the colossal portrait of the Emperor Constantine in Rome, it certainly suggests something about Kaneko’s own character.

Oddly, I think of the dangos as protective to the vulnerable humans that move among them, perhaps like the hat-wearing figures of Easter Island. The idea of character has some application to the great heads Kaneko makes, striped or patterned in some way, occasionally facing one another, engaged, perhaps, in a *sacra conversazione*, or perhaps chanting the sacred syllable *om* to one another, setting up a field of communication. They certainly wouldn’t chatter.

Veneciano: I want to offer you a quotation from the same essay you cited earlier on Kaneko, the essay in which you introduce the principle of *ma* from Shinto thinking. You stated, “There is a principle, at once *aesthetic and moral*, that governs Kaneko’s practice as an artist and which may help explain the ideal that not only the dangos, but all of his work projects” [my emphasis].³ Can *ma* suggest the moral (and aesthetic) character in question?

Danto: I am uncertain as to whether the dango is in any way governed by the principle of *ma*, and can only speculate. The passage with which Plato’s *Republic* ends is a myth, which describes what happens to people after they die. Plato creates a character, Er, a warrior, who is severely wounded but does not die. Instead, his soul follows the souls of others as they go through a program of reeducation in the underworld, at the end of which they have to select their next life. The lives are all laid out in a meadow and there are plenty of lives to go around. The first soul sees the life of a despot, and immediately selects it for his own. He is blinded by the power and riches that will be his, not to mention the beautiful bed partners. The moment he realizes what

“There is a principle, at once aesthetic and moral, that governs Kaneko’s practice as an artist and which may help explain the ideal that not only the dangos but all of his work projects.”

—Arthur Danto

he has let himself in for, however, he screams in agony. Yes, he will have power, and can do whatever he wants. But the price exacted by such a life is horrendous. By contrast, Odysseus searches around until he finds just the life that his wisdom directs him to seek. It is a life of quiet obscurity. I think the *moral* might be “everything in proportion,” which has a Greek ring. But something like it underlies the Islamic imperative to be charitable, and the Puritan virtue of modesty. The moral education of a dango consists in learning not to use its power to hurt the vulnerable.

Veneciano: In the *Poetics* Aristotle said that character is what reveals the nature of a moral choice. I like to think of this as a parallel to Hamlet’s line “The play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King.” And since Aristotle also defined character in relation to virtue, I find it useful here (if a bit leading) to connect the question of character to your own thoughts on

virtue in Kaneko. You’ve written: “My own sense is that the dango implies a virtue that is the exact opposite of the *machismo* that defined American art in its heroic period, when Abstract Expressionism flourished.”⁴ Do you see that implied virtue extending to Kaneko’s work in painting, prints, and/or opera design?

Danto: I think that the idea of machismo as a defining attribute of the Abstract Expressionist persona is perhaps overdone, though Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock’s wife, once said that “I’m a product of this civilization, and you might say that the whole civilization and culture is macho.” The implication is that her own machismo was a function of what was needed to get ahead as a woman.

“[Fidelio costumes] are, in my view, a tribute to the era to which Beethoven and Bouilly belonged, in which the Rights of Man became recognized as a political reality and the storming of the Bastille became an iconic event. ”

—Arthur Danto

I did get to know Robert Motherwell in the 1980s, after his great show at the Guggenheim Museum, and I would hardly think of him in those terms. Robert had studied philosophy and was widely read. He was a gourmet, who perhaps smoked and drank too much, but he was generous, kind, and thoughtful. Certainly, the dango embodies a certain consideration for others less overpowering in size. My wife and I live with a number of Jun’s smaller pieces that have a bulky beauty—far more bulky than they would need to be in order to discharge any function, or don’t have any function at all, but convey an unmistakable grace and wit.

I don’t quite know what to say about the opera productions from this point of view. The characters, after all, are given. But I have read about productions that are disproportionately overbearing, especially in the case of *Fidelio*. There is no point in using, for example, the barbed wire and guard towers of the

concentration camp for the setting of *Fidelio*. It has to be possible for love to rescue an unjustly imprisoned victim. Jun’s costumes express operatic possibility. I was struck, when I attended the opening last October, that the audience applauded the villain when the time came for the curtain call. I did not see his production of *Madama Butterfly*, but I was overwhelmed by the way he used the device of *Bunraku*, in which the puppeteers are visible, to walk behind Butterfly when she is singing, as though she really had the fragile beauty and ephemerality of a butterfly, to furnish a metaphor. It must have been thrilling. Nothing could be more exciting than the abstract array of stripes at the beginning of the performance, while the overture is played. Stripes zip horizontally and vertically, overlap one another, until the whole stage is alive with *ma*. It is like visual music.

Veneciano: In your essay in Kaneko’s *Fidelio* book you talk about the opera’s plot having a moral beauty. Is there an aesthetic pleasure to recognizing moral elements in plots or stories? Your suggestion just now regarding *Fidelio* is that plots with this kind of moral beauty would have to be somewhat abstract or universal rather than too specific in historical detail, which involves, in your example, settings like concentration camps.

Danto: I may be wrong, but this seems to me to be a good place to bring *ma* up again. *Fidelio* was an eighteenth-century drama centered on one prisoner and his wife disguised as a young man named Fidelio. The jailer’s daughter falls in love with Fidelio, obviously not aware that she has fallen in love with a woman. The jailer sees her as a suitable mate for his daughter, which justifies teaching Fidelio the ropes. He trusts Fidelio, giving Fidelio a chance to enter her husband’s cell. He is weak with hunger, and she gives him something to eat. And she has brought a pistol with her. Imagining this taking place in a concentration camp is out of the question. The scale of the prison is proportionate to love being effective in freeing the husband. The play was based on an actual happening. The concentration camp is too dehumanizing for the plot to work. It would accordingly be artistically wrong to set *Fidelio* in Auschwitz. To liberate someone from Auschwitz requires the Fifth Army!

Veneciano: Let’s switch then to a lighter side of Kaneko’s work. You’ve written that the dangos can be our “partners in the pursuit of happiness” and that their “sunny coloration [sends] the kind of message that art has lately almost forgotten how to send.”⁵ Since my first encounter with your work was with your book on Nietzsche as philosopher, I wonder if you read Nietzsche here, too—in the sense of joyful affirmation, the innocence of artistic play, or some other sense.

Danto: There are dangos and dangos. The ones that seems closest to us are a bit like sumo wrestlers, in sumptuous robes, who are friends to man. It is hard to think of them as Supermen, in the Nietzschean sense, who are humans who have managed to transcend themselves. A whale is not a superman, nor is an elephant. These are just big mammals, which, at least in the case of whales, test our strength. Elephants can be trained to do heavy lifting or to paint abstract expressionist paintings, as in the experiment of Komar and Melamed. They [the dangos] are among Jun Kaneko’s best inventions, but I don’t see that they stand for moral possibilities that have so far evaded us. Their moral code is defined by the scale. Cards on the table, my candidate for Superman is our marvelous president, Barack Obama. For me he is the living antidote to where the American character took a wrong turn.

Veneciano: The question of art and politics is a basic one—certainly to Plato’s *Republic*, a work you extol. You just divorced the two in your Superman example. Do you think the beauty of an opera plot about restoring the freedom of speech, or the moral code of dangos as partners in “the pursuit of happiness” (not an innocent phrase), can be aesthetic pursuits divorced from the democratic values of the society that sanctions them?

Danto: Well, I would say yes. Our experience with dangos is an experience with art. There is nothing natural with the dango: its scale and pattern are not found in nature. And there is nothing political in a garden ornamented with dangos. But how different it is from an eighteenth-century European garden! There are no mythological sculptures, no Apollo or Diana, no Satyrs or Nymphs. A classical Western garden, and a Shinto garden with dangos, are very different!



Opera Omaha’s 2006 production of *Madama Butterfly*
Photography: Takashi Hatakeyama

Endnotes

1. Arthur Danto, “Vision and Spirit in the Art of Jun Kaneko,” ed. Iwai Meiko and Yasugi Masahiro, in *Jun Kaneko: Selected Works 1989–2005* (Omaha: Kaneko Studios, 2006), p. 11.
2. Arthur Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), p. 47.
3. Danto, “Vision and Spirit in the Art of Jun Kaneko,” p. 11.
4. Ibid.
5. Arthur Danto, “The Dango en Plein Air: Jun Kaneko as Outdoor Sculptor,” in *Kaneko at Work* by Jun Kaneko (Omaha: Jun Kaneko Museum, 2001), unpaginated.





Kaneko on Park Avenue, 2008
Head, glazed ceramic, 2005–2008
Photography: Takashi Hatakeyama

PLAY'S THE THING

Reading the Art of Jun Kaneko

Jorge Daniel Veneciano
Sheldon Museum of Art

Hana yori dango

—Japanese saying¹

There are dangos in the world. There are dangos in the museum. They surprise and provoke us with their uprightness and their vibrancy, and we try to make sense of them. That's our simple problematic: the issue inviting this study. No greater rationale for study do we need. Yet the dangos have relatives in the world, and like anthropologists we wonder about their kinship and their culture.

All art lives in the world, in the world of associations coloring our lives. Art lives in no other world. "Reading" art is the act of tracing those associations, which branch out in rhizomic paths—not a linear path, not a history. The readings below illuminate the symbolic world of Jun Kaneko's interlacing art forms, an illumination engendered by the exhibition *Play's the Thing: The Paintings and Objects of Jun Kaneko* at the Sheldon Museum of Art. These readings amplify the cultural contexts in which we think about the artist's work.

Readings rely more on the performance of meaning than on its pronouncement, more, that is, on the *exercise* of meaning in thinking through a subject than on discovering or pinning down meaning. So readings here will lean, by design, more toward interdisciplinary criticism than toward art history. They may be likened to *play*—reasoned, intertextual, even agonistic play—going back and forth, tussling with the "texts," the *things* in question: the artwork of Jun Kaneko.



Reading Dangos

Inside an unmarked warehouse on an industrial street in Omaha, where Kaneko keeps his studios, stands an unusual and unlikely urban phenomenon: a vast interior space washed in indirect natural light and populated by a forest of tall sculptures—a space inhabited by stony stalwart beings, thirteen feet tall. One may be reminded of Stonehenge for its arrangement of like-sized monoliths, an orchestration of things suggesting a transcendent presence, purpose, or time. Another allusion one may catch leads to Easter Island, with its mysterious giant heads in ever-silent vigil. Like them, these titans exude epochal patience—and in doing so demonstrate an air of superiority over us, mere temporal beings that we are.

Though the sculptures cannot amble, they refuse to be still. Their form of mobility defies kinetic measure: moving instead in a projective sense, visually and viscerally. The movement one feels in this vast space is both theirs and ours. Theirs in their multicolored

complexion, patterned striations, freckles, and blemishes, giving them irregularity of countenance and visual dynamism—their forms of visual movement. *Ours* in that we feel their presence, their differences, and their immediacy to us and to one another, infusing in our encounter with them an internal energy: psychic or spiritual, or even sublimated—if we were to favor a psychoanalytic approach to interpreting the experience. Sensing movement in these works is not merely subjective—ours, felt personally. There is also something objective about it, in that its instigating sources of visual vibrancy (colors, lines, patterns) appear as qualities in the work itself, and about which we may confer with one another as to their aesthetic effect.

So here we discover the primary predicament encountered with Kaneko's work: the *fact* of these weighty beings, which he calls “dangos”²—and *what to make of them*. They stand as robust sentries before the corpus of Kaneko's work. One has now to deal with them, beg their forbearance, no matter the work one may be interested

in seeing or exhibiting: whether paintings, drawings, garments, or glass—the dangos are always watching.

Our second predicament, then, is what to make of this inextricability, this visual kinship among the artist's various media. It speaks to the imbricate nature of Kaneko's work overall, to its interrelationship by design: that is, both to the artist's processes and intentions as well as the graphic gestures and patterns that recur on different surfaces in different media. Works also interrelate in space, especially by the design of space, establishing a relation among *things*. Tug on one delicate print fiber of color and it will lead to a two-thousand-pound dango.

What Kaneko's “gentle giants” (Arthur Danto's term) permit is the assimilation of our emotional and psychic projections: they smilingly accept whatever we imagine about them. They need not even be sentient to benefit from our anthropomorphic regard—something we do with animals all the time, attributing to them human feelings and thoughts and intentions. These kinds of attribution can become the speculative stuff of writing and a catalyst for organizing exhibitions.

Reading the Exhibition

We write because we have problems, interesting problems. We organize shows for the same reason. Good critical work begins in this mode, formulating a problematic: a series of related issues, questions, or problems. Here, we begin with dangos, the hefty ceramic sculptures produced by Jun Kaneko, the work for which he is best known. Problems need be neither good nor bad, though we have emotionally valenced responses to them. Dangos are like that. They pose challenges, about which we have reactions, feelings, beyond simple pleasure.

There they are, the fact of them, in book illustration here, in spacious warehouses in Omaha, and in the world at large, as outdoor public sculpture: these weighty *things*, these sometimes overly conspicuous, overly determined *objets d'art*. Our experience of them exposes the problematic: the questions we confront when we confront the dangos. Art does that, good and bad. Middling and mediocre art may be distinguished as the type that fails to engage us in a problematic—

they're uneventful. Dangos are nothing if not eventful; some are major events. They comprise, of course, only one area of the artist's creative activity.

In surveying the wide range of Kaneko's artistic production, as in the exhibition *Play's the Thing*, we see visual affinities among works in different media. In arranging works along the gallery, curators orchestrate a reading of how connections may be made. Specifically, the exhibition stages relationships between paintings and sculpture, and permits us to see how the opera designs work as *intertexts*, linking the two—that is, the designs work as references taking us beyond the primary “texts” of paintings and sculpture to the world of opera design, among other places (discussed in the readings below).

The sheer physicality of Kaneko's human-scale and larger sculptures, the *things* themselves, elicit in us a meditative response. We want to think about them, grapple with them as a presence, both physical and aesthetic. The exhibition *Play's the Thing* invites this meditation on the sculpture and paintings, and especially the relationship between the two—between painting and object making, which correspond to *play* and *thing*. We readily see that Kaneko's sculptures test the limits of form and scale, as ceramic objects. We also see them as surfaces, as though they were canvases in arching three-dimensional form, on which color, line, and new shapes are rendered as paintings.

The opera drawings of costumes and stage sets encourage us to see richer associations (readings) in Kaneko's abstract sculptures and paintings than we had available to us before the drawings were produced. The opera studies provide us with a new, important intertext to the paintings and ceramics, enlivening our meditation and broadening our reading of the artist's work.

The limit to this model is that we, as curators and critics, weave these interpretive threads into the fabric of an exhibition thesis or a critical reading as much as find them in the work, as if to be revealed there. An exhibition study or a reading, as this one, conducts vested negotiations with a body of work, not innocent discoveries of meaning—hence, we *exercise* meaning in reading art. We all do this, for example, when we discuss our personal reactions to works of art.

Reading the Title

When not overly telegraphic or didactic, titles, too, can stretch the intertextual range of an exhibition's thesis. *Play's the Thing* comes from a line in *Hamlet*. As a title it offers two key terms deeply relevant to thinking about Kaneko's work. *Play* requires the interaction of *things* and a degree of freedom to their interplay—a requisite to the activity of art. *Thing*, in Kaneko's work, is what we encounter, especially as dango, the dominant element in the artist's oeuvre: the physical presence of these many and mighty things.

In Act II of *Hamlet*, you may recall, the Prince of Denmark decides to stage a play mimicking the

*The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience
of the King.*

—Hamlet, in William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

presumed manner of his father's murder. Hamlet hopes to catch sight of the usurper king's guilty conscience by gauging his reaction to the play.

But what, you might wonder, has this to do with Kaneko, this stuff of drama, not visual art. Hamlet's words about the effect of drama can bear fruitful relevance, beyond providing a couple of key terms, when we consider Kaneko's recent work in opera costume and stage set design: Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, a tragedy, and Ludwig van Beethoven's *Fidelio*, a tragicomedy. These dramas provide another key—a kind of play within the play, as in *Hamlet*—to interpreting the kinship of works in the Kaneko oeuvre: our mission.

Hamlet's line offers us a parallel: substitute Kaneko for king—not the man but the work. Then consider the outward manifestation of conscience—*character*—and you get the sense in which we might invoke Hamlet's

famous strategem for reading psychological states. For us the idea is this: just as Hamlet's clever play reveals the king's conscience, play in painting will help reveal character in the work of art (or, in our sense of reading, ascribe character). Aristotle had a similar idea when in the *Poetics* he notes: "Character is the element which reveals the nature of a moral choice." In turn, words and actions are signs by which we may know someone's character. Character is coded in these outward gestures of conscience. Character in a Kaneko work of art is suggested in outward gestures of paint and pattern.

In this manner of association, we enlist Aristotle and Shakespeare to teach us something about Kaneko. Our subject, the thing we suspect but would like to catch in clearer view, is the quality of affinity Kaneko has given his multiple forms of art, which appears to us as visual familiarity among them. What extends that affinity across works and media, what ties them together, is what we're calling "character," our new term for reading Kaneko's art.

Reading Character

Reading Kaneko's role in and contribution to the two operas can be an elaborate pursuit, one that warrants its own study. For our purposes, the operas can assist us in reading our notion of character as a visual element recurring across Kaneko's work.

Let's start with *Fidelio*, which is the masculine name taken by the female protagonist, Leonore, who disguises herself as a man in an attempt to liberate her husband from prison. Arthur Danto finds her daringness exceptional in literature: "Hence the power of the name that Leonore took to advertise her character—Fidelio—which almost calls for an exclamation point: 'I am fidelity!'"³ Just as names can advertise a type of character, so, we may contend, can colors, shapes, and patterns, as Kaneko employs them, "advertise" or suggest character by the associations and feelings these visual elements evoke. Certainly this is the challenge around which the stage set and costume designer must organize his thoughts.

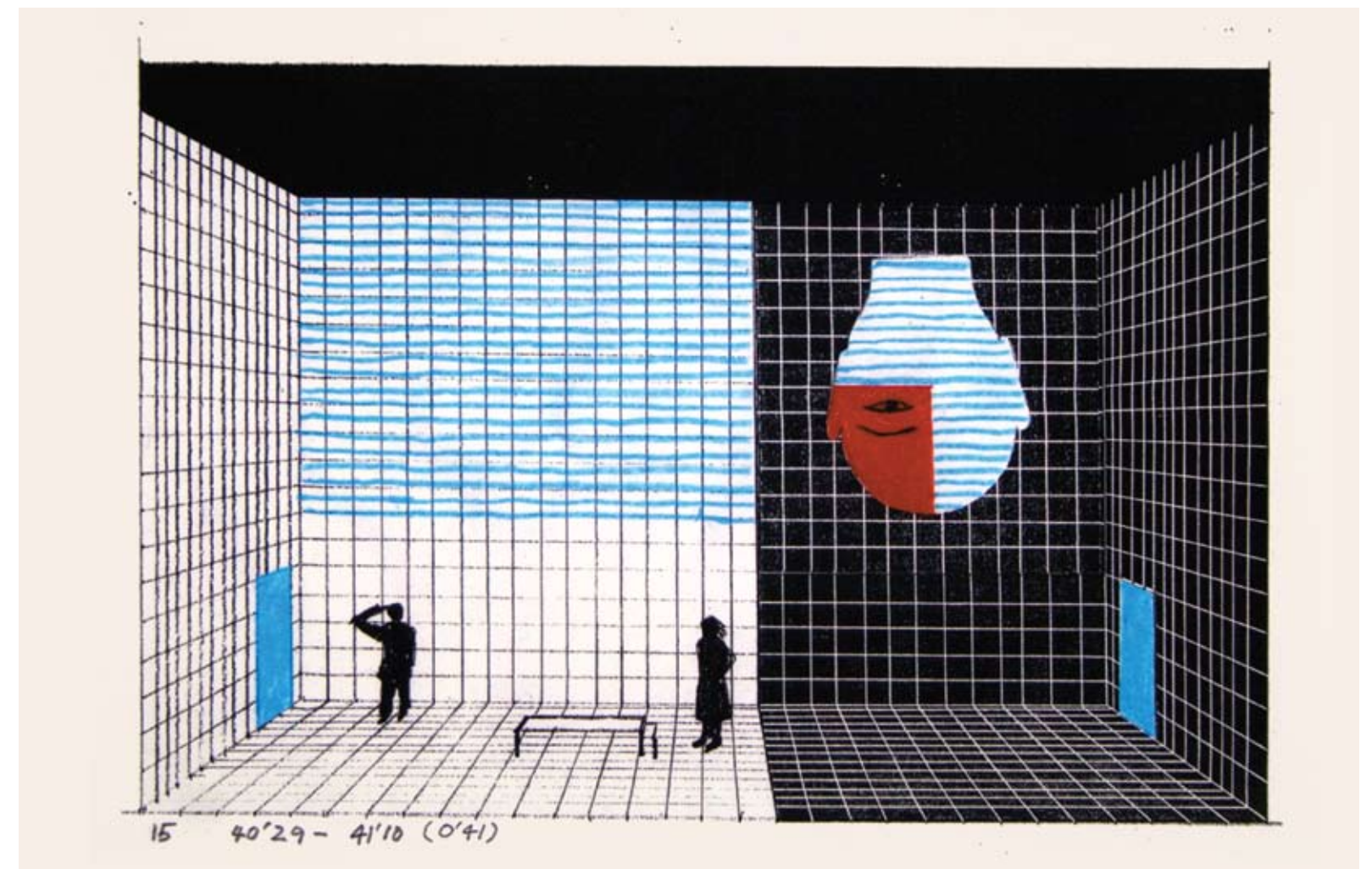
With respect to the *Fidelio* stage set design—a spare graphics of black and white with reticulated grid

work—Danto notes: "The white space . . . is the space of love and freedom; the black space for oppression, the suppression of truth, and the torment of undeserved penal brutality. The white space is the realm of marriage, the black space of the miscarriage of justice."⁴ These are general Western cultural associations with color, rendered specific in plotting the story in the opera. Kaneko himself made a similar observation about *Fidelio*: "One of the interesting contrasts in this opera is the dark side of society and the beautiful and joyful side of human life."⁵ But he doesn't need to invent a new style or symbolism for rendering this contrast. He was commissioned, after all, to draw from his signature, highly developed stylistic repertoire.

Hence, in thinking about Kaneko's work for the design of *Fidelio*, Robert Driver, director of the Opera Company of Philadelphia, reported: "The two characteristics of Kaneko's work that immediately resonated

with me were his powerful enormous head sculptures and the presence of grid works throughout his works. I envisioned using the former to symbolize overwhelming power and oppression and the latter as an abstraction for incarceration and prisons."⁶ It is the *character* inherent to Kaneko's design work—created through color, form, gesture, and pattern—that lends the opera a visual vocabulary for setting mood and moral tone through aesthetic design. As the above reflections indicate, this moral-aesthetic connection was in the minds of the artist and opera director before they began the opera, and in the observations of the critic-philosopher subsequent to production.

The same connection applies to *Madama Butterfly*. "The costumes must also be within the world of Jun Kaneko's aesthetic, while reflecting the story and its characters," writes Leslie Swackhamer, *Butterfly* stage director and theatrical consultant.⁷ Kaneko's charge is to imprint his visual phraseology on the costumes to



Fidelio Set Design, 2007
Digital reproduction, 8 1/2 x 11 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Utagawa Hiroshige
Sudden Shower Over Shin Ohashi Bridge and Atake
Courtesy of Brooklyn Museum of Art



Untitled, 2003
Sumi ink and oil stick on Korean paper, 66 x 55 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist



Fall, 1996
Glazed ceramics, 54 x 73 1/2 x 7 inches
Created at the European Ceramic Workcentre, The Netherlands
photography: Takashi Hatakeyama



Jacket, 1979
Silk-screened fabric, 40 x 63 inches
Made in the Fabric Workshop, Philadelphia, PA

further the characterization along in the story. Similarly, Danto notes: “Here he is charged with creating sets against which a powerfully emotional drama is to be enacted, and costumes that bear a significant symbolic weight.”⁸ Bearing that “symbolic weight” is what it means to experience catharsis, which Danto explains:

A transformation occurs with which Aristotle was already familiar, in which the emotions of an audience are taken up and engaged, so that they leave the theater as exalted beings. If this can happen with the living persons who play roles, it can certainly happen with *the garments they wear and their painted surroundings, which come to life with the characters* the actors become.⁹

[My emphasis]

Characterization breathes life into the actors’ roles. It does something comparable in bringing life to works of art through the uses of color and design. Garments and painted surroundings contribute to the transformation made possible in drama because their design enhances characterization and mood. Design features can do

this only if they carry mood or character as a form of aesthetic latency: character abstracted to symbolism.

With respect to backdrops, Swackhamer gives this example: “When Butterfly and Pinkerton sing of the stars and moon, traditionally most productions actually have a stardrop and some sort of moonbox. Instead, we approach this through the projection of painterly images. Hence, for example, Jun’s trademark polka dots embellish a dark blue screen, becoming the stars and the night sky.”¹⁰ Again, as in *Fidelio*, recourse is made to Kaneko’s existing visual vocabulary; the opera design hinges on this recourse. The playfulness of polka dots, adapted to a starry setting, adds a new abstract dimension to the scene and how it’s performed and received. Kaneko’s visual elements have supplanted the stars and the moon. His universe is now the heavens.

Kaneko’s painting patterns, and the associations they conjure, become available for symbolic or interpretive employment. They become as tools and assembly parts in the construction of a scene. Using his own painting signatures, Kaneko builds a stage set. This, too, is the

work of art—its employment—how a painting can be set to do the work of symbolism. The painting is not a symbol, but is employed to carry out the task of symbolism.

Finally, consider the trace of moods conveyed in Kaneko’s painted patterns—apart from those discussed in the operas. For example, take the pattern of rain. Its varying moods are the subject of many works of representational art, such as Utagawa Hiroshige’s “Sudden Shower Over Shin Ohashi Bridge and Atake” from the 1850s. Compare it to Kaneko’s *Untitled* 2003 sumi ink drawing, and you see the same shower, become deluge. Hiroshige’s reds and blues are abstracted to angled bars of color. *Fall*, 1996, a ceramic “canvas,” is an earlier abstraction and variation on the rain motif. Earlier still is *Jacket* from 1979, a garment silk-screened with the pattern of wind-angled raindrops behind a latticelike window frame that structures the bodice of the jacket. Across four different media, the moods suggested by the different abstractions of rain translate to the subtleties of character discernable in the works of art.

Another Thing About Play

The rain example returns us to the idea of play at issue in this study, as suggested in the title *Play’s the Thing* and in the artwork itself. Play serves several purposes. One, play relies on rules, against which something reacts (itself an act of playing), thereby creating tension in moving away from the rules. Looking at similarities across Kaneko’s artistic media, for instance, we see a form of play at work between canvases and sculpture, as between the traditions (rules) of painting and object making. Specifically, we see one medium, painting in abstract styles, infiltrating the other: sculpture in organic forms, like vases. The rules of one form of expression, when applied to another form, distance the work from its traditional rules. We read this as play: as against working properly within a discipline, such as traditional ceramics.

Two, regarding the painted surfaces themselves (whether flat or convex), play pertains to the formal tension between design elements within a composition, or elements working against the composition itself, i.e., against the

general pattern forming the composition. This internal inconsistency of composition—an intended discrepancy—defines a tension between freedom and structure: as between errant elements and regularity of pattern, on which play depends, especially in Kaneko’s painted compositions. A good example of this is *Untitled*, 2003 from the above discussion. Against the almost vertically articulated dark gray shroud of rain, which composes the background, we see angled stripes of vibrant colors. The contrast of the color bars over the gray patterned sub-structure constitutes the play at work in the piece. Pattern introduces order and structure, against which play marks its field of emergence. Kaneko works precisely with this mode of play by also welcoming irregularities that occur naturally in organic patterns and processes like kiln firing.

Three, *play*, as we saw above, denotes a sense of theater—as in the two opera productions Kaneko designed. As theater, *play* provides a metaphor also for the way sculptures are staged in galleries or public arenas for viewer encounters, as well as for interaction among themselves

as works of art. Dangos, we now can see, are vested with color and *character*, as though dressed for a part. This extended metaphor of art as vested with character permits another view to appreciating the artist’s work. Kaneko infuses his artwork with character through the use of color and pattern. “Character” is a name we give the sought-after connection linking the artist’s various media.

Reading Kaneko

*Now the reality of creating and making an object starts.
Keep on breathing trying to find the center of yourself.
Mind works and hand moves. It is the beginning.*
—Jun Kaneko, *Dutch Series: Between Light and Shadow*.¹¹

We now turn to Kaneko himself. During a residency in 1995–96 at the European Ceramic Workcentre in ‘s-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands, he jotted down some observations and thoughts “written over a period of a few days” in the artist’s studio. The resulting works of ceramic art, completing the residency in 1996, were

exhibited in Haarlem as the *Dutch Series: Between Light and Shadow*. Early in his meditation he writes to himself, and his future readers, the sentences quoted above. Recall for a moment the penultimate sentence:

Mind works and hand moves.

This terse yet poetic statement, simple and elegant in five syllables, reads like the culminating epiphany of a haiku. A little later he invokes a seasonal setting, a practice of the haiku:

Wind blows
Rain falls
Finally the sun comes out . . .¹²

One reaches for the articulation of a moment in a haiku, maybe a moment of understanding. The sun’s appearance is a sign of a revelation, a moment of clarity achieved. The prior line about mind and hand does this, too, yet has the further intellectual poise and emotional balance of a Zen koan. One that bears recalling in relation to Kaneko’s observation is a koan associated with Huineng (known as Daikan Enō in Japan), a seventh-century Chinese Zen monastic and founder of the Sudden Enlightenment school of Buddhism:

Two monks were watching a flag flapping in the wind. One said to the other, “The flag is moving.” The other replied, “The wind is moving.” Huineng overheard this. He said, “Not the flag, not the wind; mind is moving.”¹³

There is something quizzically Kantian—to our Western understanding—about Huineng’s response. Immanuel Kant showed us that the way we come to know the world, the way we think it works, is shaped by the structure of our thinking, which filters our perception of the world. It is impossible for us to know the world without viewing it through the prism of these mental constructs, like cause and effect. The koan makes a similar claim: movement—as a question posed by the monks over what is actually in motion—resides in the mind, which determines our options for how we see movement in the space of the world.

Kaneko’s maxim seems to agree with Kant, as much as with the old koan. It conjoins the activities of mind and hand, rather than separating them. It also mixes the

activities of thought and labor: hands usually do the work, and mind usually moves from one thought to the next. The maxim stops short, however, of attributing cause and effect—that the hands would follow the mind’s will. Instead we get a reversal of the usual subject-verb combinations, such as hands working: instead, we are told that mind *works*, performs a labor, in the *manual* sense of the metaphor “works,” while hands *move*, skimming across surfaces like meandering thoughts.

The beauty of this confusion is that it permits the reversal or collapse of the cause-and-effect relationship we Westerners have come to expect. Thought, in Kaneko’s koan, is generated in and *through* physical activity, rather than having mind as the agent of action, which then illustrates or implements its thoughts, as in Hegel’s formulation of art. The reinvestment of thought into the work—“Now the reality of creating . . . starts”—itself completes the cycle of artistic activity; thought and work stimulating one another: what we might call the force of creative energy. Mind and hand become *mutually generative* of creativity: “It is the beginning,” as Kaneko observes—the spark of creative activity. This reading is made clear moments later in the *Dutch Series* meditation when he writes, “Working gives me a chance to think. Doing makes me think, makes me do more.”¹⁴ This circularity, for the artist, drives his creativity.

Dangos and Dasein

At play in Kaneko’s symphony of mind and hand are the forces of work and will: a tension between the work of art (what it does) and the work of the artist (what he does). This agon creates a binding distance of push and pull to be overcome. Becoming aware of this tension, Kaneko’s objective has been “to shrink the distance between the material and [oneself]”:¹⁵

Some people develop an amazing ability of working with a material. The mind and the hand work so free and good with the material, that it looks like there is no distance between the material and the maker anymore.

Recently I have started to think if it is possible to become the material itself. Then this space between the maker and the material would not exist.¹⁶

We take Kaneko to mean that the more intimate an artist becomes with the material, the more the artist



Opera Omaha’s 2006 production of *Madama Butterfly*
Photography: Takashi Hatakeyama

has adapted to its nature. As the maker becomes more “in tune” with the material, the space between them would be perceived less as a distance. I offer this explanation of Kaneko’s meaning because it may seem foreign to Western thinking, trained as we are in dualistic thinking: us vs. them, artist vs. object, good vs. evil. One always tries to conquer the other.

Yet some Western thinkers have been influenced by Eastern philosophies and have attempted to recast our dualistic way of thinking. Philosopher Martin Heidegger was one. His innovative concept *Dasein* means literally “there-being” in German. It’s a term used by Heidegger in his magnum opus *Being and Time* to label the kind of beings that we are. The “there” (*da*) in “there-being” (*Dasein*) refers to the world: our kind of being, as humans, is always in the world (of associations, as I said at the beginning), in which we find ourselves as if thrown, *there*. *Dasein* isn’t a human being, but a way of being human: always already rooted in the world.

Heidegger’s philosophical advance is in master-planning a rethinking of the subject-object relationship. Instead of thinking of ourselves as Descartes did, as “thinking things,” living *here* in our thoughts, and everything else as “extended things,” out *there* in space, Heidegger puts the two in mutual context, returning us to the world from which we spring, and returning the world to our regard of it. He does so by concentrating not on us as things but, instead, on our way of *being*, which includes having a practical regard for things in the world—a way of closing the conceptual distance between beings and objects. Everything around us is there for a reason; the “reason” is the glue that binds us to things—the web of significance that composes “the world.” This way of thinking is eminently significant in bridging *here* and *there*—Kaneko’s problematic of the artist’s relationship to his material, and the problematic of our study: a question of our own place among the dangos, and of their place among themselves.

Not coincidentally, *Dasein*, in Heidegger’s worldview, would live comfortably in Japan. This is because Japanese culture designs a world in which things have their rightful places—which is precisely *Dasein*’s attitude toward the world. Heidegger’s sense of the world is not one of spatial coordinates but that of weaves of signification, weaves in which *Dasein* is inescapably enmeshed rather than detachable.

Consider what Kaneko says about Japanese society to get a better sense of *Dasein*’s world:

A Shinto idea is that the sun comes up one end and goes down another end. My idea doesn’t start from there but from Japanese gardens, the way Japanese serve food, the kinds of plates they use, the packaging of goods. Japanese always arrange things in space. If you grow up that way, it gets to be subconscious. But now I’m conscious of it.¹⁷

The arrangement of things coincides with the arrangement of space—lending palpability to space, which we might otherwise think of, in a Western frame of mind, as emptiness or nothingness. The substance of space, binding entities in the physical world, as in visual design, becomes the medium of distinction for Kaneko’s work in sculpture, installation, and painting. Becoming conscious of the Japanese cultural subconscious, as Kaneko says, agrees with Heidegger’s notion of art as disclosing what we take for granted.

Reading the Work of Art

Returning to the work of art, we should ask what the art itself teaches us, in addition to its form of spatialization. Heidegger’s thoughts about the visual arts, including architecture, are most fully articulated in his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art.” He means by “the work of art” not an object of art, but the service it performs. Heidegger looked at art as more than objects or things of pleasure and beauty; he saw them as having the power to reveal what things are, which he called the *being* of things. This understanding has in turn implication for the kind of being we exhibit as humans—that is, as interpreter-participants in the disclosures that art has to offer.

For Heidegger, art has a job to do. Its business is to divulge truth.¹⁸ Rather than think of an artwork as consisting of a *thing*, to which we ascribe aesthetic qualities, we are to think of the *nature of things revealed* in the artwork. That is to say, rather than treating a work as an object, the end toward which we apply work, Heidegger returns to the active sense of the word: *work* as a job to do, the role of which includes the “unconcealment” or “disclosure” of the nature of things (their being). In his attention to practical effects and intuitive understanding, his approach to art interestingly fuses pragmatism and mysticism.

Work needs a problem to focus on, and for Heidegger the work of art poses a conflict between concealment and unconcealment, between the usual and the extraordinary, in both thinking and doing. This corresponds accurately to the agon of play discussed above. So something of an event, a work-related event, must occur with art. According to Heidegger, a revealing of truth occurs, which comes as a gift to both artist and viewer. This idea of gift delivered to the artist neatly parallels what Kaneko says about his artistic process: that he has no predetermined end in mind when he sets out to work. Instead, he has a meditative tête-à-tête with the dango before he can come to an awakening (the gift) about its character. That moment in the creative process, between fogginess and clarity, as he puts it, contains a truth to be revealed: namely, the nature or the *character* of the dango, which the work will bring forth. It is, however, only one such moment, between concealment and unconcealment, occurring in the process of Kaneko’s work. Other moments appear at other stages of the process, such as at the end of the firing, when, released

from the kiln, the dango offers the artist new revelations about what transpired in the privacy of the infernal kiln.

The “origin” of the work of art is in these moments, not in the poundage of wet clay or in the free-associating mind of the artist. The origin is that crucible of moments from which the work of art springs forth—neither idea nor end product but a nexus of ongoing work and toil. The viewer, from her world of associations, resumes the work of unconcealment, from where the artist leaves off, by interpreting (reading) the work. According to Heidegger:

In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a “signification” over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation.¹⁹



Installation at Gallery Takagi, Nagoya, Japan, 1991, hand-built glazed ceramic sculpture and epoxy paint
Photography: Jun Kaneko

This passage serves as a model for what the work of “reading” can do when turned to art. Reading doesn’t deliver a judgment on the merits of artwork. Instead, it investigates the involvement artwork already has in the world of signification. The involvement “disclosed” by interpretation doesn’t become the meaning of the work; the disclosures become the world of the work. This is what readings will deliver: an unearthing of worldly embeddedness.

The Sunny Side of Dangos

Arthur Danto, as a prolific arts writer and philosopher, has conducted several illuminative readings of Kaneko’s work in their worldly context. For instance, writing of dangos appearing *en plein air*, he concludes:

The dangos in [an outdoor] setting make a subtle transition from sculpture into statuary. They are not objects of disinterested critical or aesthetic contemplation, to be regarded gallery precincts, but co-inhabitants of a living space and partners in *the pursuit of happiness*.²⁰ [My emphasis]

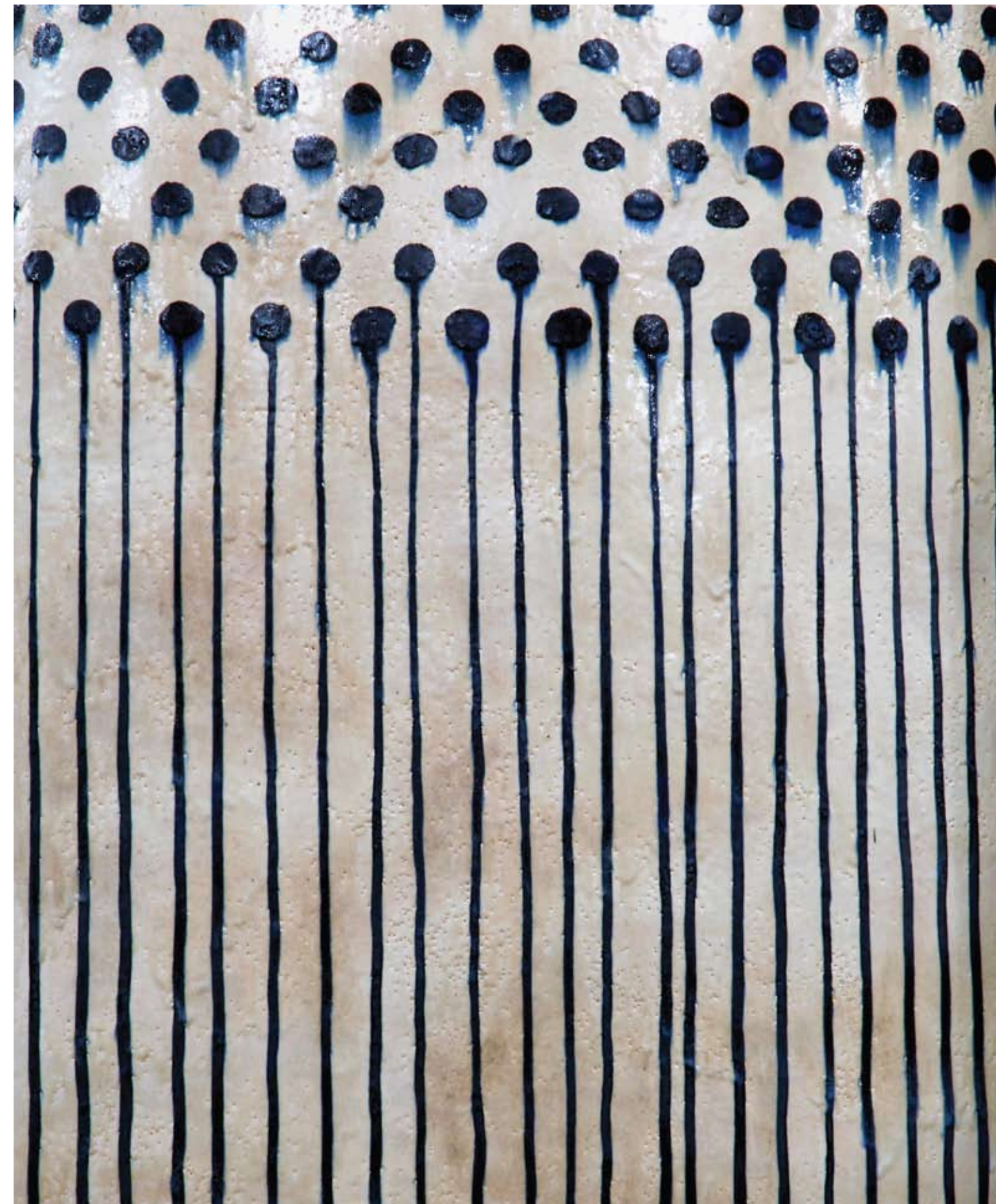
The dangos are of the world, co-inhabitants of our living space. More so, Danto discovers in them a goal of our emotional and psychic investment: the pursuit of happiness. He therein attributes to them a civic character “natural to their good-humored essence,” greeting people in public spaces, “where they share sky and air with ordinary men and women who cannot have too much of the color and innocence they radiate.” What strikes people in their encounter with dangos in public spaces, according to Danto, is the dango’s “improbable dimensionality and sunny coloration.” They require no interpretation, he insists, by which he means academic and art-historical treatment. Their sunny disposition, as he describes it, is their message: “They communicate instantaneously their friendly and reconciling assurances, and wear the real world as well as the brilliant coverings that Kaneko has given them.”

Michael Kimmelman, another art critic who has spent time with Kaneko, expounds his own world of *playful* associations, comparing some dangos to “Easter Island-like heads, the size of baby rhinos.”²¹ Though he finds them abstract, he sees in them “hollow shapes like

lozenges or lima beans or dumplings,” acknowledging that “dango” is Japanese for dumpling. Traveling with Kaneko he visits an industrial firing plant in Pittsburg, Kansas, where he sees “[d]ozens of his Dangos, bisque-fired, huddled like dinosaur eggs.” In inquiring about their painted patterns, he quotes Kaneko and returns to playful similes about dangos:

How does he decide which get stripes or dots?
“I don’t know how it happens, but over the months they will speak to me: ‘I want a polka dot.’ Or whatever.” The critic Arthur Danto has compared the results to colorful kimonos on sumo wrestlers: joyful patterns lightening hulking forms.

Something interesting and telling emerges in the lively associations of these critics. The playfulness of their comparisons relies on a clash of opposing values in each association, creating conceptual composites that in turn have us chuckling. Such humorous images, however, seem to undermine the seriousness of Kaneko’s work. Yet humor, Freud teaches us, reveals something about psychological anxieties. Let’s review these vivid images: “kimonos on sumo wrestlers”: kimono (feminine, modesty apparel) and sumo wrestler (masculine, immodest exposure); “dinosaur eggs”: dinosaur (power, intimidating scale) and eggs (powerless, manageable scale); “baby rhinos”: baby (soft, cuddly, small) and rhinos (hard, prickly, huge). Each binary expression carries the same opposition of values: something threatening and something endearing. One term diffuses the other, as in Danto’s expression “gentle giant.” The threat of a giant, inherent to his size and worldly alienation, is undone by his gentleness. The same applies to the dinosaurs, reduced to the charming thought of eggs, smaller than humans, and sumo wrestlers, dolled up in their colorful kimonos. In every instance there is an implied threat, simmering near the surface, and requiring some kind of lid to keep it from spilling over—the lid of a lighthearted image. Every thought or sighting of dangos calls for “their friendly and reconciling assurances” (we must need assurances around them), and for “joyful patterns lightening hulking forms” Danto, “The Dango en Plein Air: Jun Kaneko as Outdoor Sculptor,” in *Kaneko at Work* (Omaha, NE: The Jun Kaneko Museum, 2001), unpaginated.—we must need the hulking forms lightened. But why would dangos feel so threatening?



Detail of dango texture
Photography: Takashi Hatakeyama



Views of first Omaha studio, Nebraska, 1988

The Dark Side of Dangos

Though he rejects the cartoon characterization of his work, Kaneko understands well the competing effects of dangos, their inherently playful duality, and the dark side that makes their play possible. In an NET Television spotlight, he discloses this simple truth:

If it's below my eye level, it's sort of still not threatening. But if I start passing my eye level and if it went like three or four feet up, then your physical feeling to the shape really changes. The scale itself has definitely power of its own.²³

Kaneko in fact pushes scale to the threshold of the threatening. Our sense of threat with imposing figures derives from feelings instinctual or unconscious in origin. Kaneko knowingly plays on this unconscious response in the viewer. In his article, Kimmelman also touches on the latent quality of the dangos, quoting Kaneko:

"Scale has its own power," he said. "An unsuccessful big piece can still cause people to say, 'Wow!' And although that's the last thing I want, just to make people say 'Wow,' I do expect you to look at big things differently."²⁴

The artist knows we look at big things differently, not just as threatening, but as otherwise different from smaller things. Something edgy inhabits the larger works, something that moves them outside our range of comfort and familiarity. They're a little foreign in their size, shape, and carapace. The duality of simultaneous comfort and discomfort, familiarity and unfamiliarity with something, characterizes neatly the uncanny—that which we can identify as the quality of difference that the larger dangos have over the smaller ones.

Yes, this is true of other large-scale and human-scale works. Sculpture of all sorts, especially statuary, can arouse in us the unexpected feeling of the uncanny. Even abstract sculpture such as Kaneko's can provoke the experience of uncanniness. Implied in every modern work of erect sculpture, regardless of representational similitude, is the original: a statue of a Greek god (such as Apollo), an Egyptian animal god (such as Horus, the falcon), an Olmec colossal head, or even the small but potent Willendorf Venus, and so on. This is true in

architecture as well, where columns became caryatids, gates became griffins, a lighthouse a giant. Things that stand apart and erect, things as abstract as steles, by their very verticality evoke the thought of living things. They retain, so it seems, a gaze upon those of us who would sojourn in their presence, as though wandering inland from the shores of Easter Island. We feel we're being watched by these vigilant beings—even if it's only a feeling metonymically displaced from the seeing power of those who originally erected the heads, to the ancient heads themselves.

The human scale and larger Kaneko dangos impose that kind of presence. The feeling of being in the company of something not fully revealed is an uneasy feeling. Precisely because Kaneko's dangos have a humanlike scale and shape, they bear an uncanny presence. Japanese culture has a different relationship to what we call the "uncanny." Shinto practice, for example, admits a more animistic understanding of things like wind, trees, and rocks than Westerners are used to. Shinto ritual honors natural forces as the spirit or deities of things in the world. As Kaneko has noted, he is becoming more aware than before of the subconscious influences stemming from Shinto practices.

Western writers as well have been thinking about the subconscious influences of the uncanny. In a 1906 essay titled "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch proposes a definition of the uncanny as a feeling of doubt regarding "whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might be, in fact, animate."²⁵ He refers in this connection to the impression made by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls, and automata. Interestingly, in connection to Kaneko, Jentsch's prime example of the uncanny comes from Hoffman's story "The Sandman," which comes to life in Offenbach's opera *Tales of Hoffmann*, containing the doll Olympia whose life status is uncertain. Freud critiqued Jentsch's theory in his famous essay "The Uncanny," which offers his own psychoanalytic reading of the Hoffmann tale.

As with Olympia, sculpture seems to come to life in Kaneko's own operas, taking on the character of roles in the drama. In this sense, the operas reveal the

mechanism of the uncanny present in Kaneko's work, even in work executed before Kaneko designed the operas. The operas disclose the latent animism of the dangos when their pattern-designed modes of character come to life in the actors' performances.

Reading Grids

As Philadelphia Opera Company director Robert Driver noted above, some of Kaneko's works, especially the grid pieces, can have a symbolically dark application. In her essay titled "Grids," Rosalind Krauss discusses at length the effect of the pictorial grid on modern art. She observes that its deleterious result has been, among other things, to announce "modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse." "The barrier it has lowered," she asserts, "between the arts of vision and those of language has been almost totally successful in walling the visual arts into a realm of exclusive visuality and defending them against the intrusion of speech."²⁶ This expresses Krauss's general complaint about the advent and proliferation of the grid in the twentieth century.

For Krauss, the grid is an emblem of aesthetic modernism and its limitation: its concern for the universal at the expense of interest in the concrete (the real world). She does consider, in her essay, two interesting and competing models for how grids have functioned in art: the centrifugal and centripetal models.

In the centrifugal model, the grid is thought to push outward, like the force of a washer spin cycle, extending logically in all directions, to infinity—this is also a mathematical concept. Hence any depiction of a grid in a work of art could present only a mere fragment, a close-up of the larger grid it stands for: the boundless possibility or mathematical idea of a grid. "Thus the grid operates from the work of art outward, compelling our acknowledgement of a world beyond the frame," writes Krauss.²⁷

In a Kaneko grid painting, by extension, the grid itself is at once a complete painting and a partial detail of the painting, always only a moment in the life of the ideal painting—a text and a pretext of the painting and its idea. The material painting might even be seen as the supplement to the idea of the painting, the existence or being of which is greater than the part the artist

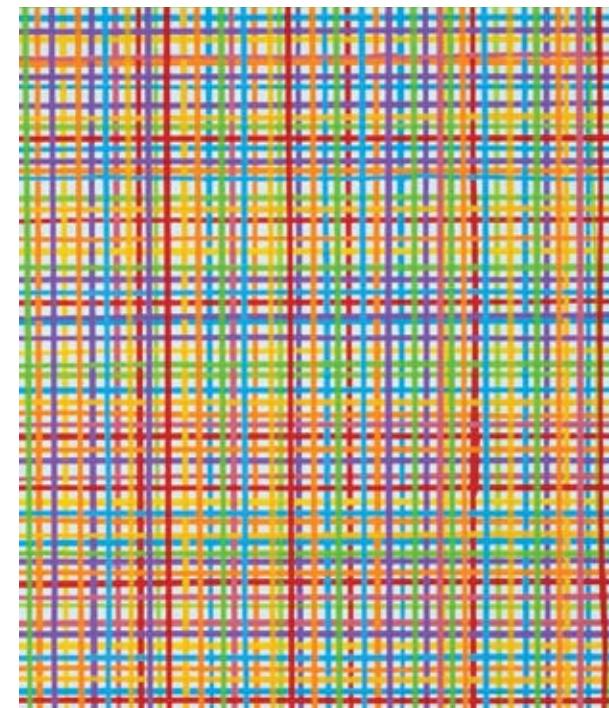
shows us, the part we see. Kaneko's grid pattern, loose plaid, and striped paintings suggest this sense of extended grid and line work. His 2002 *Untitled* five-panel painting makes this point quite well (see page 75). The painting extends its linear structure from one canvas to another, across five canvases in its material form. Its drips of paint protrude past the edges of the outer canvases, pointing outward in both directions to a geometry beyond the visible edges of the canvases.

For the centripetal model, Krauss asserts: "The grid is an introjection of the boundaries of the world into the interior of the work; it is a mapping of the space inside the frame onto itself."²⁸ That is, visual attention is drawn inward rather than outward in the ideal geometric sense. Instead of doing the work of visual illusion, such as in intimating the infinite linearity of the ideal grid, the painting steers our focus to the materiality of the painted surface. Our vision and imagination return from the world of extended space to concentrate on elements contained in the artwork. The dango titled *Expansion* from 1996 is a good example of how to use a grid in a way that draws attention to the painterly gestures composing the piece. The physicality of color, intensified against the white base, the running of colors beyond the pattern, and the evident viscosity of paint all generate a gravitational pull of vision to the materiality of the grid, grounding our attention in the concrete abstract pattern.

An interesting exception to these types of pictorial grids, as Krauss discusses them, is Kaneko's tightly woven plaid grid piece *Untitled* 2009 (page 78). Its visual density and complexity permit no resting place for the eye, no detail to offer visual traction. Our vision slides hopelessly from one slippery intersection of lines and color to the next. Our eyes skim across the painting's surface with each flicker of implied motion produced by the play of abutting colors. We find it difficult to focus on—even to find a focus to—the material contents that compose the work. Arguably Kaneko's painting partakes of tendencies in both models. Other paintings, such as the drip-protruding striped paintings, embody both effects at the same time. The tension between these forces, between illusionism and materiality, marks another form of play in Kaneko's work.



Detail of *Expansion*, 1996
Glazed ceramic, 73 x 56 1/4 x 17 3/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



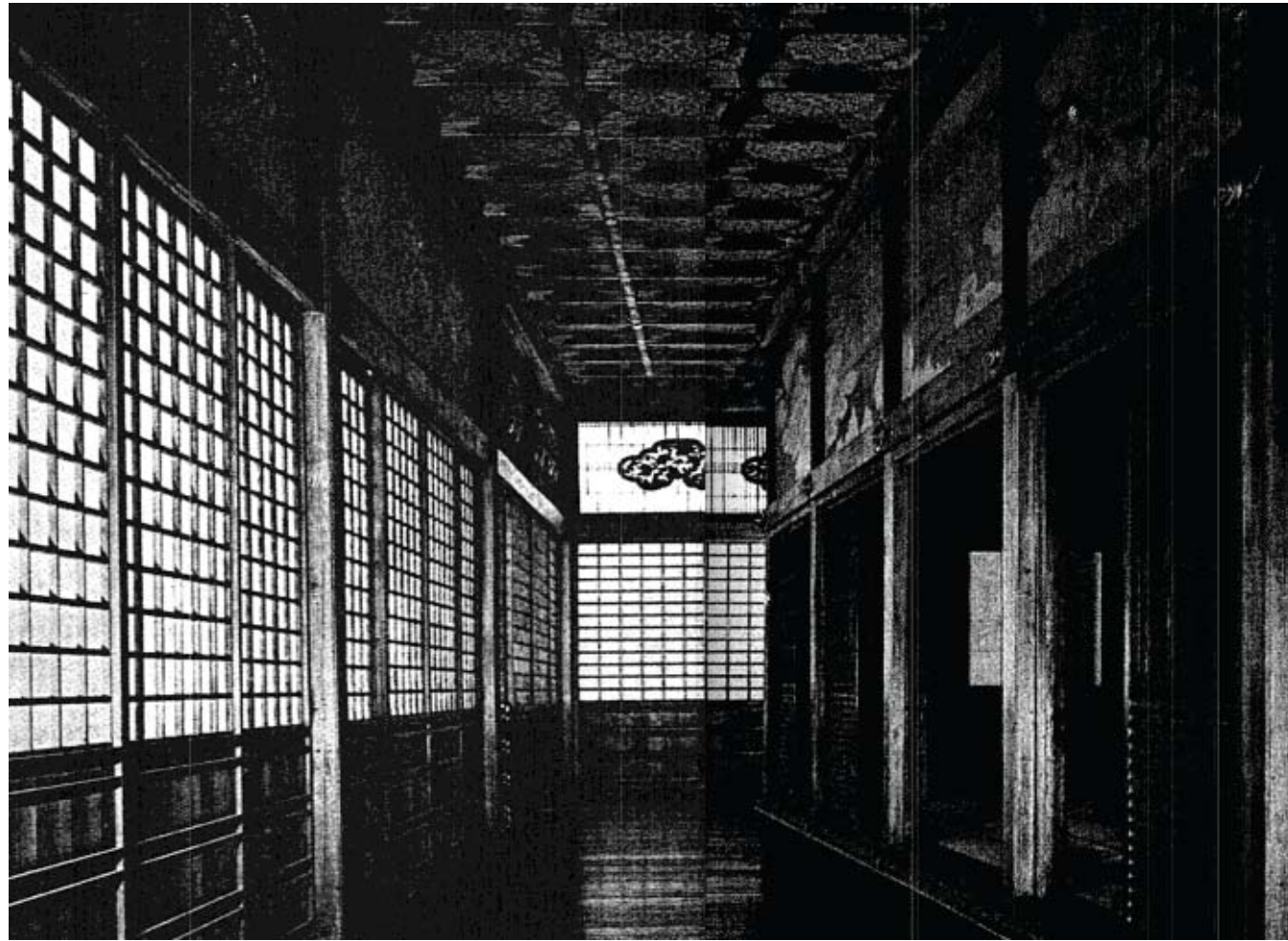
Detail of *Untitled*, 2009
Acrylic on canvas, 114 x 90 x 2 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker

Reading Japan

The grid also has its sources in Japanese culture and architecture. In his book *Empire of Signs*, Roland Barthes takes a Western look at Japanese society. In it he describes a culture of gestures and signs that to him routinely resist deep reading and fixity of meaning. He contrasts this semiotic ethos with our Western proclivity for metaphysics, by which he means our penchant to require an ultimate meaning to things and a god to preside over our rituals, rather than allowing the practice of ritual to determine its significance, as in Japanese cultural and public ceremonies. Barthes offers many examples of Japanese semiotic sparseness, including ones in city planning (nameless streets), Japanese theater (actorless *Bunraku* puppetry), and architecture—specifically, the Shikidai gallery at the Noja Castle in Kyoto (see p. 50). He describes the decorative leanness of the gallery as "tapestried with openings, framed with emptiness and framing nothing, decorated no doubt, but so that the figuration (flowers, trees, birds, animals) is removed, sublimated, displaced far from the foreground of the view."²⁹ Barthes finds that whereas the Western home is furnished to situate its owner,

in the Shikidai gallery, as in the ideal Japanese house, stripped of furniture (or scantily furnished), there is no site which designates the slightest propriety in the strict sense of the word—ownership: neither seat nor bed nor table out of which the body might constitute itself as the subject (or master) of a space: the center is rejected (painful frustration for Western man, everywhere "furnished" with his armchair, his bed, proprietor of a domestic *location*). Uncentered, space is also reversible: you can turn the Shikidai gallery upside down and nothing would happen, except an inconsequential inversion of top and bottom, of right and left: the content is irretrievably dismissed: whether we pass by, cross it, or sit down on the floor (or the ceiling, if you reverse the image), there is nothing to *grasp*.³⁰

The walls of the Shikidai gallery therefore function as more than walls—more, that is, than the way we tend to regard walls or, properly speaking, *disregard* them, as structures designed to recede in the support of ornamentation: pictures, lights, wallpaper, mirrors, and so on. Our walls are stripped of signifying duties. In the Shikidai gallery the walls are the ornamentation, signaling the structure: the ceiling, floor, entries,



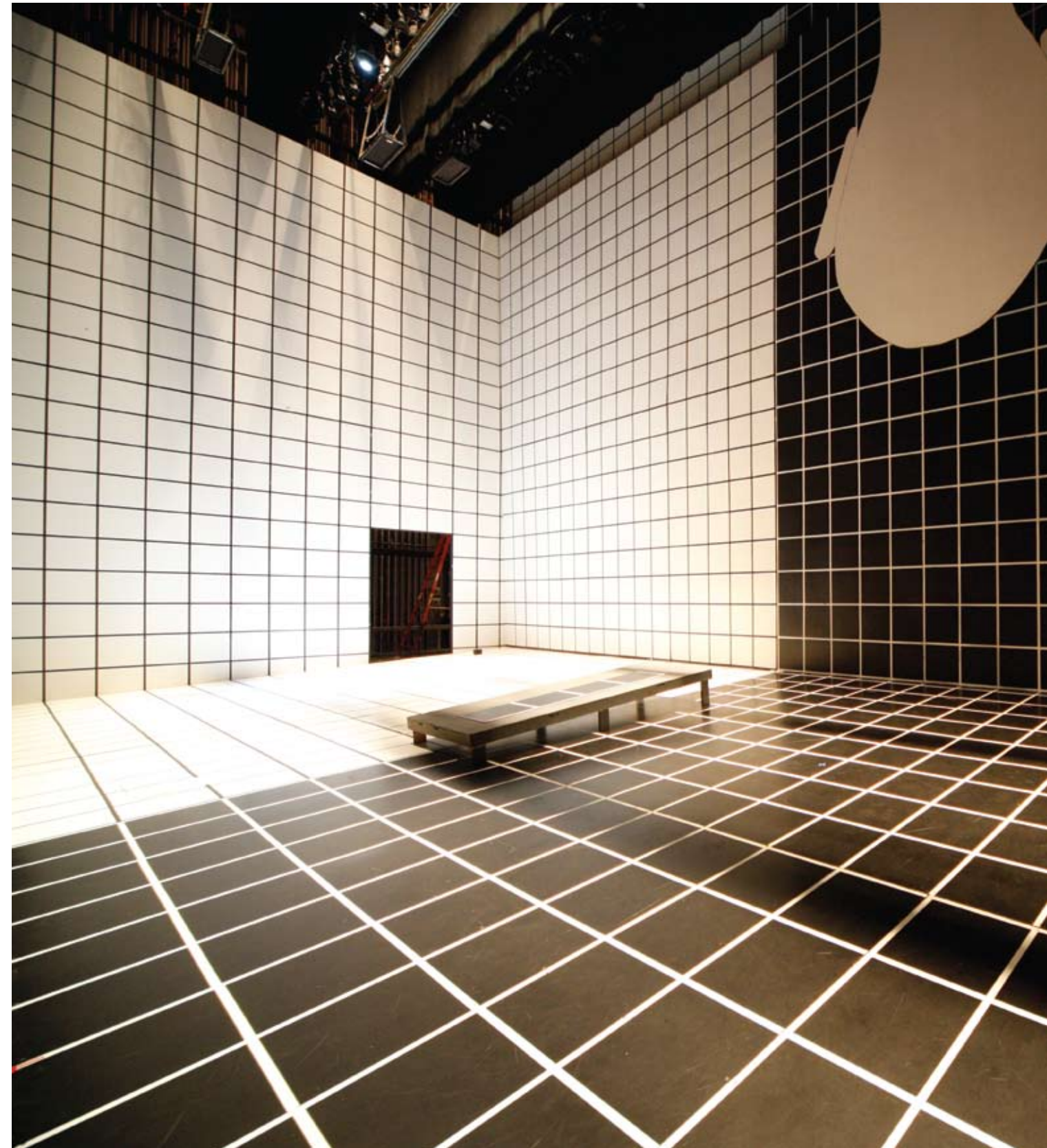
Shikidai gallery at the Noja Castle in Kyoto, Japan
Courtesy of Hill and Wang, Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*

passageways—the edifice. Walls in the gallery, as in the ideal Japanese home, according to Barthes, function not only materially or structurally but also symbolically as signs that can impose a conceptual framing and unframing of the subject within the walls—the users of the space, or rather, those who traverse the space.

This architectural and interior-design stinginess of contents has its purposes, which Kaneko puts to good use in the prison-cell set designs for the opera *Fidelio*. Like the Shikidai gallery, Kanko's stage set design for *Fidelio* maximizes the combined decorative and functional effect of the grid, drawing attention to the walls themselves, as visual and physical limits. Though Kaneko's set designs fuse Japanese architectural allusion with references to Western aesthetic minimalism (which owes a debt to the former), they also go far beyond the cultural sphere, and into political symbolism.

In the *Fidelio* set design, the specifics of interior space have been evacuated, leaving, as in the Shikidai gallery,

“nothing to grasp.” Unlike the gallery, through which one traverses, the cell is a terminal, ending mobility. It becomes a grid, a set for coordinates without character, and without room for character. More so, in “its will to silence” (Krauss), the grid-cell becomes a room for the stripping of character and personhood, a room for dehumanizing its occupant. The function of the cell is to de-center its subject, to take the prisoner out of his or her world. In marking and unmarking the subject of the space, the cell simultaneously renders the prisoner as captive individual and as anonymous. The suppression of history, Krauss's chief complaint about the grid, becomes the operative function of a prison cell's cagelike walls—detaining yet denuding its subject of identity, relationships, and historical context. The grid-cell removes the subject from social visibility and the form of justice that public law might confer. Justice has to infiltrate the secrecy of the “black site” prison system. It does so in the opera through the character of Fidelio, a male figure of fidelity to state authority, who is in fact the disguised Leonore, wife of the prisoner, silenced in the grid-cell for his political views.



Stage set installed for the production of *Fidelio* at the Opera Company of Philadelphia.
Photography: Takashi Hatakeyama



Photography: Takashi Hatakeyama

Hana Yori Dango

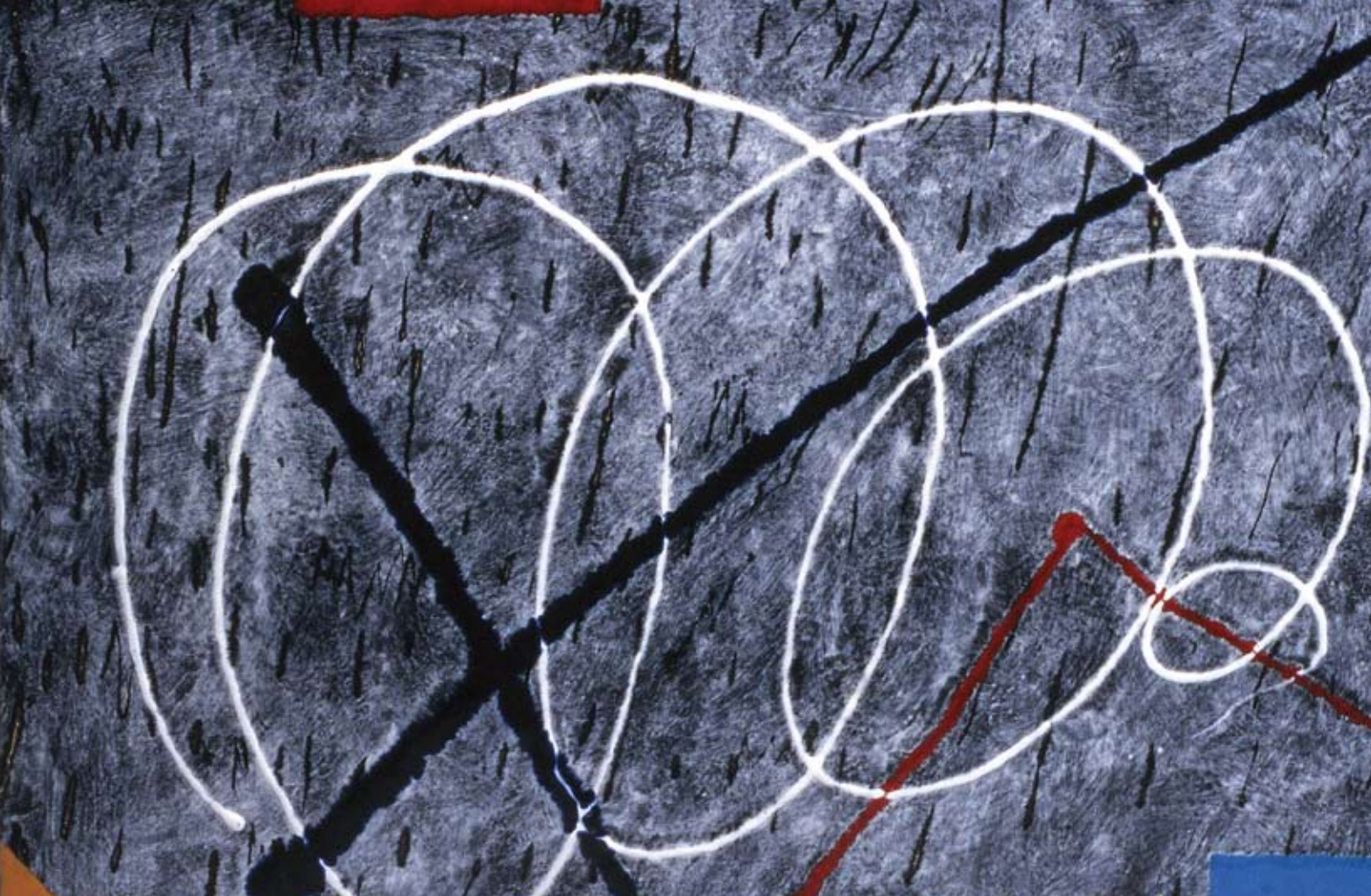
The readings above, like the grid itself, weave a net of associative traces in the art of Jun Kaneko. Linked at nodal points along the net we find political symbolism, literary allusion, philosophical and spiritual meditation, inventive play, and visual pleasure. In ways such as these, art finds its utility as art: in communication, aesthetics, and catharsis; in evoking empathy, sympathy, and sublimation; in developing and processing emotions, thoughts, and actions. In short, art finds its utility in the world of human signification.

The Japanese saying *hana yori dango*, quoted at the beginning of this essay, states a preference: “dumplings before flowers”—favoring physical to aesthetic pleasures. Though said sarcastically of people who desire food and drink over the beauty of flowers, the saying also contains the kernel of our problematic: that there are useful things in the world, and there is beauty in the world. The sarcasm of the saying is directed at those who fail to see that beauty is an integral part of the world of things, even useful and edible things like dumplings, and that the ceremony of the blossom festival is meant to connect pleasures, not separate them. They fail to see that even dumplings have their own visual charm. Kaneko, on the other hand, shows us that aesthetic charm can have its own dumplings—that is, that beauty also may come with useful things of play, like edible snacks.

The annual flower festival in Japan makes this point. It combines picnicking, sociability, and aesthetic appreciation. To divorce aesthetics from goods, bifurcating the world into beauty and utility, would be to lose sight of our role—the mediating role of sociability—in bridging the two. It would be to lose sight of the festival’s purpose, the Shinto concern with what animates things in the world and, in Jun Kaneko’s case, the distance-closing measure of his art.

Endnotes

1. *Hana yori dango* means “dumplings before flowers” and is said sarcastically of people who attend annual cherry blossom parties (*hanami*) but really prefer food and drink to admiring the beauty of the blossoms.
2. Dango are rice dumplings, often served three on a skewer, in Japan. *Sakura dango*, served during *hanami*, for instance, are pink, white, and green, tinted with red beans, eggs, and green tea. They represent the cherry blossom, the passing of winter, and the coming of summer, respectively.
3. Arthur Danto, “Jun Kaneko’s Staging of Beethoven’s *Fidelio*,” in *Fidelio Leonore* by Jun Kaneko (Omaha: KANEKO, 2008), p. 7.
4. Ibid.
5. Jun Kaneko, “The Way I Met *Fidelio* in Honolulu,” in *Fidelio Leonore*, p. 29.
6. Robert B. Driver, “Notes on *Fidelio*,” in *Fidelio Leonore*, p. 25.
7. Leslie Swackhamer, “Directing Butterfly,” *Madama Butterfly* by Jun Kaneko (Omaha: Kaneko Studios, 2006), p. 35.
8. Arthur Danto, “Art into Opera,” in *Madama Butterfly*, p. 7.
9. Ibid.
10. Swackhamer, “Directing Butterfly,” p. 35.
11. Jun Kaneko, *Dutch Series—Between Light and Shadow* (s’Hertogenbosch, Netherlands: European Ceramics Workcentre, 1996), p. 7.
12. Ibid.
13. Collected in *The Gateless Gate* by thirteenth-century Zen master Wu-men Hui-k’ai and translated variously in numerous anthologies and commentaries on the Zen koan.
14. Kaneko, *Dutch Series*, p. 8.
15. Kaneko, *Dutch Series*, p. 9.
16. Ibid.
17. Susan Peterson, *Jun Kaneko* (London: Lawrence King Publishing, 2001), p. 56.
18. My interest in Heidegger is in the way he structures the reading of art, which he calls interpretation; the divulging of truth is more metaphysical than a reading, in our sense here, would warrant.
19. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 150.
20. Arthur Danto, “The Dango en Plein Air: Jun Kaneko as Outdoor Sculptor,” in *Kaneko at Work* (Omaha: The Jun Kaneko Museum, 2001), unpaginated.
21. Michael Kimmelman, “Giants of the Heartland,” *The New York Times*, January 14, 2007, accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/14/arts/design/14kimm.html>; quotations below are also from this source.
22. Danto, “The Dango en Plein Air,” unpaginated.
23. Jun Kaneko, “Changing Boundaries and Scale,” transcript of video interview conducted by Joel Geyer, *Jun Kaneko: Changing Boundaries & Scale*, on DVD courtesy of NET Television, accompanying the publication *Jun Kaneko: Special Project* (Omaha: KANEKO, 2009) and printed in this volume.
24. Kimmelman, “Giants of the Heartland,” unpaginated.
25. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, translated by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003).
26. Rosalind Krauss, “Grids” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), p. 9.
27. Krauss, “Grids,” p. 18.
28. Krauss, “Grids,” p. 19.
29. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982), p. 108.
30. Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, pp. 108–9.

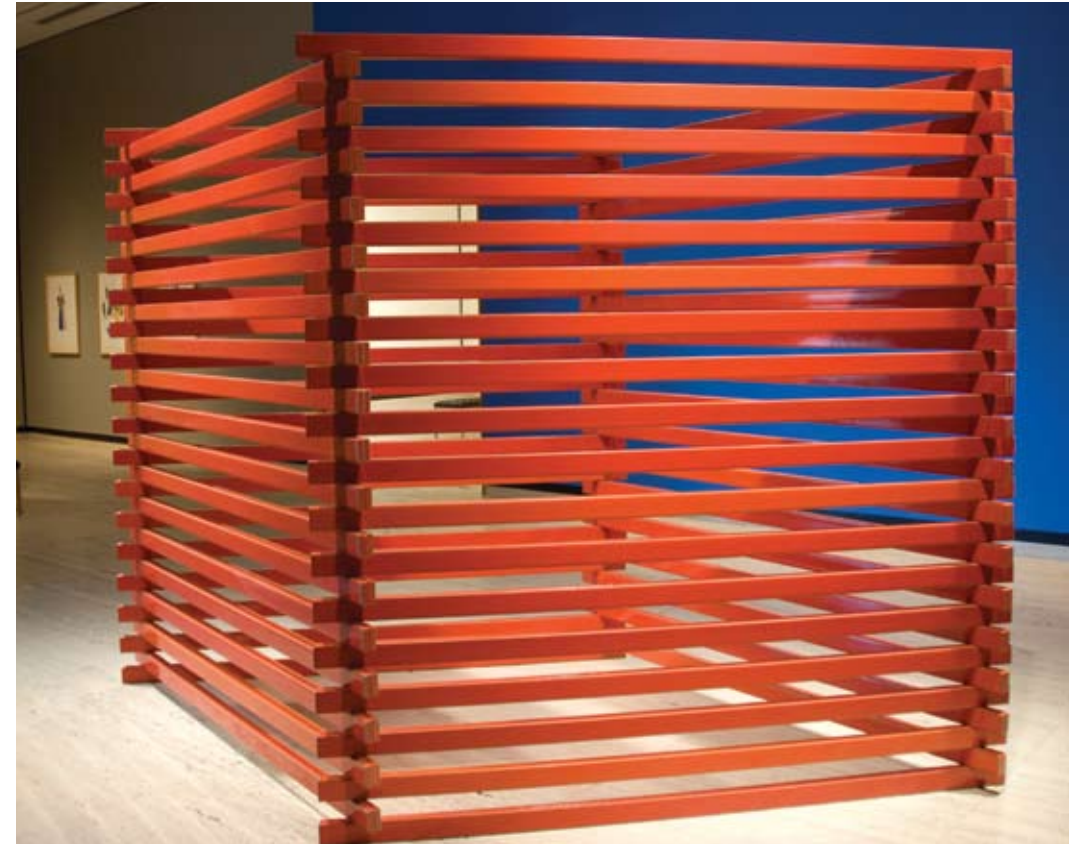


Detail of slab texture
Photography: Takashi Hatakeyama



PLATES

CLAY



Untitled (Parallel Sound), 1981
Glazed ceramic, 84 x 144 x 72 inches
Courtesy of the artist; Photography: Greg Nathan, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Communications



Untitled, 2004
Hand-built glazed ceramic, 110 x 63 x 70 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2007
Cast bronze and steel with patina, 96 x 51 1/2 x 52 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Expansion, 1996
 Glazed ceramic, 73 x 56 1/4 x 17 3/4 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2002
 Glazed ceramic, 78 x 71 x 27 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Dango, 1986
 Glazed ceramic, 69 7/8 x 28 13/16 x 26 1/16 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Takashi Hatakeyama



Untitled, 2006
 Glazed ceramic, 85 x 30 x 16 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2009
Glazed ceramic, 44 1/4 x 32 x 16 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Takashi Hatakeyama



Untitled, 2003
Glazed ceramic, 41 x 24 x 15 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Takashi Hatakeyama



Untitled, 2007
 Glazed ceramic, 33 1/2 x 20 x 11 1/2 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Takashi Hatakeyama



Untitled, 2007
 Glazed ceramic, 22 1/2 x 16 x 9 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2008
 Glazed ceramic, 23 x 16 1/2 x 11 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2009
 Glazed ceramic, 25 1/2 x 19 x 11 1/2 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



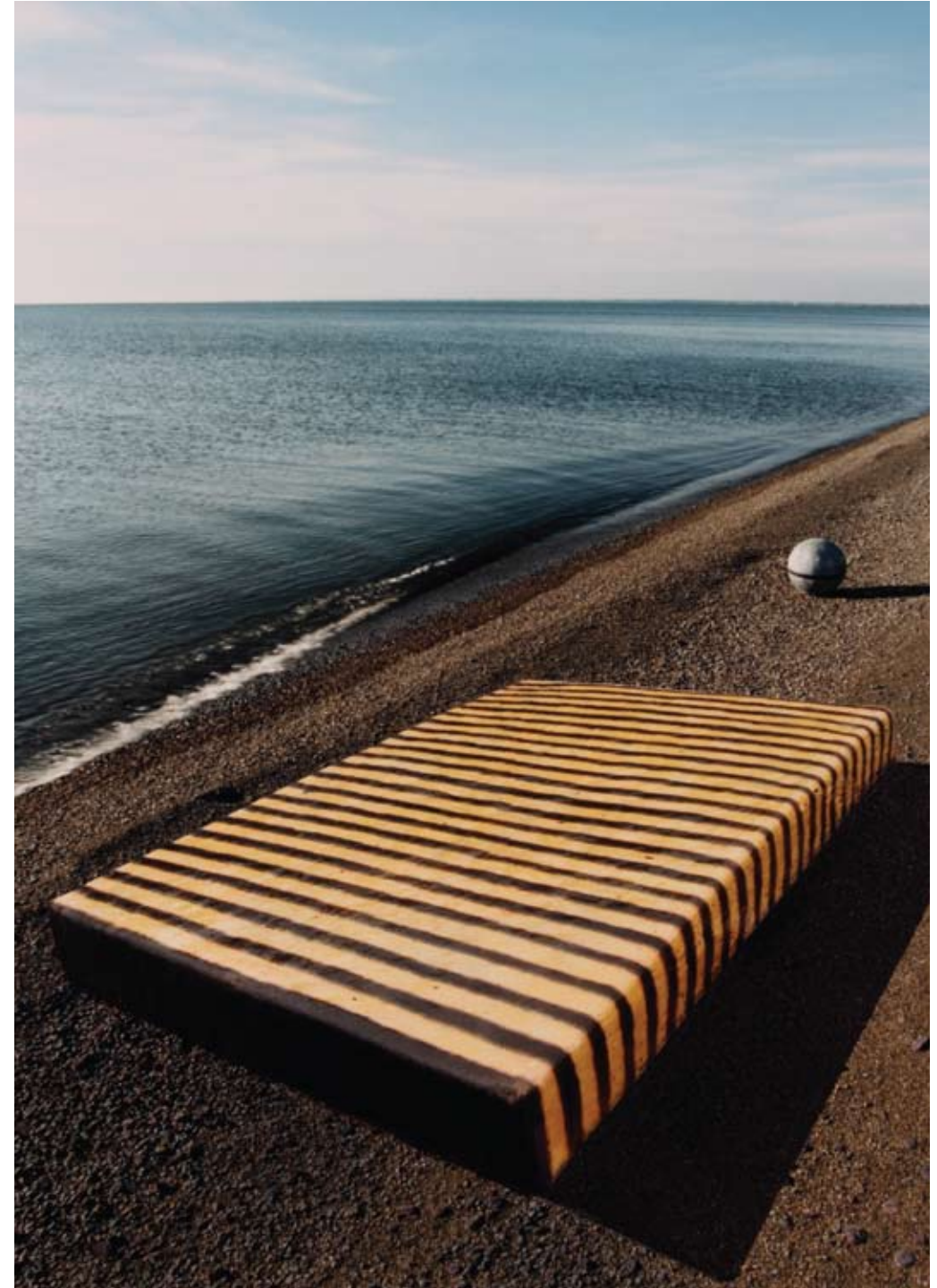
Untitled, 1987
 Glazed ceramic, 77 x 22 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2005
 Glazed ceramic, 73 3/4 x 21 1/2 x 5 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2005
Glazed ceramic, 73 3/4 x 21 1/4 x 4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker

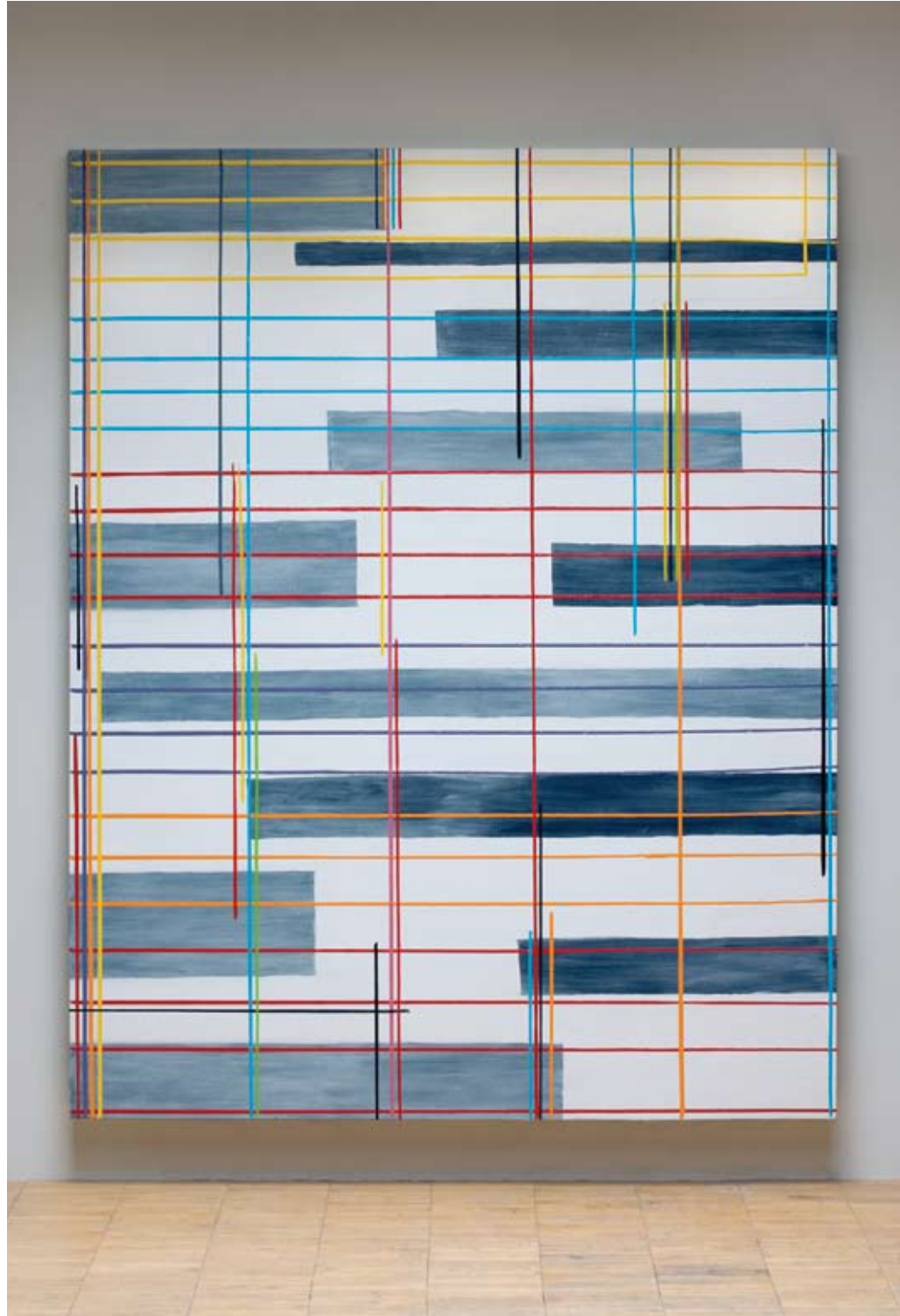


Untitled, 1984
Glazed ceramic, 8 x 48 x 96 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Misha Gordin

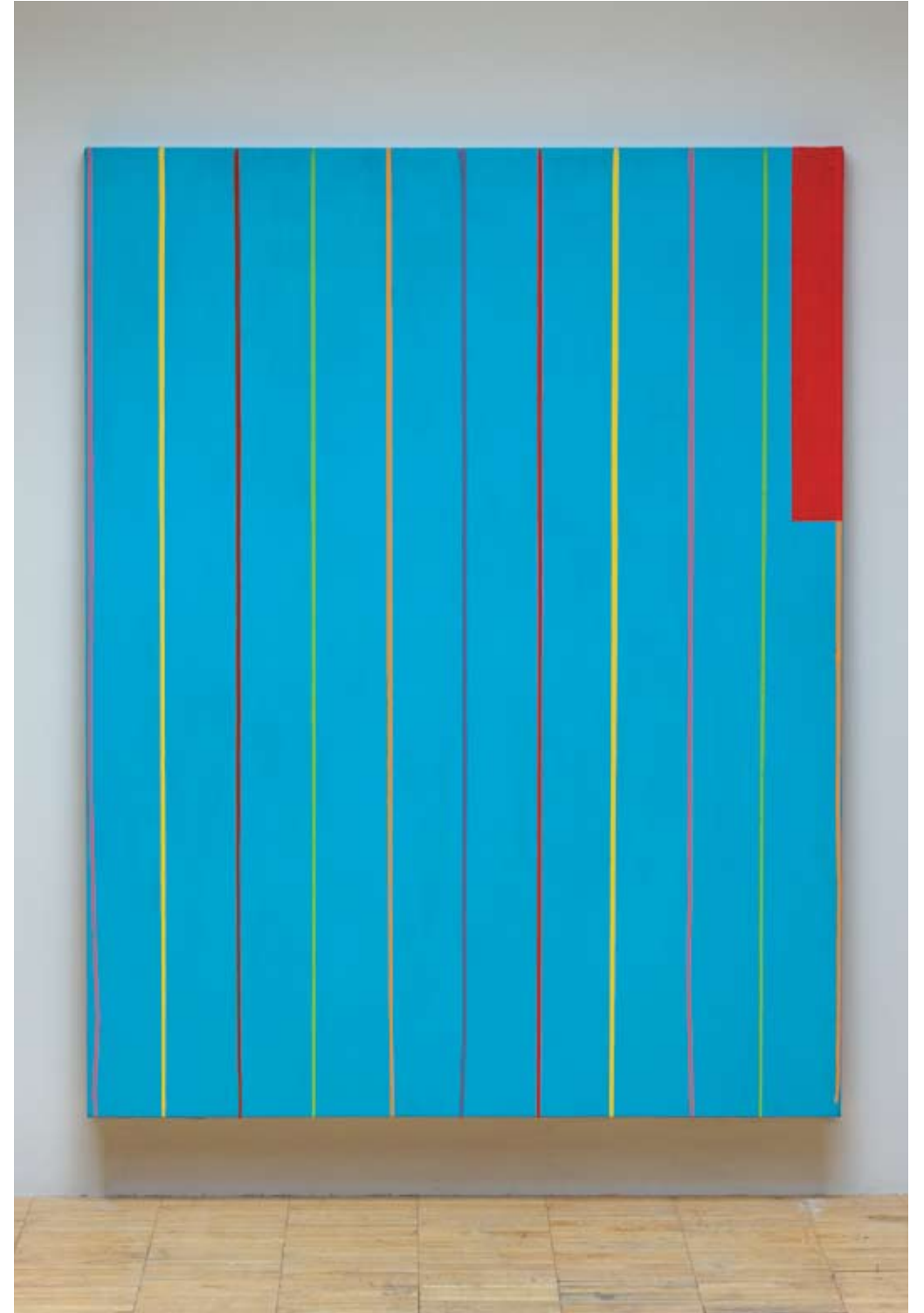
CANVAS



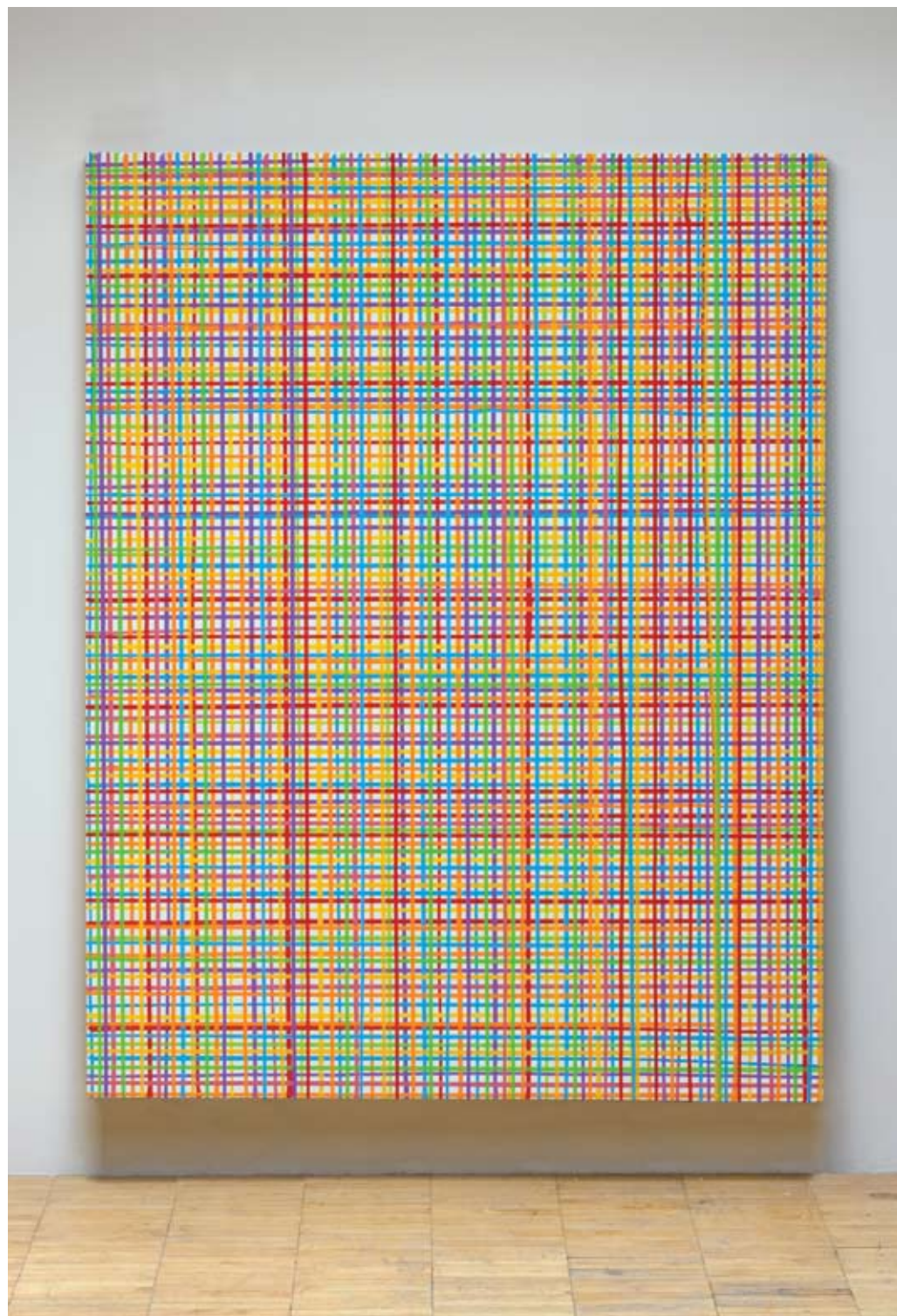
Untitled, 2002
Acrylic on canvas, 114 x 368 x 2 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2009
 Acrylic on canvas, 114 x 90 x 2 1/2 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2009
 Acrylic on canvas, 90 x 70 x 2 1/2 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



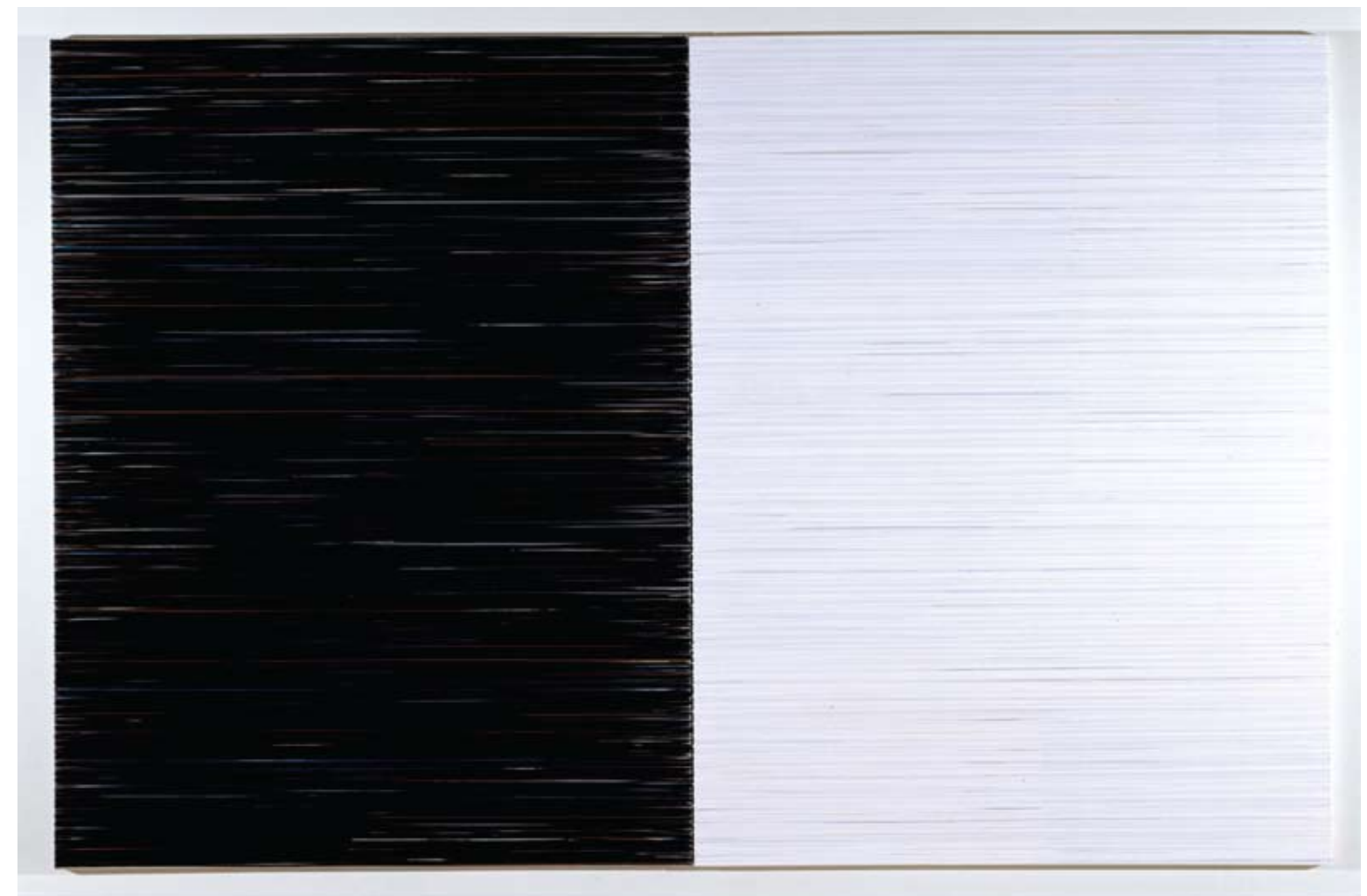
Untitled, 2009
 Acrylic on canvas, 114 x 90 x 2 1/2 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2009
 Acrylic on canvas, 114 x 90 x 2 1/2 inches
 Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 1999
Acrylic on canvas, 108 x 83 x 2 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 1999
Acrylic on canvas, diptych, 108 x 84 x 2 1/4 inches (each)
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker

PAPER



Untitled, 2002
Oil stick and ink on Korean paper, 66 x 55 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2003
Sumi ink and oil stick on Korean paper, 66 x 55 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Untitled, 2003
Sumi ink and oil stick on Korean paper, 66 x 55 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Drunken Tree, 1995
Oil stick on paper, 44 x 64 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Cannonball Tree, 1995
Oil stick on paper, 44 x 64 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Madama Butterfly, 2004
Pencil and acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Goro, Act II, 2005
Pencil and acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Butterfly's Mother, 2005
Pencil and acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Pinkerton, 2005
Pencil and acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Official Registrar, 2005
Pencil and acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Butterfly's Friends, 2005
Pencil and acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Suzuki Act I, 2005
Pencil and acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



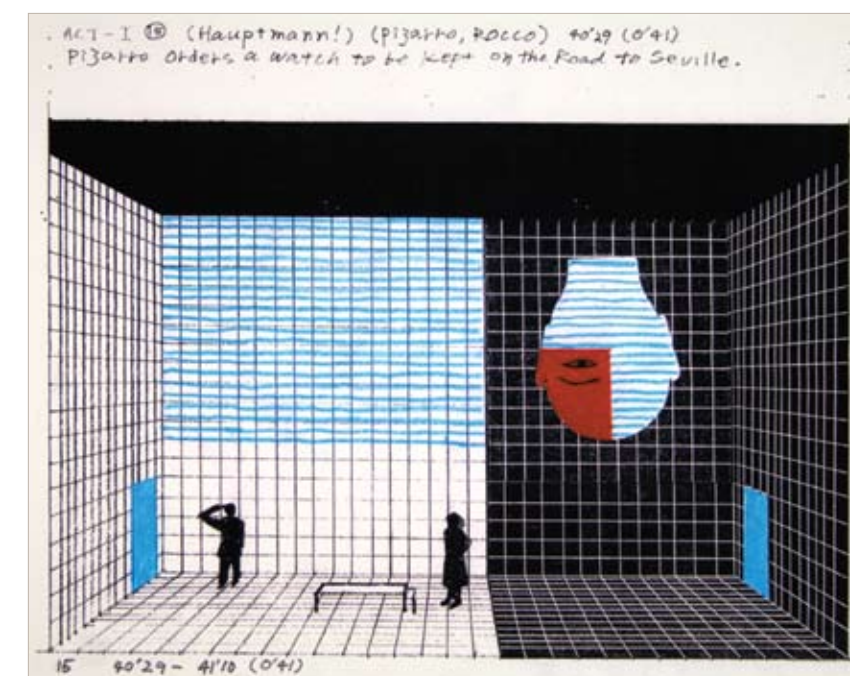
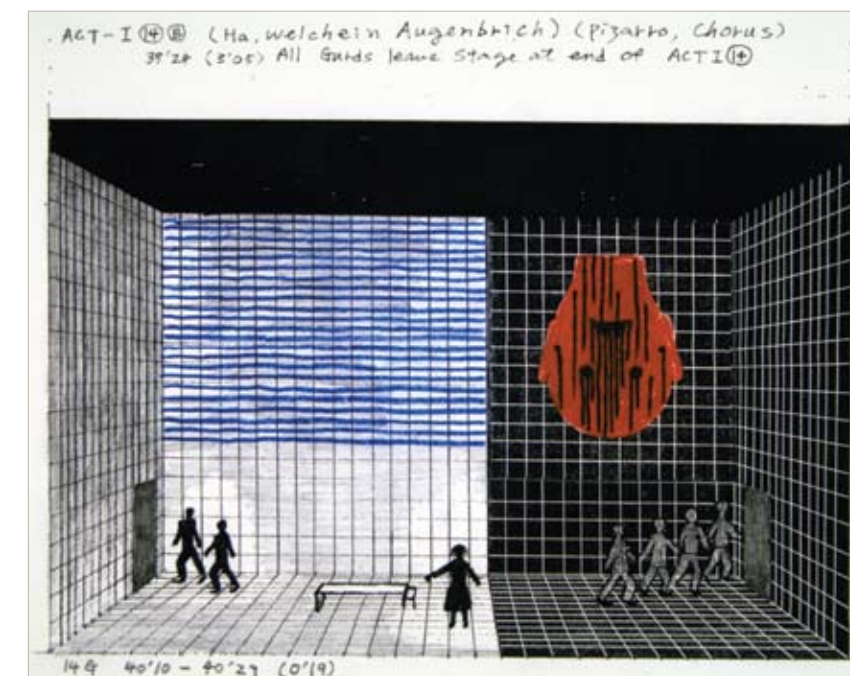
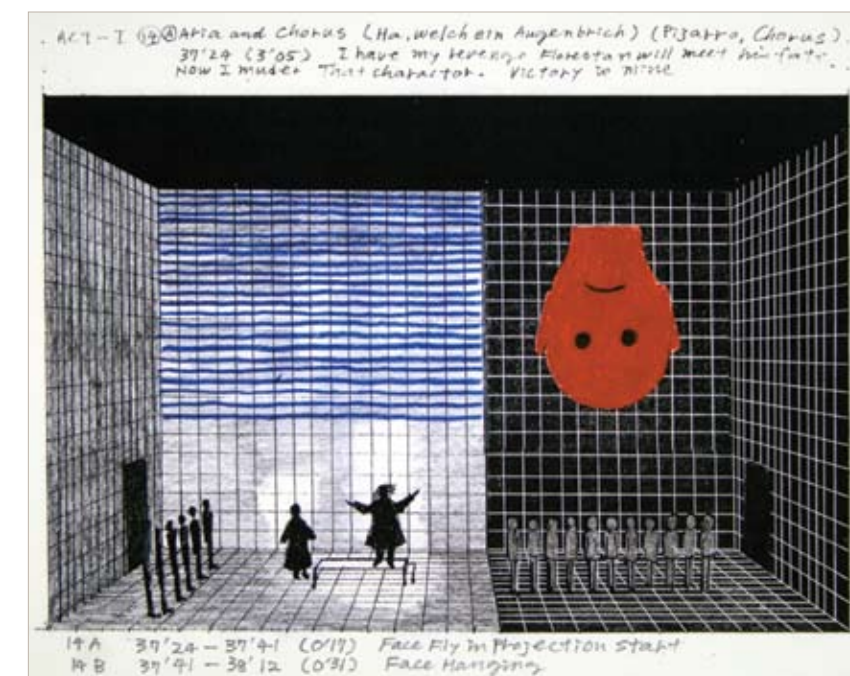
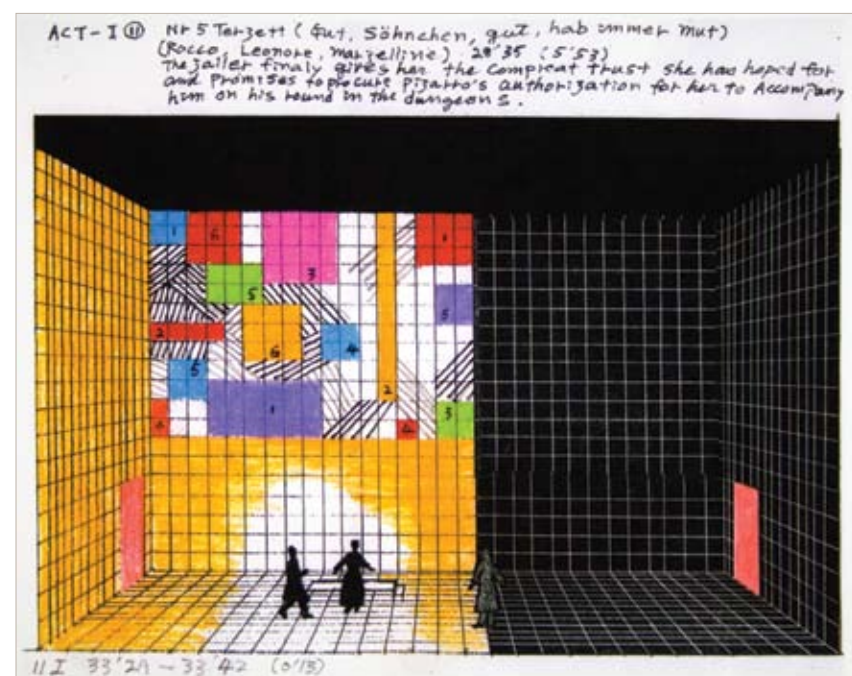
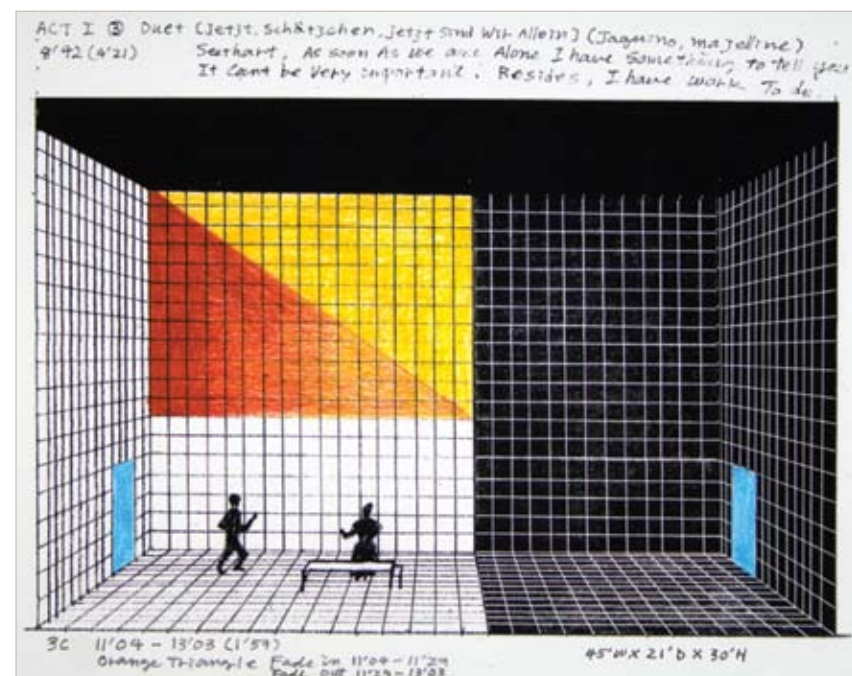
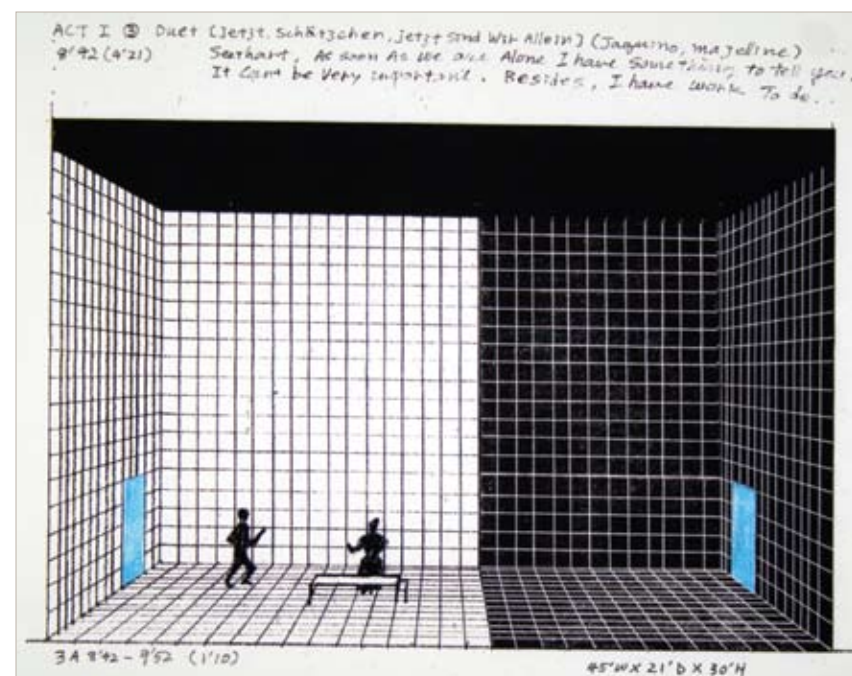
Yamadori and his attendants at Rikisha Man, 2005
Pencil and acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



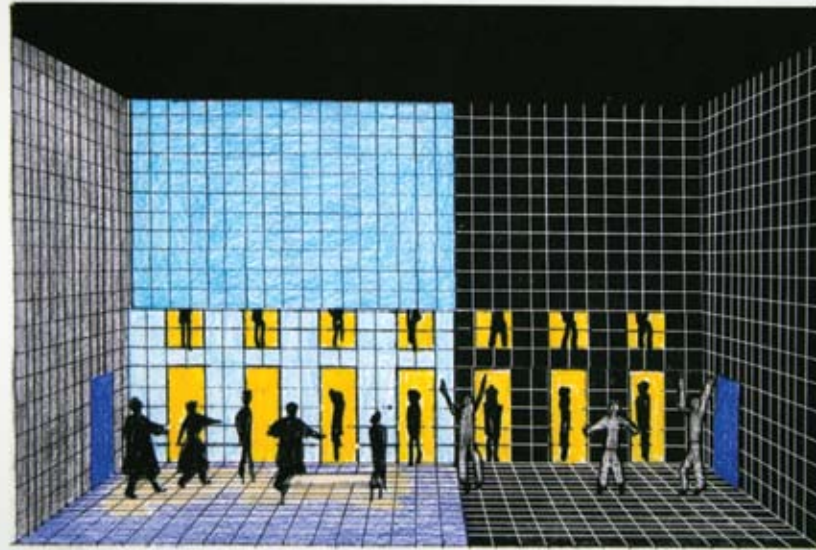
Bonze and his disciples, 2004
Pencil and acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



Bonze and his disciples, 2005
Pencil and acrylic on paper, 30 x 22 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Dirk Bakker



ACT I (19) (Fidelio) (Marilyn, Rocco, Fidelio) 57'25" (0'44")
(54'24" - 54'34") 10 sec.



ACT I (19) Prisoner's Chorus 55'09" (9'13") - 62'22"
Guard starts coming into prison yard at 61'40". All prisoners and guards
out of prison yard 62'20" (40 second)



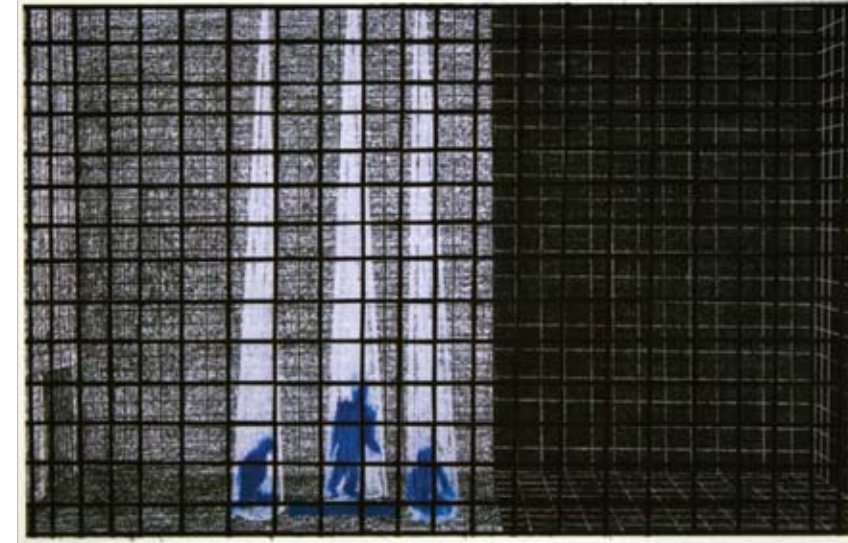
(110) 58'20" 1st Prisoner sings - 59'21" 2nd Prisoner sings (and 59'58") - 62'22"

ACT I - 24 (200) 84'53" - 86'50" (Leonore, Rocco)
It's cold down here. I'm tired. We'd even find the entrance. He doesn't seem to
know. May be he's dead. He's asleep. Let's get drunk. There's no time to
worry. I must make out his features. He stands by me. Here is the cistern.



I told you about. Give me the Pick and get those things. You are terrible
the you afraid? No it's just the cold. Then go to sleep. But! watch your step.

ACT II (20) 6'06" 92'16" - 92'18" (Florencia, Rocco, Leonore)
Florencia Rocco, and she recognizes his voice. With sleep
and a piece of bread she tries to leave the starving man's
suffering.

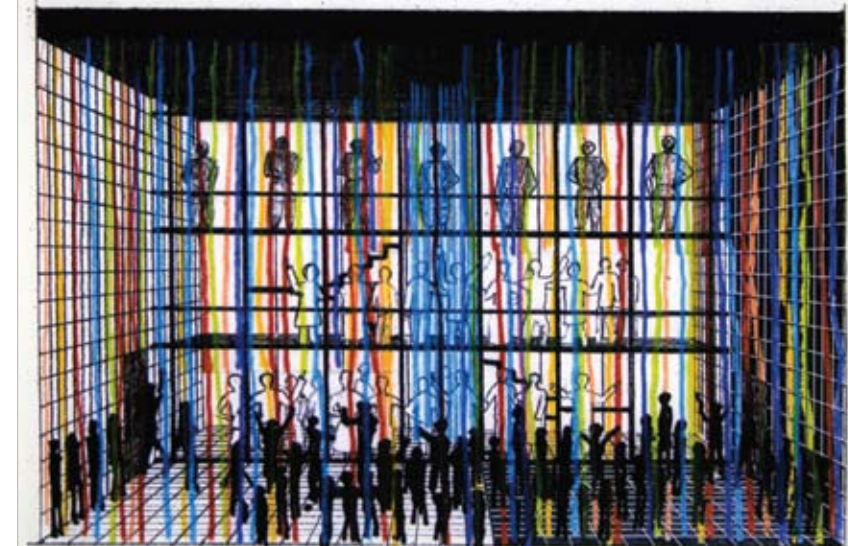


ACT II (20) 108'49" - 118'10" (4'22") (Fernando, chorus, Rocco, Pizarro, Leonore,
Marilyn, Florencia) In the name of the King, Don Fernando declares
his determination to punish the guilty and to free all who have been
in prison unjustly to his appointment his friend Florencia, whom
believed dead, is brought out forward from among the prisoners, and
helps from Rocco at the Governor's murderous plot. After Pizarro has



been led away by the guards. Leonore is given the joyful task of removing her
husband's feet.

ACT - II (20) 118'22" - 120'09" (1'47")
Love is stronger than Tyranny!



Jun Kaneko Chronology

- 1942

Jun Kaneko is born on July 13 in Nabebutcho, Atsuta-Ku, Nagoya, Japan. His father, Yutaka Kaneko, and his mother, Toyoko Ono Kaneko, are dentists. His brother, Shin, is born in 1943 and his sister, Sayaka, in 1947.
- 1945

The young Kaneko is sent to live with his grandparents in Chino, in the mountainous region of Nagano-ken, Japan, to escape the heavy bombing in Nagoya. His brother, too young to be apart from his mother and father, remain in Nagoya.
- 1947

The Kaneko family moves from Nagoya City to Anazawa, a village in Nagano-ken, Japan. Jun Kaneko rejoins his family there.
- 1949

Kaneko starts elementary school in the mountains at the age of seven. The journey takes him an hour on foot, each way, and he often has to walk in the snow and freezing temperatures.
- 1950

The Kaneko family move back to Nagoya City, Japan. Kaneko's mother and father open their dental practice, which remains in the same office to the present day. Kaneko continues his schooling at Hokusui Elementary School in Minami-ku, Nagoya.
- 1951

Transfers to Mitsurugi Elementary School in Mizuho-ku, Nagoya.
- 1955

Graduates from Mitsurugi Elementary School.
- 1958

Enters Nagoya Gakuin High School.
- 1960

Transfers to Meiwa High School to attend night classes, so that he can paint during the daytime.
- 1961

Kaneko starts to study painting under Satoshi Ogawa in Nagoya, working in his studio during the day and attending high school in the evening.
- 1962

Kaneko graduates from Meiwa High School. He paints full-time in Ogawa's studio and in his own studio at home until departing for the United States.
- 1963

August. Kaneko arrives in Los Angeles, California, to study painting. He meets Fred and Mary Marer on his first day and stays at their house at 537 North Kenmore Avenue for the remainder of the summer and then for another three months while they are traveling in Europe. Kaneko recognizes their extensive ceramics collection and builds shelves for it. This is his first encounter with contemporary ceramic work, particularly by Californian artists such as Voulkos, Mason, Takemoto,
- Price, Bengston, Frimkes, Melchart, and Rothman. In his practical undertaking, he becomes excited about, and interested in, working with clay. Fred and Mary Marer, on their return to Los Angeles, continue to invite Kaneko to spend time with them at their home and at their friends' studios. They also visit museums and go to see movies two or three times a week. Their friendship proceeds like this until 1972, when he moves to New Hampshire to teach. November. Kaneko works with clay for the first time at Scripps College. He is there for a week with Paul Soldner.
- 1964

Kaneko enrolls at the Chouinard Institute of Art in Los Angeles as a special student in painting, drawing, and printmaking. His limited knowledge of English makes communicating so slow that it forces him to change his lifestyle, attitude, and the way he makes art. This has an important influence on how and who Kaneko becomes. How he deals with his work now is directly informed by this period. Summer. Kaneko works at Jerry Rothmans's studio and begins to work in ceramics. In the fall, he returns to his studies in painting and drawing at Chouinard.
- 1965

Spring. Begins ceramics courses under Ralph Bacera at Chouinard Institute of Art.
- 1966

February. Quits Chouinard and helps Jerry Rothman for 18 months, building his studio on Towne Avenue in Los Angeles.
- 1967

Summer. Receives an Archie Bray Foundation Grant and spends the summer at a three-month stipendiary residency in Helena, Montana. Fall. Studies under Peter Voulkos at the University of California at Berkeley.
- 1968

Spring. Builds his own studio in Temple City, California. Visits Japan for the first time since his arrival in the US in 1963.
- 1969

Fall. Kaneko enrolls at Claremont College and studies under Paul Soldner. He works both there and in his Temple City studio. During his time as a graduate student (1969–71), Kaneko experiments extensively in ceramics, photography, sound, and performance, expanding and challenging his concepts for developing his artwork.
- 1971

May. Graduates from Claremont Graduate School. Summer. Kaneko travels to Japan and

mounts an experimental exhibition at Mori's Form Gallery in Osaka. Invitations are printed in white on white crumpled paper. The exhibition starts with an empty gallery without objects, the artist sitting in the space with the intention that whoever comes to the gallery will communicate with him and take the show off in a particular direction. He gives a lecture at the American Center in Nagoya, Japan, and elsewhere on contemporary American ceramics. He also sponsors and organizes the Clay Festival in Tokoname with Ryoji Koie.

1972 – 1973 Spring. Kaneko returns to the US to take up the position of head of the ceramics department at the University of New Hampshire, Durham.

1973 – 1975 Kaneko is offered a teaching position at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, and teaches there with Norman Schulman.

1975 Spring. Moves back to Japan and starts construction of a house (1,500 square feet, 139 m²), a studio (2,000 square feet, 186 m²), and a kiln house (1,200 square feet, 111m²) in Nagura. This undertaking gives him his first experience of the large-scale environment and its sculptural possibilities, which becomes an important influence on his work. Construction continues for three years with the help of many friends and reaches completion in October 1978.

1977 Kaneko and Goro Suzuki travel through the southern part of Japan, for six weeks, in a two-ton Toyota pickup truck. They build a small shed on the back of the truck to live in.

1979 Kaneko travels to Korea for the first time, for two weeks, to investigate the making of large Korean kimchee jars. February. Kaneko is invited to work for six months at the Clayworks Studio in Manhattan, New York. During his residency, he is also invited to work in textiles at the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, as well as being offered a teaching position as Head of the Ceramics Department at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Fall. Kaneko's position at Cranbrook begins with a two-year project, fixing and reorganizing the studio space, equipment, and facilities. During the next 24 months, Kaneko and his students build seven new kilns for the school. He teaches there for seven years until 1986, when he moves to Omaha, Nebraska.

1982 Kaneko gives his first workshop in Omaha, Nebraska.

1983 May. Kaneko embarks on his Omaha Project, his first large-scale endeavor, at the Omaha Brickworks. He fabricates four large dangos, 7 feet wide by 5 feet deep by 6 feet high (2.1 x 1.5 x 1.8 m), weighing 5.5 tons each, and four large slabs, 8 inches high by 4 feet wide by 6 feet deep (20 cm x 1.2 m x 1.8 m), weighing 1.5 tons each.

1984 January. Three of the Omaha Project dangos and three of the Omaha Project slabs emerge successfully from the kiln. November (until March 1985). For four and a half months, Kaneko travels around Europe for first time. He visits Helsinki, Düsseldorf, Amsterdam, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Venice, Padua, Rome, Assisi, Perugia, Todi, San Gimignano, Florence, Pisa, Lucca, Petra Santa, Imperia, Nice, Barcelona, Granada, Malaga, Seville, Cordoba, Toledo, Cuenca, and Madrid.

1986 Kaneko makes his Polka Dot Sidewalk installation, 75 feet wide by 150 feet long (22.9 x 45.7 m), in front of the museum of South Texas in Corpus Christi. He resigns from his teaching position at Cranbrook Academy of Art and moves to Omaha, Nebraska. There, he leases and develops a 7,000-square-foot (650 m²) studio and apartment at 616 S. Eleventh Street. Cofounds Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts with Ree Kaneko, Lorne Faulk, and Tony Hepburn.

1987 June–September. Kaneko is invited to work at the Arabia ceramic factory in Helsinki, Finland. He makes “Arabia Wall” which inaugurates his interest in ceramic walls.

1988 Purchases a 38,000-square-foot (3,530 m²), four-story building at 1120 Jones Street, Omaha, and works on developing it into his studios and living space. Visits Isamu Noguchi at his studio in Japan with Ryunosuke Kasahara.

1989 Continues work on the renovation of his new studio space. November–December. Kaneko travels to Japan for an exhibition, works at Shigaraki, and visits Korea.

1990 Spring. Kaneko's parents travel to the US for the first time to visit their son. Together, they tour the various places where Kaneko has lived, studied, taught, and worked since 1963. Summer. Kaneko moves from his leased studio and apartment into his own new studio. June. Attends the International Ceramics Symposium in Oslo, Norway, and revisits Helsinki and Stockholm.

1991 March. Kaneko installs a public art commission of ten dangos at Phoenix Sky Harbor airport.

April. The Shigaraki Work Center opens in Japan. Kaneko works there running a workshop and giving demonstrations and lectures. May. Kaneko visits Fremont, California, for the first time to see a large sewer-pipe factory, Mission Clay Products, to consider the possibility of producing a large-scale series of works in their beehive kilns. October. Kaneko returns to Shigaraki to work and fire the first dangos made in Japan. He travels to Korea and meets Sang Ho Shin for the first time.

1992 April (to March 1994). Kaneko works on the Fremont Project. May–September. Construction of six large dangos, measuring 11 feet high by 6 feet wide by 3 feet deep (3.4 x 1.8 x .9 m). August (to March 1994). Drying period of the dangos.

1993 Throughout the year, the Fremont Project dangos continue to dry and Kaneko commutes monthly between Omaha and Fremont to monitor their progress. February. Kaneko fires two large dangos in a wood kiln, owned and operated by John Balistreri in Denver, Colorado. May. Travels to Europe to visit the European Ceramic Workcentre in 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands. June. Brings the Fremont Project dangos out from under their plastic tents. November. Susan Peterson and Robert Schwarz join Kaneko in Japan to visit Nagoya, Tokyo, Kyoto, and Shigaraki.

1994 January. Kaneko exhibits at the Bentley Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona, and visits Mexico City for the first time. March. Attends the annual NCECA (National Council on Education in the Ceramic Arts) conference, held in New Orleans, Louisiana, that year, and receives their Lifetime Achievement Award. March-September. Kaneko unloads the bisque firing of a dozen 8-foot (2.4 m) dangos and starts the bisque firing for the 11-foot (3.4 m) dangos at Mission Clay Products. The glazing process begins first on the 8-foot dangos, while the 11-foot pieces are in the bisque. Kaneko is stricken with herpes zoster and half of his face becomes paralyzed. He loses his sense of balance. All work stops for four weeks. Slowly Kaneko begins working again, taping his left eyelid open so he can see. Three months later, all dangos emerge from the kiln successfully. A huge celebration is held at Mission Clay Products with over 200 guests from the US and Japan.

1995 January. Kaneko goes to Hawaii for the first time, where he creates a body of works on paper. February. Construction of Kaneko's new larger kiln in his Omaha studio starts. March. Kaneko travels to Japan and to a site in North Carolina for a large public project. April. Kaneko works with Peter Voulkos at the Shigaraki Ceramic Center, Japan. Susan Peterson and her son, Taäg, visit them there. July. The new kiln in the Omaha studio is completed. August–October. Kaneko travels in Germany and works at the European Ceramic Workcentre in 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands. November. Travels to Japan for an exhibition at the Maruei Gallery and the Takagi Gallery, Nagoya. December. Works at the Shigaraki Ceramic Center, Japan. While there, he sees an exhibition by Toshiko Takaezu in Kyoto and travels to Korea.

1996 March–May. Kaneko and Peter Voulkos have an exhibition at the Kenji Taki Gallery in Nagoya, Japan, of works made at Shigaraki. Kaneko returns to the European Ceramic Workcentre, the Netherlands, to glaze and finish the work he started there the previous year. This is the first time he experiments with low-fire glazes on a major group of works and discovers some of their new possibilities. May. Kaneko moves everything from the Nagura studio he completed in 1978 to the Omaha studio. June. Travels to Finland for an exhibition with Tony Cragg, Xavier Toubes, Angel Garraza, and Radoslaw Gryta, and on through France and Italy, to Carrara, to visit Manuel Neri's studio and look at the local marble, and to Todi to visit Nino Caruso, and Betty and George Woodman at their studio in Florence. July. Kaneko travels to England and Germany, and a major exhibition of works from his European Ceramic Workcentre residency opens at the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem, the Netherlands. Over 16,000 people view his work. August. Kaneko visits a site in Salt Lake City for a proposed public art project. It is a large tile wall that is installed at the convention center/symphony hall, Salt Palace. It is called the “Salt Palace Wall.” September. Kaneko installs his public project for North Carolina. It is called the “Liquid Order” plaza and is installed at the North Carolina Graduate Engineering Center. October. Exhibits at Klein Art Works, Chicago, and LewAllen Contemporary in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and travels throughout the US with his friends Goro and Yoshiko Suzuki.

1997 January–February. Kaneko works on a series of drawings in Hawaii. **March–April.** Installation of Aichi-Ken Sannomaru Project. Goes to Korea to visit Sang Ho Shin and his wife, Yoon Sook Han, and to investigate handmade Korean rice paper. He has hundreds of large sheets made and sent back to his studio. Also visits the Jin Bae studio complex. **June.** Kaneko conducts a workshop at Penland School of Crafts, North Carolina. **August.** Kaneko starts to test low-fired material in Omaha. **September.** Exhibition at the Susanne Hilberry Gallery, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. **October.** A 70-piece exhibition of Kaneko’s work from the European Ceramic Workcentre opens at the Academy of Art in Leuven, Belgium. He travels to Bilbao, Barcelona, Madrid, Majorca, Ibiza, Nice, and Amsterdam. Visits artist Mathijs Tsunissen van Manen and his family, both in Ibiza and Amsterdam. **November.** Kaneko visits Therman Statom’s studio in Escandido, California. **December.** Kaneko goes to Hawaii to work on a series of drawings.

1998 February–March. In Texas, Kaneko lectures at the Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth. He attends the NCECA conference. Chicago exhibition opens at Klein Art Works. **April–May.** Kaneko lectures at the Oakland Museum. He has a San Francisco exhibition at the Dorothy Weiss Gallery. He also visits Dale Chihuly at his boathouse studio in Seattle and participates in a week-long conference at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. **June.** Purchases his third warehouse in Omaha. It has 50,000 square feet (4,645 m²) and is the future site of the KANEKO, an institute to support creativity in all fields. He goes back to Japan and is a member of the jury for the Tajimi International Ceramics Competition and also conducts a workshop there. **July.** Kaneko goes to Hawaii for a meeting about the Waikiki Aquarium Public Art Project. Also meets with curator Jennifer Saville at the Honolulu Academy of Art to discuss a forthcoming exhibition. **August.** Goes to Acadia Summer Art Program (ASAP) in Maine. Works on architectural plans with Kippy Boulton Stroud for a large studio in Maine for Stroud’s program. Kaneko also works on some smaller drawings. **September.** Kaneko experiments with glass works at Bullseye Glass in Portland. He has a solo exhibition at Lewis and Clark College. **October.** Exhibition at the Leedy-Voulkos Gallery, Kansas City, Kansas. **November–December.** In Omaha,

Kaneko continues his studio work and renovation of purchased buildings.

1998 January. Exhibition at the Bentley Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona. Kaneko returns to Hawaii and begins a new series of drawings. **March.** Kaneko attends NCECA in Columbus, Ohio. Kaneko’s sister, Sayaka Inui, passes away. **April–May.** Finishes tile fabrication for the University of Connecticut commission. He returns to Japan and Hawaii. **June.** A Kaneko piece is shown at the Neuberger Museum Biennial Exhibition of Public Art, Purchase, New York. **August.** Kaneko is in Bar Harbor, Maine, all month, working on a series of large paintings in a space provided by Kippy Boulton Stroud at the Acadia Summer Art Program. **September.** Exhibition at Art Center in Hargate, New Hampshire. Kaneko also attends the University of Iowa Wood Fire Conference. **October.** Kaneko works on Omaha Steaks Wall commission—this is to be installed in their main headquarters. Exhibition opens at LewAllen Contemporary in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Kaneko also lectures at Santa Fe Clay and at the Northern Clay Center, Minnesota. **November–December.** Peter Voulkos, John Balistreri, and Rudy Autio come to Omaha to work in Kaneko’s studio. Exhibition opens at Imago Gallery, Palm Desert, California.

2000 January–February. Susan Peterson travels to Omaha to begin work on book project. Kaneko receives the Beaverton City Library Project commission and begins work on tile wall fabrication. Laurence King visits Kaneko’s studio in Omaha. **March.** Kaneko attends NCECA in Denver and is offered an exhibition at the Denver Contemporary Art Museum by its director Mark Masuoka. **May–June.** A two-month-long trip is planned for Japan, Korea, and an extensive China/Taiwan ceramics tour. Sites scheduled to visit include the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Terracotta Soldiers, Jingdezhen, and the National Palace Museum, Taipei, plus numerous artists’ studios and clayworks. **September.** Dedicates public commission in Portland, Oregon. Travels to London, p 102New York, and Toronto. **October.** Opens exhibition at Traver Gallery in Seattle. Travels to Japan with Robert and Karen Duncan. **December.** Peter Voulkos, John Balistreri, and Rudy Autio return to Kaneko’s studio to glaze. Goro Suzuki joins the work session.

2001 January. Kaneko travels to Honolulu for the dedication of his public art

commission for the Waikiki Aquarium and continues to Hawaii studio to work on a series of large-scale Korean rice paper drawings. **March.** Works at Bullseye Glass. **April.** Travels to New Zealand and Australia to attend and conduct a workshop at Clayfest Gulgong Ceramics Conference. **May.** Opens exhibition at the Honolulu Academy of Art. **June.** Works on a series of 100 wall slabs at the European Ceramic Workcentre culminating in an installation exhibit. **July.** Kaneko accepts invitation to work at Franz-Meyer in Munich, Germany experimenting with architectural glass. **August.** Conducts workshop in tandem with Peter Voulkos at the International Ceramics Festival in Korea and travels in Japan. **December.** Peter Voulkos, John Balistreri, and Rudy Autio return to Kaneko’s studio to start new pieces.

2002 January. Kaneko works on a series of large-scale drawings at Hawaii studio. **March.** Installation of tile wall for Aquarium Station public art in Boston begins. **April.** Travels to Oakland for Peter Voulkos’s memorials at the Oakland Museum of Art and Peter Voulkos’s Dome Studio. **June.** Begins work on series of cast bronze heads at Artworks Foundry in Oakland. **July.** Renovation begins on KANEKO facility, a nonprofit center for creativity and research founded by Ree and Jun Kaneko. **August.** Kaneko works on a series of large drawings at a space provided by Kippy Boulton Stroud at Acadia Summer Art Program in Maine. **September.** Travels in Japan and attends Gallery Kasahara’s 30th anniversary exhibition which includes Kaneko’s work. Travels to China. **October.** Mark Mack visits Kaneko’s studio, meeting him for the first time. **November.** Opens exhibition and lectures at the Holter Museum in Helena and visits Rudy and Lela Autio’s studio. **December.** Travels to Los Angeles and on to Kauai to work at Hawaii studio.

2003 January. Travels to Japan for meetings with Mr. Kasahara and the National Museum of Art, Osaka, and the Museum of Modern Ceramic Art, Gifu, to plan exhibitions for 2006. **March.** Engages the architect Mark Mack to develop architectural plan for KANEKO. Marries Ree Schonlau. Jun and Ree meet with Joan Desens, general director of Opera Omaha. A discussion between Ree and Joan leads to the idea of Jun collaborating with the Opera to create designs for Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*. **May.** Rudy Autio and Ken Little work on new pieces at Kaneko’s studio.

June. Travels throughout Europe and attends the Venice Biennale. Opens dual exhibitions at the Museum of Applied Arts and Gallerie Bandstrup for the Oslo International Ceramics Symposium for which Kaneko and Tony Cragg are the keynote speakers. **August.** Works in Maine at Acadia Summer Art Program. Kaneko begins research and conceptual drawing for the production of *Madama Butterfly*. **November.** Travels to Philadelphia for a meeting with Fabric Workshop about creating textiles for costumes for a production of *Madama Butterfly*. **December.** Installs public art commission in Pasadena. Holds first meeting at Omaha studio with the director of *Madama Butterfly*, Leslie Swackhamer.

2004 January. Installs public art commission at the San Jose Repertory Theater. Travels to Hawaii studio to work on the designs for *Madama Butterfly*. **February.** Travels to Japan for further meetings for museum exhibitions in 2006. **March.** Kaneko holds meetings with the 13 lead members of *Madama Butterfly*. **April.** Works on new series of glass pieces at Bullseye Glass Research and Development. Travels to New York City to attend the conference on *Madama Butterfly*. **May.** Opens exhibition for the grand opening of the Rochester Art Center in Minnesota. Meets with Mark Mack in Omaha and the local architectural firm on KANEKO blueprints. **June.** Kaneko visits Mission Clay Products factory in Pittsburg, Kansas, to consider doing a large-scale sculpture project there. **July.** Works through August on *Madama Butterfly* at a studio space provided by Kippy Boulton Stroud at Acadia Summer Art Program in Maine. **September.** Kaneko and Mark Mack lecture on collaborative process at the UNL Architecture Department. Attend International Sculpture Center Spiral Jetty conference. **November.** Travels to Mexico with Robert and Karen Duncan to consult on the design for a new studio site. **December.** Attends production of *Madama Butterfly* in Miami. Returns to Mission Clay in Pittsburg for project planning meeting with factory manager and project lead assistant Conrad Snider.

2005 March. At a meeting regarding *Madama Butterfly* with FWM staff and artistic director Marion Boulton Stroud, it is determined that fabric designs that incorporate Kaneko’s signature mark-making will be produced at FWM while solid-color and woven fabrics would be commercially produced.

April. After years of planning and discussions with Bryan Vansell of Mission Clay Products, Kaneko and his team set out on an ambitious, large-scale ceramic project that involves using Vansell’s largest beehive kilns. Materials including forklifts, industrial clay mixers, and 45 tons of clay travel from Omaha to Mission Clay Products in Pittsburg, Kansas, in three semi-trucks. Kaneko and his team will live in Pittsburg over the next two years to complete this project. Summer. Kaneko and his team build thirty-six 9-foot (2.7 m) dangos, four 13-foot (4 m) dangos, and four 8.5-foot (2.6 m) heads. The pieces then dry for a full year. **July.** Kaneko receives an honorary doctorate from the Royal College of Art in London.

2006 February. In conjunction with Smith Kramer Fine Arts, the Kaneko studio curates a touring exhibition of Kaneko’s work that will travel for five years. Running through 2011, the show will travel to the following venues: Knoxville Museum of Art, World’s Fair Park, Knoxville, Tennessee; Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Alabama; Museum of Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas; Boise Art Museum, Boise, Idaho; The Arts Center, St. Petersburg, Florida; San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, California; Alden B. Dow Museum of Science and Art, Midland Center for the Arts, Midland, Michigan; Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, Arkansas; Mobile Museum of Art, Mobile, Alabama; Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens, Delray Beach, Florida; Museum of Arts and Sciences, Macon, Georgia; Reading Public Museum and Art Gallery, Reading, Pennsylvania; and the Crisp Museum, Southeast Missouri State University, Cape Girardeau, Missouri. **March.** Opera Omaha unveils Kaneko’s production of *Madama Butterfly* at the Orpheum Theater. **May.** Kaneko receives an honorary doctorate of Humane Letters from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. August. Kaneko is awarded a contract by the Kansas City Council as part of the city’s One Percent for Art program to create new public art at the Bartle Hall ballroom expansion. Kaneko’s outdoor installation, Water Plaza, includes seven ceramic sculptures—two large-scale heads and five spotted dangos. **Fall.** The Mission Clay project pieces undergo their first bisque firing process, which takes six weeks. Over the next seven months Kaneko glazes the sculptures on site before their second six-week firing.

October. At the dedication ceremony of the Dr. Guinter Kahn Addition at University of Nebraska–Omaha’s Criss Library, a 2,300-pound (about 1 metric ton) head that Kaneko was

commissioned to produce for the space is unveiled as the centerpiece of the addition’s top level.

2007 February. Kaneko is commissioned to install a sculpture garden outside the Mid-America Center in Council Bluffs, Iowa. The garden spans 30,000 square feet (about 2,800 m²) and consists of 21 works by Kaneko. **March.** *Madama Butterfly* opens at the Hawaii Opera Theatre in Maui and Honolulu. Robert Driver, the general and artistic director of the Opera Company of Philadelphia (OCP) sees *Madama Butterfly* in Honolulu. Driver shares the production book of *Madama Butterfly* with OCP’s music director, Corrado Rovaris and managing director, David Devan. After meeting with Jun and Ree in Hawaii, Driver invites Jun to design OCP’s upcoming production of *Fidelio*. Kaneko’s solo exhibition New Glass opens at the Bullseye Gallery in Portland, Oregon. His third all-glass exhibition at Bullseye, “New Glass” showcased 20,000 pounds of raw glass, 40 cast-glass slabs, and a 42-foot-long (12.8 m) spiraling wall of glass threads. **July.** Driver and OCP’s director of design and technology, Boyd Ostroff and costume director, Richard St. Clair visit Jun and Ree in their home and studios in Omaha to begin their collaboration on *Fidelio*. **September.** The Mission Clay project sculptures emerge successfully from the kilns. **October.** Kaneko’s team loads the Mission Clay project pieces into four semitrucks and returns to Omaha.

2008 May. Kaneko receives an honorary doctorate from Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston, MA. **June–November.** Three of the Mission Clay project heads are installed on Park Avenue in New York City for the “Kaneko on Park Avenue” exhibition, part of the New York City Public Art Program. **August.** Kaneko’s Water Plaza at Kansas City’s Bartle Hall is listed as one of the top 21 public art pieces in the country by Art in America. **September.** *Madama Butterfly* opens at the Atlanta Opera in Atlanta, Georgia. **October.** The Opera Company of Philadelphia’s production of *Fidelio* opens at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. **November.** The Madison Opera’s production of *Madama Butterfly* opens at the Overture Center for the Arts in Madison, Wisconsin.

2009 October. The Opera Company of Philadelphia presents *Madama Butterfly* at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia.

Works in the Exhibition

All works are courtesy of the artist unless otherwise indicated.

Untitled, Head
2004
hand-built glazed ceramic
110 x 63 x 70

Untitled, Head
2007
cast bronze and steel with patina
96 x 51 1/2 x 52

Untitled, Dango
2002
glazed ceramic
78 x 71 x 27

Untitled, Slab
1984
glazed ceramic
8 x 48 x 96

Untitled, Dango
2006
glazed ceramic
85 x 30 x 16

Untitled, Dango
2003
glazed ceramic
41 x 24 x 15

Untitled, Dango
2009
glazed ceramic
44 1/4 x 32 x 16 1/2

Untitled, Dango
2008
glazed ceramic
23 x 16 1/2 x 11

Untitled, Dango
2007
glazed ceramic
33 1/2 x 20 x 11 1/2

Untitled, Dango
2007
glazed ceramic
22 1/2 x 16 x 9

Parallel Sound
1981
glazed ceramic
84 x 144 x 72

Untitled, Dango
2009
glazed ceramic
25 1/2 x 19 x 11 1/2

Untitled, Hawaiian Drawing
2003
sumi ink and oil stick on Korean paper
66 x 55 1/2

Untitled, Monotype
1995
ink and oil stick on paper
created at Magnolia Press
85 3/4 x 35 3/4

Untitled, Painting
2002
acrylic on canvas
114 x 386 x 2 1/2

Untitled, Painting
2009
acrylic on canvas
114 x 90 x 2 1/2

Drunken Tree, Hawaiian Drawing
1995
oil stick on paper
44 x 64

Cannonball Tree, Hawaiian Drawing
1995
oil stick on paper
44 x 64

Untitled, Hawaiian Drawing
2002
oil stick and ink on Korean paper
66 x 55 1/2

Expansion, Dango
1996
glazed ceramic
created at European Ceramic Workcentre,
The Netherlands
73 x 56 1/4 x 17 3/4
Courtesy of KANEKO, Omaha, NE

Untitled, Painting
2009
acrylic on canvas
90 x 70 x 2 1/2

Untitled, Painting
1999
acrylic on canvas
diptych
108 x 84 x 2 1/4 (each)
Courtesy of KANEKO, Omaha, NE

Untitled, Leaning Slab
1987
glazed ceramic
77 x 22 1/2 x 4 1/2

Untitled, Leaning Slab
2005
glazed ceramic
73 3/4 x 21 1/2 x 5

Untitled, Leaning Slab
2005
glazed ceramic
73 3/4 x 21 1/4 x 4

Untitled, Painting
2009
acrylic on canvas
114 x 90 x 2 1/2

Untitled, Painting
2009
acrylic on canvas
114 x 90 x 2 1/2

Untitled, Painting
1999
acrylic on canvas
108 x 83 x 2 1/4

Dango
1986
glazed ceramic
69 7/8 x 28 13/16 x 26 1/16
Collection of the Sheldon Museum of Art
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, UNL-Elsie
Fitzgerald Acquisition Trust

Madama Butterfly
2004
pencil and acrylic on paper
30 x 22 1/4

Goro Act II
2005
pencil and acrylic paint on paper
30 x 22 1/4

Butterfly's Mother
2005
pencil and acrylic on paper
30 x 22 1/4

Pinkerton
2005
pencil and acrylic paint on paper
30 x 22 1/4

Suzuki Act I
2005
pencil and acrylic paint on paper
30 x 22 1/4

**Yamadori and his attendants and
Rikisha Man**
2005
pencil and acrylic paint on paper
30 x 22 1/4

Official Registrar
2005
pencil and acrylic paint on paper
30 x 22 1/4

Butterfly's Friends
2005
pencil and acrylic on paper
30 x 22 1/4

Bonze and his disciples
2004
pencil and acrylic on paper
30 x 22 1/4

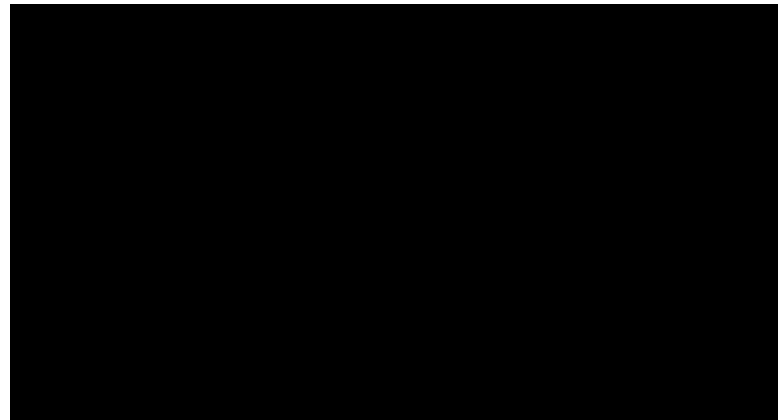
Bonze and his disciples
2005
pencil and acrylic on paper
30 x 22 1/4

Fidelio Set Designs
2007
digital reproductions
group of 12
8 1/2 x 11



To me working with my heartbeat is everything.
If I am lucky I will get something out of this.

— Jun Kaneko, *Dutch Series, Between Light and Shadow*





Jorge Daniel Veneciano is director of the Sheldon Museum of Art at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. He is the coeditor (with Rhonda K. Garelick) of *Fabulous Harlequin: ORLAN and the Patchwork Self* (Nebraska 2010). His other publications include *Neo-Constructivism: Art, Architecture, and Activism* (Rutgers 2008); *Imago: The Drama of Self-Portraiture in Recent Photography* (Rutgers 2007); and a forthcoming book on Carrie Mae Weems (Aperture 2011). He has published arts criticism in *Art Journal*, *Afterimage*, *New York Newsday*, *New Art Examiner*, *L.A. Weekly*, *Artweek*, *Visual Arts Quarterly*, and other venues. Veneciano received his Ph.D. from Columbia University in the Department of English and Comparative Literature. His areas of research include the intersection of aesthetic and democratic theory.

Front jacket image:

Untitled (Parallel Sound) (detail), 1981
Glazed ceramic, 84 x 144 x 72 inches
Courtesy of the artist; photography: Greg Nathan, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Communications

Back jacket image:

Gallery installation at the Sheldon Museum of Art; photography: Takashi Hatakayama