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**Oral history interview with Jun Kaneko, 2005
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Jun Kaneko on May 23 and 24, 2005. The interview took place in Omaha, Nebraska, and was conducted by Mary Drach McInnes for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Jun Kaneko and Mary Drach McInnes have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MARY MCINNES: This is Mary Drach McInnes interviewing Jun Kaneko at his studio in Omaha, Nebraska, on May 23, 2005, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

First, let me thank you for agreeing to do this interview. This is a real privilege.

Well, Jun, you just suggested that we start the interview with sounds of breaking ceramics, but we could also just start by asking you to tell us a little bit about your early childhood, when and where you were born.

JUN KANEKO: Okay, I was born 1942, July actually, in the city of Nagoya [Japan].

And that was during the wartime. My parents had a dental office in Nagoya, but when I was about two years old, I think, they started to bomb Nagoya, especially where my parents were, because, I don't know totally, some people would remember, the Zero fighter plane was one of the really great fighter planes in World War II, and the main plant was a few blocks away from my parents' house. So it's obvious, it's the biggest target for the U.S. Army.

So they started to bomb, and then my parents' house got a direct hit and they figure it's getting too close for me to stay there. So they sent me up to the mountain where my grandparents live, which is in central part of Honshu Island, in the prefecture called Nagano. And probably lots of people will remember Nagano, because they had Winter Olympics a few years ago.

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MR. KANEKO: So that's where I moved. And then there's a beautiful natural environment that they call the Japanese Alps, because there are lots of mountains and a beautiful environment. So I lived there about-almost five years, I believe. That was sort of my childhood, and then being away from parents, I don't know how much that affected my regular child life, because that was my life, so I didn't have anything to compare with.

My parents-I mean, my grandparents-grandfather was a missionary and a philosopher, so wartime is one of the most difficult times for these people today. So what he did was just read a book under the tree. And then this was a farming community, and everybody was still farming and then they saw this strange man sitting under the tree every day just reading book and doing nothing else. They couldn't figure him out, but that's what he did. And my grandmother was an involved missionary, too. But she did general housework and stuff. And then a few years later, my parents

moved to same village.

So I went back to my parents and I spent one semester, I think-yeah, one semester-of the first grade school in this village because-pretty interesting experience, because, obviously, there are not too many kids around, so the area this elementary school covered was a pretty big area, but they didn't have a school bus or anything, so all the kids walked to school, not even biked.

Our elementary school was far, first of all, so we walked to school every day about close to one hour. And winter was really difficult because of the heavy snow in the country, too. So I remember walking in the snow going to school and then coming back. But the springtime was great, especially coming back. You don't have a time limit, so you sort of go fish and do something else, and come back with the neighborhood children as a crew. And then, usually, maybe the elder kids take you to go back, and keep an eye on everybody.

MS. MCINNES: It sounds like it was a very close-knit community.

MR. KANEKO: It was. I mean, I think they didn't have any choice. There was no other way.

MS. MCINNES: Were you conscious at an early age of the war and its aftermath? I've read accounts of the aftermath, that it was physically a difficult time for Japan.

MR. KANEKO: You know, I wasn't really that conscious. I was too small. I really didn't start to realize about the whole difficulty Japan was having after the war, the recovery time, until probably in junior high.

MS. MCINNES: And that was just kind of a general awareness?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah.

MS. MCINNES: And I was going to also ask you, it was during your high school years, wasn't it, that you met up with your first art teacher, Satoshi Ogawa? What kind of person was he like? He taught you painting, didn't he?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, actually this sort of happened by accident. For some reason, I wasn't really too happy about the Japanese educational system after I got to around 15 years old, because it's a pretty strict system. I mean, any country educational system, I think they have a certain way of restriction and they sort of try to-not to really pay much attention to individual quality. If they start doing that, they really can't deal with a group of people. So there is sort of a tendency to deal with everybody, a mass or group of people in the classroom and this and that. I don't know why I started to resist that, but I started to realize I have a very difficult time. I started to skip school. But I didn't want to go out and then do something else, so I was sort of a-my parents knew I was at home. I just didn't go to school.

And then I started to do drawings to just kill my time, to see, and I sort of found it to be a pretty interesting challenge. It was obviously just realistic drawings. I mean you see the flower and then you try to draw the flower, and then see and compare how close could you come up with your drawing. And then, kept on doing it to get better and better, but very simple kinds of things interested me at that time, so I did quite a bit of drawing, which nobody knew and I just had it under the bed.

One day my mother found it, and then she asked me if she could take these drawings to someone. Sure, I said, sure. And then she was at that time-she is still a dentist. She is 86 years old, but she is

still practicing. But she actually in her heart I think she wanted to be a painter. So she has tried to do painting since she was a high school student, as an amateur painter. So she was painting a lot, and then because of that, her interest in art was very strong and she knew a lot of the artists. And because she was a dentist, she helped fix artists' teeth for free or very little money. So she had lots of great contact to artists. So when she found my painting, my drawings, she took the drawings to Mr. Ogawa. I think she did that because he was my sister's painting teacher in kindergarten, so that's a sort of obvious contact, even though she knew other painters.

So she took this bunch of drawings. I mean, I guess she asked him if he sees any possibility in drawing or in art. And then she asked, you know, I'm skipping school and then I'm just drawing, so if you could help to advance the drawing, that would be a good thing. So he says, "Oh, I never took a student." He said his wife used to teach children, but he never really took on students. He said that we'll see how it goes.

So I started to go to his house, and then became very close to him, and he started treating me like his own son. And because I didn't go to school daytime, I just went to his studio every day and then painted. But he says, "You know, in Japan, you really have to have a graduate-that's a requirement, you know, to have a high school diploma in Japan." So I was in already high school, toward the end of junior, and then changed to the night school in senior year. I'd rather do painting daytime and then school. And the night school, you have to go four years instead of three. So it's shorter time to be in school, but I have more time to paint.

So that's what I did. I mean, after I'm just about ready to graduate from high school, I told to my painting teacher, I really don't feel like going to Japanese art school, because the system is pretty similar, educational system. It doesn't matter if it's art school or other type of school. In that type, I have more trouble. I felt probably the best thing to do is try to get out from Japan, see how I do, but I don't even know how to do that because I didn't know anybody, my parents didn't know anybody outside of Japan.

So he said, "You know, I have one friend in California," who was Jerry Rothman, the ceramic artist. He stayed in Japan close to five years, I believe, he and the other designer for Sango China Company. It used to be a very big china company. He was part of design department, and at that time, Jerry and Mr. Ogawa became very good friends. So Mr. Ogawa says, "Well, this is the only guy I know outside of Japan." He says, "I can write a letter and we'll see."

MS. MCINNES: Providential. [Laughs.]

MR. KANEKO: He says, "I'm sending this guy, so if you could please get him started that would be great."

MS. MCINNES: And did you know that Jerry Rothman was a ceramics artist in particular? I mean, he told you that?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, I knew he was a ceramics artist, and besides that, about the really teacher-student relationship with Mr. Ogawa, he really didn't say too much. He says, "Well, draw this." How about trying to draw this thing today, and then sometimes he say something, well, maybe it's interesting to try and see it, instead of really trying to make a copy-realistic copy of what you're seeing, like a duplication of it. Maybe switch that if you can, adding emotional part of it to make it a little more abstract, you know?

And that kind of suggested-I mean, sometimes he went over on my drawing, too, which is very

interesting. Usually, that never happens in-especially in American school. Somebody comes and just does it right on top of your-it's a pretty interesting way of learning, though it could be a very difficult way, too, if you disagree with what they're doing. It could be difficult, but it's certainly direct and interesting way of seeing how things could be changed; because you believe this is the best at this moment, what you could do? And then somebody comes and just changes it completely. And then lots of times, it makes better sense.

MS. MCINNES: It shifts it, the sense.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah.

MS. MCINNES: Hans Hofmann used to do that.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah. So that makes you think, and the evaluation of what you're doing, the way to evaluate it, opens up more. If you're doing it by yourself, over and over and over, you might reach that point sometime-might take five, 10 years-might hit the breaking point, and then all of a sudden you're doing a different kind of art, you know, challenge thinking. But if somebody is doing it right next to you, especially on top of your piece, at least it is a very, very good experience for me. And then he fed me. And I usually went there at 10:00 in the morning. So he fed me lunch and dinner with his wife. His wife was a painter, too, you know.

MS. MCINNES: Did you do some work for him in the studio?

MR. KANEKO: No.

MS. MCINNES: You just did your own work? And I'm unfamiliar with him. Was he an abstract painter, or what type of painter was he?

MR. KANEKO: He actually did both in a very interesting way. But I think in heart, he was more like a realistic painter but trying to make it like a little more abstract type to include their emotional feeling into realistic way of painting.

MS. MCINNES: To shift over to ceramics, I know that you met up with Jerry Rothman when you flew to Los Angeles. Before leaving Japan, were you aware of any contemporary ceramics at that time? Because there was a lot of interesting work going on.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, well you know, actually the day I arrived to Los Angeles, Jerry came to pick me up at the airport. I think it was August 13; I don't remember the date, but I'm sort of trying to organize my file now for archival for the Kaneko, you know, so I found a sketchbook the day I arrived in America. It said August 13 and approaching to Los Angeles. It was cloudy day, and Jerry came to pick me up and then took me to Fred Marer's house, who was a very interesting ceramics collector. He was a math teacher. He was a head of math department in Los Angeles City College. And so he took me there from airport directly to Fred's house, dropped me off.

Because I couldn't speak any English, I didn't know what was going on. And then Jerry spoke very little of broken Japanese, so I sort of knew he's going some place and then will come back, but he didn't tell me when he was coming back. And so, I figured he is going some place to do something a few hours and then come back. I think I went to Fred's house-Fred and Mary's house-probably early afternoon, and then dinnertime came. Jerry isn't back. Fred and Mary is cooking in the kitchen and then they say, "Come on," and point the dinner table. So I figure I am eating there. [Laughs.] Pretty soon, a few hours later, they say, "Come on," and show me the bedroom and point to the bed. So that's when I figure out that I'm staying there. [Laughs.]

MS. MCINNES: That's a great story.

MR. KANEKO: But they had amazing amounts of contemporary ceramics. It was, I mean-he wasn't a rich man, but he liked ceramics, so he became very good friends with all ceramics artists. So many of the artists gave him a piece or sold it to him very reasonable price. Because he used to go to studio and help them to load the kilns and stuff. It's not like a regular collector. So he had much more personal contact with the artists.

So he started to take me around to these artists' studio. And then seeing his collection at home made me to think a lot, because I didn't know anything about contemporary American ceramics. And then seeing this really amazing stuff happen, I really didn't know what to think. I felt really interested, and then he, as I said, he took me around to introduce me to the other peoples' place, and I honestly didn't know who they are, you know, like Peter Voulkos, John Mason, Mike Frimkess, Henry Takemoto, and Kenny Price, and Bill Al Bengston, you name it.

And then, I didn't- because I didn't know who they are, I couldn't ask questions. I thought these are the regular ceramics people. Everybody who is doing ceramics in Los Angeles at that time is that level, I thought. It just shocked me, you know? I said, this is really amazing. So I wanted to try sometime. And I was staying there a few days, and then I guess Fred figured, maybe if the kid's okay, to ask for house-sitting or something, because it's summertime in August, right? So they went to Europe, I think, maybe a few weeks, so they ask me to stay and house-sit.

So that time I had a fantastic possibility of looking at these pieces, and then this house, it was just a small two-bedroom apartment, and then living space is like maybe one-quarter of this whole space, so it's a very modest-sized house. But he probably had close to 900 pieces, I bet you. He had a double-car garage in the back. Plates are piled up this high and everything, and then all closed; it just piled up and jammed. So while they were gone, I didn't have anything to do, too. So I figured maybe it might be a good chance to organize his collection, because if they're just jammed and they're all over the place.

So I started to build a shelf and put it up, and that way I could see everything cleaning it up, everything organized. So I did that while they were in Europe. That gave me a really great chance to see almost everything he had. And then they came back and they were surprised it was so organized.

MS. MCINNES: Did they enjoy the shelving?

MR. KANEKO: Oh yeah.

MS. MCINNES: Oh, good.

MR. KANEKO: Then I started to go to school in a school called Chouinard Institute [Chouinard Art Institute, South Pasadena, CA]. It was still in downtown Los Angeles. So Fred helped me to find the apartment, and I started to go to school as a special student in 1964, spring.

MS. MCINNES: And who was teaching there at that time? You studied ceramics?

MR. KANEKO: No, painting. Connor Everts was a printmaker. I took printmaking and painting and drawing. Painting was Emerson Woelffer, and he is a pretty well-known California painter. I believe he passed away recently, but he lived a long time.

MS. MCINNES: What was his last name? Emerson-

MR. KANEKO: Woelffer. And I want to say John Graham, but I'm not sure that's the drawing teacher. But Graham is at-Mr. Graham was a drawing teacher.

So I was sort of doing, just out of habit, I was thinking about starting painting, and that was my portfolio; I didn't have anything in ceramics. My portfolio, I had much more than most of the students have because I was almost painting full-time for two years. So I showed it to them, and because I was special student, you could skip the grade, too. You don't have to start with advanced; it's up to teacher. So luckily, I started with the advanced painting, and then I just did painting and drawings and printmaking for one semester.

But this ceramics thing, I was saying, I've got to try this. So summertime, 1964, all schools shut down for summer; so again, I didn't have anything to do. So I talk to Jerry. He had a studio in Long Beach-a ceramics studio. So I'd do anything: sweep the floor, or do anything he want me to do. So, "Can I stick around summertime to just see what you do?" So he was like, "Fine." So he gave me a little bed in corner of studio; he says, "I'll feed you, but I can't pay you. But I'll give you clay. So you make something, and then I'll fire it for you."

So I worked for Jerry all summer, and I made a whole bunch of flat pieces. You know, that's the easiest, just pound it flat and paint on it a painting. I'm sort of used to it, so I was just making a canvas out of clay. So pounding it and then that was my first group of ceramics pieces. And in the summer, he said, "There are interesting ceramics competition show, you know? I think you should send it," he said. "I'll pick two pieces and then send it for you. You want to do it?" I said, "Sure."

Syracuse used to have a huge national competition, and he sent two plates out for me, and then one got in the show. That's the first group of ceramic pieces I ever made. And then he was saying, "This is very good. This is very good." I just didn't have any-

MS. MCINNES: It was the top show the country.

MR. KANEKO: I had no idea. He was, you know saying-

[Audio break, tape change.]

In the fall I decide to audit ceramics, and Ralph Bacerra was a teacher at Chouinard at that time. Vivika and Otto [Heino] were teaching before him, you know? And then I think Susan Peterson started ceramics design at Chouinard. When I went, Vivika and Otto just left and then Ralph was teaching. So again, I entered as a special student, so I was really different from other people as far as freedom doing things. And I worked-I didn't have to take any other course, too, because I was special student-so I worked day and night in ceramics. And then I think I was working now two semesters, and then I decided maybe I should try some other place.

So I told Fred, and by that time I had already a bunch of ceramics pieces to show some other people as a portfolio. So Fred Marer said, "I'll take a bunch of photos for you to Pete Voukos, who is already teaching up north." He moved up north in the Bay Area. So he took a bunch of pictures of my pieces, and Fred asked Pete and said, "This kid, he's curious in coming and studying with you, but not as a regular student. He just wants to clay-work." And he said, "That's fine."

So I went up there, and that was the first time I met him. I mean, Fred took me up there after Pete said okay. So I went up there with Fred, and of course there he teach the ceramics department at the UC-Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley]. He said, "How much space do you want?" I didn't understand what he was saying. "How much space do you want?" It's up to me to decide,

and I couldn't understand. So I said this much, so as big as this wall space here. That's a lot. So he said okay. He said, in return you have to be assistant tech to mix clay, mix glaze, and fire kiln. I said, fine.

So he had, I think, close to maybe 200 beginners going through-I mean, they're not major. So they come through like once a week, and they come with-lots of girls come in high heels and nails and they touch clay like this, you know? And then leave about same amount of clay on the table after the classroom, right? So I never have to buy clay.

MS. MCINNES: You just used their discarded stuff?

MR. KANEKO: They just left so much. So I'd put it in the mixer and I'd mix it, which is great for me, but I didn't understand what they were doing. And then I had a chance to fire people's work, which was a really great learning process for me to do firing, because I knew very little. I fired everything of mine when I was in Chouinard, so I had a little bit of experience, but not that great, you know, only two semesters. And I had fired maybe 30, 40 kilns. But that doesn't do too much. So I was firing everybody's work, and then that gave me great opportunity to learn firing.

MS. MCINNES: I've heard from several people and I've read many interviews from former students of Voulkos about how he taught in a very open manner, and how he really did not make assignments, but that students just sort of worked alongside of him. Was that your experience?

MR. KANEKO: You know, that was pretty much like more about him when he was down in Otis [Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA]. They really worked day and night. And I know he never had assignments and then they did everything together. And it's sort of like a way of teaching is a way of showing your lifestyle, a very old-fashioned way in some way. And then, it's funny how that teaching style continues with the student of Voulkos.

And Paul Soldner was the first student of Pete Voulkos. When Paul went to Otis, Pete just moved from Montana, and then Paul told me, when I went there, expecting everything is there, right? Pete was just sitting in the middle of the room and no other student. So Paul was, here we are. And then Paul was very good with the mechanical stuff, you know, making wheel, clay mixer, and stuff. So he started to build stuff for Pete and so there was no assignment. Anything you need, you make it work, either build it or do something about it. And then, there's no formal critique. I think he did a demo, though, so a demonstration sometime.

MS. MCINNES: Now, when he moved to Berkeley, what was your experience? Did he have more prescribed assignments?

MR. KANEKO: No, he had a teaching assistant. So teaching assistant was probably handling 70 percent of everything. Pete came once or twice a week just to do some throwing demonstration, but not much. He was sort of-when I was there-he was away from clay quite a bit. That's when he was doing lots of bronze casting.

MS. MCINNES: Oh, at the Garbanzo Works.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah. So it was very interesting. Probably that's when he was away from clay most, when I was in Berkeley, like '67.

MS. MCINNES: And you were there for about six months, and then did you come back to Los Angeles?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, I came out very sore. But I went to Montana, the Archie Bray [Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, MT].

MS. MCINNES: Oh, that's right; I think you were their first resident, weren't you?

MR. KANEKO: Right.

MS. MCINNES: And what was it like there?

MR. KANEKO: Well, it was very exciting, because I was never out of California. I was just starting in ceramics. I really didn't know anything. And then, when I went there, I started to see what's going on in the East Coast, too, a little bit-not much. I was amazed at how different it could be in the same country at the same time. That's when I became aware of this country's really amazing variety of the ceramic works going on. And then there are lots of great potters and sculptors, which was a great experience for me. And the grass in Montana was pretty close to like where I spent my childhood in Japan, in the mountains. So I sort of liked that. Otherwise-how many was it? I think, one, two, three, four-I want to say four, but it was the first-

MS. MCINNES: It was the first summer residency. It was 1967, and there were four of you who had this.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. MCINNES: And who was leading the Archie Bray at that time?

MR. KANEKO: Dave Shaner.

MS. MCINNES: And then after that residency, did you go back to Los Angeles?

MR. KANEKO: I went back to LA and then started to build my own studio.

MS. MCINNES: Really?

MR. KANEKO: Outside of Los Angeles, it's pretty much east, towards Pomona. It's halfway between LA to Pomona. It's called Temple City. I rented a really beat-up old industrial warehouse, 1,500 square feet. And the outside was about-they had a lot, about 1,500 square feet, too. So in California you could do a lot outside, too, so I built a big kiln outside and clay facility; everything was outside. And then inside I built a small kitchen and living quarter in the corner, and then otherwise it was just all workspace. And I spent-that was '67, I think. I started in '67. I was there until '71, because '71 I finished graduate school.

MS. MCINNES: At Scripps [Scripps College, Claremont, CA].

MR. KANEKO: Yeah. This was very close to Scripps, maybe very close, maybe you know, 25 minutes or 30 minutes by car on the highway.

MS. MCINNES: If it's not too personal, how were you, sort of, supporting yourself during all of this?

MR. KANEKO: You know, that's an interesting question. My parents wanted to send me money; they sort of had the ability. You have to realize that's-the dollar was 360 yen at that time. That was really difficult for Japanese to send money to support someone. And then, both of my parents were dentists in Japan, and dentist in Japan really doesn't make any money close to what they make

here. But with their ability, they may have been able to support me. But U.S.-Japanese rule doesn't allow you to send private money to private person, more than \$300 a year. So this is nothing.

So you have to do something. So we figured out that they knew somebody who has a company so they just sent it through the company, but not enough. I mean, \$100 at that time was big money in Japan, in the early '60s. And I think my budget was about \$200 a month. That includes tuition, food, rent, and art supply. So that was really tough.

So Fred knew I'm not doing too well financially. So sometimes he offered to buy my piece, but I was never able to sell a piece to him. I just gave it to him. So he knew I wasn't sometimes eating too well, because I didn't have money. So he tried to make sure the basics was covered. He invited me for dinner at least three times a week for nine years.

MS. MCINNES: Wonderful.

MR. KANEKO: So he knew at least food part-50 percent is covered. [Laughs.] And they came to check me out all the time, if I was doing okay or not. And then they wanted me to have a telephone. I said, "I can't afford it." I didn't have a telephone. I didn't think about it. And then they said they will pay for it. I said, no, no, no, no. It's okay; it's okay. But actually it was better for them to pay for it and then so they didn't have to drive down all the time, right? All you have to do is call. I didn't think that.

So they fed me a lot and then took me to art shows, movies, artists' studio. So without them, I don't know, I probably wouldn't have survived and then gave up and went back to Japan. So that had a lot of things to do for my early years' survival-Fred and Mary Marer's support.

MS. MCINNES: And after you moved here two years later, you started the M.F.A. program at Scripps with Paul Soldner. Before 1969, you were there as a special student again, weren't you?

MR. KANEKO: At Scripps?

MS. MCINNES: At Scripps.

MR. KANEKO: No.

MS. MCINNES: No? You just entered the M.F.A. program?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, well, about-after I came back from Montana in about '68-after I built my own studio, I started to work, but I felt lots of problem, is too premature to be independent, and I started to think, I don't know if it will help me to go to graduate school or not, but maybe it might help. That's what I started to think, because all of my education is as a special student; I don't have any credit from an undergraduate school. So if I wanted to go to school, technically speaking, you have to start in an undergraduate school and then go to graduate school. I didn't want to do that.

So I was talking to Fred and he said, you know, "Maybe you should just apply to graduate school, anyway, with your portfolio." And I think maybe this-I never thought about it. I said, this is crazy. They would never let me get in. So Fred said, "Well, I know Paul quite a bit and he has a very good department. He's a very liberal guy and close to your studio."

So Fred called and said, "What do you think? You know, he's looking for some school, but he doesn't want to go to undergraduate-graduate school. Would you even consider to take that portfolio in front of a committee and then discuss an admission?" and he said sure.

So I put the portfolio together and everything, and he took it to the meeting, obviously a big argument, you know? And in the first round, Paul gave up. Everybody was saying, you've got to be kidding, you know?

So he realized he had to go talk to each individual before the meeting; he can't just say, "Here." So he went and talked to everybody, and finally he thinks he got everybody's agreement. It took almost a year for him. And then he again in the committee meeting mentioned that I wrote to him for admission, and everybody said, "Well, if you really believe that much, we could try, but maybe admit him as a pending, and then let him try one year. And then if he did more than average everything, academic and his ceramics"-of course not too many people worried about academics. It was another thing I had to go over. So they say, "If it is okay first year, we will accept you as a regular graduate student in second year."

So I said, that's fine. That's how it started and they say, "Okay, this portfolio is a year old now. So we want to see a new one. So why don't you bring it over since you are really, really close to our place." So that was actually very funny timing for me too, because at that time I was having a two-person show with Pete Voulkos. So I said-

[Audio break.]

MS. MCINNES: So you were mentioning about getting into Scripps. What kind of teacher was Paul Soldner?

MR KANEKO: You know, as I said, most of Pete Voulkos's students are strongly influenced with his teaching style. Paul really never did any critique, some demonstration, but never a critique. So the funny instant happened when I started-I was teaching at Cranbrook [Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI]; Paul came to Detroit for other business. So my students wanted to have him for a chat or discussion, so he came over. And then one of the questions asked to Paul, "What kind of critique did you give to Jun?" So Paul and I started to look at each other, and we couldn't even remember once in two years in graduate school. We never talked about-he never did any critique on my piece, and I never asked him.

MS. MCINNES: Did you see him working?

MR. KANEKO: Yes, I mean, to me, it was good enough to just watch and then see him around, not only doing the ceramics, but his way of living. He built his own living environment in Aspen, his studio. And it's all hand-built and then carefully thought out architectural design. And all of these-his interest in winemaking and all other things-really ties-that's a statement of his living philosophy, which makes it [all of a] piece.

MS. MCINNES: One thing that's striking about Soldner, and you mention this, is his mechanical ability, you know, that he knows how to figure certain things out, his design for wheels and that sort of thing. And it seems to me that you have that ability also, that you've constructed these studios very ambitiously throughout your life, and we're sitting in this beautiful complex that you've created over the last 15 years that's your residence and your studio. So I see a correspondence between a, sort of, can-do attitude and problem-solving. Do you see that? Did you always have that?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah. I'm not sure if I always had it or not. But I was always interested in building things, which would involve some mechanical understanding, and it would involve selection of your building technique. So, maybe that's why I'm really attracted to surroundings, too, not only the art side of it, the creativity of the piece, but it always demands-clay always demands mechanical

understanding of the material itself. That would bring extra interest for me.

And then Paul, too, in that way, Paul's invention of the American raku is something that really reflects his personality and his mind. So watching him, how he does things, building kilns, and then, I mean, that was more than enough actually for me-information to learn. But that was another thing that I had already. He was questioned about this critique automatically.

Nobody thinks about it, but when you go to art school, people do it quick. Once a teacher even gives them an assignment, they say, "Hey, next week Wednesday, I expect to see your work based on this, and bring it over and we will talk about it." This has been a strong basic for the art school teaching technique, or style for quite a while, but not too many people think, what, is there really critique? What does it do? So when I started to teach, that was my first question.

MS. MCINNES: And you started teaching in New Hampshire in 1972. And then, the next year, I think, you went to the Rhode Island School of Design [Providence, RI]. And Norman Schulman has said wonderful things about your time there. How long were you at RISD?

MR. KANEKO: Just two years.

MS. MCINNES: Two years?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah. I wanted to go back to Japan. So that was actually a permanent job, and then they knew it would be probably two years I would be there. I told them, and because I don't want to put them, you know, thinking about this person might be here a pretty good length of time, and then searching for a new teacher is a big, serious deal, and it's a really a time-taking process. So I told them, it's a really great opportunity, great school, but I'm pretty sure I'm going back to Japan. So if they are expecting me to stay here for a long time, I said, "Maybe you should look for somebody else because I came from Japan '63 and really didn't do too much ceramics there, just in a friend's studio a little bit here and there." So as far as I'm concerned, I didn't know anything about Japanese ceramic-reality of an operating studio or-so I wanted to go back about five to 10 years. And then over that time I was teaching at RISD.

And I went back and then built my own studio. And I did most of it; I think this is pretty strong influence from Paul Soldner. You know, I built studio. I did all electrical and plumbing by myself, dug the wells, trench, and the mountain there. It was very-just thinking about what I did, probably, I picked up lots of attitude from Paul Soldner.

MS. MCINNES: And what was it like to return to Japan, after having so many years, and education, in the United States, and seeing those new ceramics here, to go back?

MR. KANEKO: First, I thought maybe I made a big mistake, because I'm used to the bigger space. I feel like I'm choked, and then I didn't really have friends except very few, because I wasn't there. So I think in Japan it's a little more difficult to really get to know people really openly. They wouldn't say what they are thinking straight out to this stranger. I mean here, you know, "What the hell are you doing?" Or, "I like this," or "I don't like it," or pretty straight attitude, especially in the West Coast when I was there in the '60s, you know, and the '70s. And then going back to Japan, everything is different. So that I knew-that's why I went back. I wanted to learn the different attitude. But after beginning, it wasn't easy.

[Audio break.]

-the clay festival. That was my question to Japanese ceramic world. I just couldn't figure it out, how

they get into doing ceramics, because in Japan it's very strict. You know, go to a university is a very hard competition, even art schools. Like, one out of 30 people gets in there. To get in there, they study like four or five years, the entrance exam, and then try to pass it. It is a real serious commitment. Or go work for somebody. I mean, if their studio-artists, they don't want any beginner. It just gets in their way. So they will pick somebody who has experience to help them.

So for the person who doesn't have any experience and wants to try it, it's almost impossible. There is no door open for them. So that was my question: How do they do that? There is no way. So I said, okay, this might be really crazy; it's going to be short-term and I want to see how it is going to happen. I said, "Anybody who is interested in practicing clay work and do something with clay, you're invited, no restriction in any experience." And then my responsibility is to provide you space and then clay. And then I did this with the other artist, Ryoji Koie, who used to live in Tokoname.

And I had a closed-down sewer pipe company as my studio space. So it was a big, empty space. So I went to talk to the owner if I could use it for the artists, and he said okay. So we did that. About 700 people came. And I think two people out of 700 became very important ceramics artists in Japan now. And they weren't doing ceramics before.

So, you know, I'm always interested in the possibility of Japan and what they are doing. But at the same time, I know really it's impossible for me to go back and then do what I want to do, because I'm not really Japanese anymore. I've been here 40-some years. My thinking is different, my behavior is-I feel much more comfortable here. But that is very important for me to go back for a short time, build a studio, and do it, and then-so I don't regret.

MS. MCINNES: No. And you came back. Did you come back specifically after the offer from Cranbrook?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, it's funny. I forgot to tell you about this, too. All of my jobs was offered. I didn't even apply for one job.

MS. MCINNES: Really? [Laughs.]

MR. KANEKO: Every one of them: the University of New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Cranbrook. And then the Cranbrook job-they called me when I was in Japan, just about finishing the studio. It took three and a half years to build it. So they called, and I knew it's a great school. I said, "You know, I'm sorry; I just built a studio"-spent three and a half years. It is crazy for me to leave for the job, even though it's a great thing. I'm really curious what I could do in Japan. I want to see it.

Two years later-I'm not sure if you remember it-a place called-Clayworks in New York City. You know Rose Slivka and then Susan Peterson. So they took this thing together. So when they started this Clayworks Studio, they called me-said, "Jun, you have been away too long. It is time for you to come back." And they just-"We've got studio and living quarters in Manhattan. You could take off at least half a year to a year and come here and do your work, and then you could always go back. So why don't you just take a break from Japan?"

So I said, okay. That is an interesting offer, hello. Go buy a ticket. So I came to New York. As soon as I walked into the office, there is a young guy sitting there: "You've got a phone call from Cranbrook." I said, "About what?" He said, "They want you to come for a workshop -I mean, a lecture." And the date was even set. Jesus, I just arrived, you know? [Laughs.] So I said, okay. I mean, I don't have nothing to do that day. So I said, okay; I have never been Cranbrook, so I'll go.

I went and then did a lecture, and this small school-I mean, about 150 students. All the students were there; all teachers sitting in the front. I didn't think anything, and then it came to the lecture, and then after the lecture I said, "Are there any questions?" They started asking really funny questions, you know: what is your teaching philosophy and stuff? And it took me a while to realize they are just interviewing me, both students and teacher. [Laughs.]

And the printmaking department-this Connor Everts I said, mentioned in California, Chouinard Art Institute-he was teaching printmaking. He was teaching printmaking at Cranbrook. I didn't realize-I mean, I didn't even know he was there until I went. So all of the sudden I knew, this is the guy pushing it. So after that I said, "Connor, I told you I'm not interested." He was smiling, you know. "You have been just interviewed and everybody likes what you said. Everybody wants to get you here." I said, "I really appreciate it."

Then I went back to New York. He called me every day all week. He said, "I know you just built a studio; you are anxious to go back to Japan. You just don't know this school. It's fantastic; it's good. Until you try, you will never know. If you don't like it, you could resign at any time you want anyway, so why don't you come and start?"

Like this, every day, from a different angle. I gave up. A week later I said, "Connor, I give up. But I want to come and check the department, because I wasn't thinking about teaching, so I will need to evaluate what is there in the completely designed angle."

So I went back about one week to check everything. I wrote a report to address them. And then if they want, I can talk about salary. I said, I don't care about salary because they will pay me enough to survive. But if I'm teaching, I want to do a good job, and if the instrument is not good enough to fit to my idea and attitude of teaching, there is no use to go there.

So it happened to be about \$600,000 they have to come up with to make a change. And everything I wrote down-it's not outrageous, crazy things. It makes very good sense for them. But they just-it was ignored. And I even told them, I will conduct building the kilns. I am not asking you to buy a kiln-too much expense. If you buy bricks and steel, it would be a good experience for a student to learn how to do this. I knew they would give up. It's big money, I mean, especially, you know, at that time.

And three days later, the president called me and said, "Lots of money for us; I'm not sure. I don't think I could do it in my shop. Can you figure it out? Can you see it-dividing it in two years-do some part first year; do some part the second year. Can you, can you do that? If you could, I'll promise you to come up with that budget." So I said, "Give me a couple of days; I'll figure it out. If I can, I'll let you know." And I figured a way of doing it. So I said, I think I could do it. So that is how it happened, you know.

It's already-two years later I got the job. They were looking for somebody two years. They had just temporarily called someone in. They couldn't find anybody. So when I went to Cranbrook, I definitely-I was the new teacher there. So this-those aren't-so, in summary, I am really lucky in some ways.

MS. MCINNES: Absolutely. And did you enjoy Cranbrook? That is a graduate program only. You had something like seven students a year. So did you enjoy that atmosphere?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, I mean, I got-who could complain that environment, you know? I mean, you pick your students. You are 100 percent responsible for everything that goes on-with the students, just the department alteration. And then I had a great bunch of students. So people really-they didn't understand why I am leaving. I was there seven years. I was surprised about myself-I said three to

four years maximum and that was it. Seven years, I said, well, this is about time for me to just get out of an institution and then just free myself, see where I am going to go. And then all of my close friends said, "You are really nuts; you're crazy." [Laughs.] They were upset.

But my relationship to students was-anyplace I taught, it felt good, like University of New Hampshire [Durham, NH], they didn't have really that many serious students, you know-a small department-but I had a great relationship to the students, though. But I had the biggest problem out there with that administration. That was actually a tenure track three-year contract. I got out in one year. I said, "Listen, you're not supporting what I say and I can't do even half a job," but I'm thinking, it's wasting my time and it's wasting your money, because I'm not happy about it. Let me get out of here, and I just got out.

MS. MCINNES: Do you think in general that the university is a good place to learn art? Or do you think that more of an apprenticeship is a more worthwhile form of training artists?

MR. KANEKO: You know, especially not-I don't know too much in other fields. We are so used to think about institutions-you know, Cranbrook or Alfred [Alfred University, Alfred, NY] or Rhode Island School of Design. All have a great name, but that doesn't mean every one of them teaching there is the greatest teacher. I believe in art; it is all individual contact and respect. If one develops respect, it doesn't matter. This person could be teaching in some junior college in a little dinky town. It could be the best teacher.

So to run into these people to fit to your concept and ideas and attitude, lots of, you know, like, accidental situation and place. And it depends on how lucky you are, too. And they-in my case, I just can't believe, you know, how lucky I was in that sense. So teaching is a pretty heavy duty, I mean, responsibility. But at the same time, it hasn't been going for a long time, like, historically about teaching art. Especially nowadays, so many art students-you know, like in the-compared to the '50s; '50s, the galleries, just a handful of galleries, even, like, in New York.

MS. MCINNES: Right, and now it's huge.

MR. KANEKO: Now there is a zillion of them, right? So it expanded so much, and then for young people it is almost impossible to develop the sense or feeling to understand what is going on. They might accumulate enough information but the information, that will-

[Audio break.]

MS. MCINNES: This is Mary Drach McInnes interviewing Jun Kaneko on May 23, 2005, for the Archives of American Art. This is tape number two. And, Jun, we were just talking about education. I want to shift for a minute and talk about the wider sort of context for ceramics, particularly in the time period we have been talking about, the '60s, '70s, and '80s.

When did you start exhibiting your work? It was pretty early in your career; you mentioned your show that you did with Peter Voulkos before getting into Scripps. What was the character of those exhibitions? I mean, was it sort of what you expect today, or did they have the-in terms of information provided for people, or in terms of showing works on pedestals. What was the character, the sort of visual character, of the exhibitions? Was it pretty much as it is today, or has it changed?

MR. KANEKO: I'm not sure what to say about that question, but, you know, I was-what I showed was ashi, the three-legged pieces-

MS. MCINNES: Oh, right.

MR. KANEKO: It's a number of these pieces-painted with pretty bright colors, and it sat on the floor.

MS. MCINNES: Directly on the floor.

MR. KANEKO: Directly on the floor. So if you're talking about traditional ceramic exhibition abroad, usually they don't put anything directly on the floor. In that sense, maybe it was different. But I didn't think that way, you know. I thought that particular piece should sit on the floor. It makes better sense. That is how it stands up. And then Pete's piece was a stack-a bunch of pottery shapes put on top of each other, and they were just black-no colors. It's like a heavy iron, probably some manganese in it, and almost like a bubbling kind of mass.

MS. MCINNES: What a contrast.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah. So it was an interesting contrast. And then selection of the two people, which obviously gallery owner and then director did that-I really didn't know how he did that. I think you have a show before they-Voukos was, like, one of his best, established artists. And in normal sense, most of the people won't take that kind of a chance to put two together.

MS. MCINNES: A young emerging artist and someone so well-established.

MR. KANEKO: Right.

MS. MCINNES: Do you remember who that was or the gallery name?

MR. KANEKO: David Stuart [David Stuart Galleries, Los Angeles, CA].

MS. MCINNES: And this was in Los Angeles?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, La Cienega.

MS. MCINNES: And what were some of your major exhibitions over your career? The first one, you were in the Everson [Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY]. And then what other ones really stand out in your memory?

MR. KANEKO: Well, okay, probably Everson is definitely the first one, even though I didn't know what it meant. Later on I found out, about three or four years later. And then having Pete was my biggest honor, too. That definitely I knew who he was, what it means to me, so the only question was, why did he select me? It just didn't make sense, couldn't understand. It's still a mystery, you know.

Another thing was the Japanese-National Museum in Japan in Tokyo, and the Kyoto [Kyoto National Museum] did a survey of American contemporary ceramic show in '70-early '70. I forgot the year. I could probably find it, but early '70s. And my-it's a major piece-16 feet high and 21 feet long, is in a steel frame. But they selected that piece with all other American contemporary ceramic artists I admire. So that was a really big deal for me.

Other than that, you know, I have a lot of memories of some shows, but I don't know how I evaluate importance. I think in some ways important-every show is certainly important for me.

MS. MCINNES: Who has been your major dealer?

MR. KANEKO: Well, in Japan-I have two dealers in Japan. They are major, both of them, but both of

them are not operating anymore-one is a Gary Takagi. He was handling my work since, probably, '76. They had just closed, because he wasn't the gallery director; he had another business. The gallery director passed away, and she was the one doing a fantastic job operating the gallery. And the only one I knew. You could hire somebody, but it's not going to be the same. So he just closed it, which I think was the right decision.

The other one closed because of the expense. It is so expensive in Japan. Here is the biggest contemporary gallery dealer, the biggest selling gallery dealer. He was sole presenter of [Isamu] Noguchi's pieces in Japan. I mean, he hung with the big people.

MS. MCINNES: And what was his name?

MR. KANEKO: Kasahara.

MS. MCINNES: Kasahara.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, he has his private office, but he just closed the exhibition space. He was paying \$60,000 every month for just rent. And then he had, like, three people working for him for a long time. He was very generous, I think. He rent their house for them, he was paying very good salary, and the expense got too much.

MS. MCINNES: And your dealer is here in the United States?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, here in the United States-you know, lots of them closed, too, like Dorothy Weiss in the West Coast.

MS. MCINNES: Right.

MR. KANEKO: She was-I mean, because of her age, she closed it. She was an amazing woman. And then she handled my art for a long time, like 20-some years, too. And I really liked her attitude, and we had a great relationship. I still go see her when I'm there. So I consider-she was an important gallery for me, and she-if you're talking about sales, you know, she sold quite a bit, but she wasn't the highest-selling gallery. But as a person, I really respected her a lot.

And Paul Klein [Klein Art Works] in Chicago-again, he closed, too.

MS. MCINNES: Right. And what was the last name again? Paul-

MR. KANEKO: Klein.

MS. MCINNES: Okay.

MR. KANEKO: He is my long-term gallery dealer. I think they might be-some of them might be the longest.

MS. MCINNES: And how have you seen the market in the United States change over the course of your career, particularly for ceramics?

MR. KANEKO: You know, for ceramics market, I think that is very positive for ceramic artists. There is more understanding, more interest, and then people are willing to pay a little better money for the piece than 30, 40 years ago. Thirty, 40 years ago, it was impossible. But now, you know-on the other hand, it's more competition too. There wasn't that many ceramic departments; there aren't

that many ceramic graduates from graduate school. And now, what, over a thousand people, right, every year.

MS. MCINNES: You're in an unusual position in that your international reputation allows you to comment not only on the American market, but we were talking earlier about the Japanese market and how there has, historically, been such strong positive associations with ceramics, versus reception of contemporary ceramics in, say, Europe. Could you speak a little bit about that?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, well, it's interesting. I think each culture has a different concept toward just the material and clay. Some, like Asian countries, usually has a pretty high understanding and respect to the ceramics itself, even though they really don't understand the contemporary structure or anything. Their understanding of the clay, I think their historical understanding, it is respected much higher.

You go to Europe, there is a strong ceramic history in porcelain and other things. But compared to Asian ones, it is not that long a history.

MS. MCINNES: But it's not just history, it's how you value it and value is a real tricky-

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, the value development in Europe is, like-almost like any other commercial value development. Like, you know, make fancy porcelain and sell it at a higher price to queens and kings. They use it, and then they push the price up, and then they may get more, you know, details. It's like all promotional things. In Asia, especially in Japan, I think value developed from the concept.

MS. MCINNES: The concept of-

MR. KANEKO: The philosophical concept of the importance of the ceramic, basically, out of tea ceremony. And then value followed your philosophical concept. That is why I think it's very concrete, and sometimes for the other people it sounds really outrageous.

Now, I hear a story sometime-you know daimyo is a small district king in Japan, before Japan was organized by shoguns. There were small kingdoms all over, and sometimes they changed a certain part of their district just with one tea bowl. They want that tea bowl so bad and say, okay, I'll give you this much-[laughs]-property-you know, half of Omaha-for one tea bowl or something like that. [Laughs.]

[Audio break.]

It is hard to believe, but all of these values, the conceptual value, came from like a-from philosophical values they created from tea ceremony.

MS. MCINNES: Which are aesthetic, spiritual, and philosophical values.

MR. KANEKO: Aesthetic, yeah.

MS. MCINNES: So the material is imbued with all of that potency and value, whereas over in Europe, the association with decorative art and that sort of secondary art is there. And you were mentioning to me that when people-collectors in Europe-buy your work, they see it as sculpture first, and the ceramics is sort of happenstance. I mean, they buy it as sculpture.

MR. KANEKO: Well, people who buy ceramic sculpture see it as a sculpture first. But they saw it made out of ceramics, they would never buy it, because their concept about clay wouldn't make

them to pay a certain amount of cost for certain things. They have a set kind of mind built into their mind. So if they are looking at the ceramic piece, they say-even like a major piece-they would say, it should be under this price. And if it is way over it, they say, this is crazy.

So that variation came from material, what it is made of. But there are other people in New York that they say, "Wow, this is an interesting sculpture." It happened to be made of clay. So the price issue is not there, because they like that sculpture. So it's very interesting. I think the same kind of thing is happening in this country, though, too. You know, you go to, really, the galleries that specialize in just clay objects; it means their client must be really specialized in collecting ceramics.

You put some other sculpture piece, the price rises-jumps about 20 times. They would never sell it, even though they understand the clay and stuff. They develop certain kind of value within a group, and I'm not sure if I'm-that's why I end up having my gallery-really it was never limited to ceramics. Mostly regular gallery; it just happened to be my pieces made out of clay.

MS. MCINNES: Right. And you find that advantageous to you.

MR. KANEKO: Oh, yeah, definitely. Definitely. I would have a problem selling my piece probably in the gallery that so-called specializes in ceramic artists.

[Audio break.]

MS. MCINNES: This is Mary Drach McInnes interviewing Jun Kaneko at his studio in Omaha, Nebraska, on May 24, 2005, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Thank you, Jun, again for consenting to do this interview.

And today I would like to start by focusing on your current studio practice, and go back in time and talk about residencies.

We're sitting in your wonderful residence / studio space in Omaha. Can you describe your studio space for us?

MR. KANEKO: Well, right now I think we have one, two, three, four buildings altogether. The main studio is the oldest one. We purchased it in '89 and then took two years to develop it. It is a four-story brick building. It's about 40,000 square feet. And this is definitely the main studio building. It includes all studio operations, living space, all offices. And the first floor is-I have a five-assistant studio and then some small storage workspace, and woodshop in the garage.

The second floor is all ceramic studio, fabrication space, studio office, living room, some dried-ware storage space, bisqueware storage, and then drying space for the art pieces. And then kiln room. That floor is about 9,000 square feet. And the third floor is all sort of related to the living space and guestroom, and then large personal storage space. The fourth floor is-right now I have a main, sort of administration, office, plus a small office for the museum space, and then three separate painting studios on the fourth floor.

So that is basically the main studio facility. Across the street we have about 65,000 square feet. Out of that, 40-I think around 45,000 square feet will be new museum space, and the rest of it will be my personal space, new living unit, and then some storage space. And then we have another building, about three blocks away, about 10,000 square feet. Right now it is a miscellaneous storage space. So that is my whole studio operation and spaces.

MS. MCINNES: That sounds great. I'll ask you about the museum in just a little bit. But you have

described this wonderful combination of your public and private existence as an artist and all the material surroundings. What are the immaterial things that you look for in terms of needing to work, in terms of inspiration?

MR. KANEKO: What do I look for for the inspiration?

MS. MCINNES: Yes, or qualities do you look for? What do you need to work, in a sense?

MR. KANEKO: You know, I believe now most of my inspiration comes from previous experience, or let's say the piece I did yesterday maybe triggers new ideas or makes me to think to improve certain ways. And that is sort of like a way of getting myself going. At the very beginning, I really don't know. This is what we were talking about 45 years ago. When I started to try to become an artist, I don't know why I started to do drawing. Possibly, maybe I was bored. I just didn't want to just sit and do nothing.

And like I explained yesterday, I didn't want to go to school, but I wanted to find something to do, and then I picked up a pencil and started to draw. This action, I don't know how it happened. Maybe I was familiar watching my mother painting all of the time. That may have had something to do, but once I started to do drawings-and I had-fortunately I had a great teacher, tried to make me to think, to improve what I did, and then to make another piece.

So once you get into that, sort of like, a kind of way of working, as long as you do something, it triggers the next idea usually. And then usually, more than one idea comes up to your mind how to improve the piece that you have just finished. And then you have two or three. So obviously I'm curious which one works best. I don't know until I do it. So I try to do two or three, and then, look, I make art. So a quick variation of what I'm seeing, and then I pick one that I feel works best, and then the same thing happens.

So it's sort of like a snowball. An idea expands pretty quick, but at the same time I know I can't do everything, so I have to have a very critical judgment of my thought and then defining that thought, and then sort of make a guess which might be the best way to go, and then I do that. So the refinement of the idea gets more intense as the year goes, and then a number of the ideas get expanded. So you have got to be very selective. I think that is the way I work, and the inspiration-obviously when I look at it, the question is-when I'm looking at what I did yesterday, and then try to figure out if there is a better way of doing it.

And how do you get that spark or idea-maybe this or maybe that? That moment of something happening to your mind and then feelings about improvement of particular thought and piece; that is a pretty mysterious kind of time, and I really don't know how that happens. But my guess is it is an accumulation of my general daily life, instead of the just looking at art and dealing with art and then getting feedback from art. This maybe doesn't have too much to do with bottom line of getting sparks or next sort of idea of improvement. That is a very-to me it's a strong and mysterious part of it, yeah.

MS. MCINNES: I mentioned to you recently that I had heard Jim Melchert speak in San Francisco about your work and Kimpei Nakamura's work. And he made some very interesting observations about some of your designs and forms. And having visited Japan on a number of occasions, he saw an interesting affinity, a kind of a correspondence with some of your designs in the kind of wrapping and some of the forms with everyday objects-knife forms, fencing, wrapping forms in Japan. And it sounds that-seeing how you move around here-that you are very conscious of how things feel and how they look and-do you think about that, the small domestic forms or, oh, design elements in

everyday life? Are you conscious of looking at how things are put together?

MR. KANEKO: I am very conscious about that. I'm not sure that it's because I grew up in Japan or not, but definitely I'm conscious about-I wasn't at the beginning actually. It took me about 15, 20 years to understand what I'm doing. I didn't have any concrete idea where it came from, but all of the sudden I sort of started to see some of the-my strong curiosity towards patternmaking, like stripes and polka dots and stuff like that.

There is-definitely you can translate it to maybe some Japanese influences, because Japanese culture has really lots of patternmaking things floating around in general everyday life, but other cultures, too. Patternmaking is-to me, it's a pretty basic element of human mark-making. And I was probably started to do patternmaking since the early '60s. Again, I didn't know why I was doing it, and when I look back at my work, there are lots of pieces that has polka dots and stripes, and-I start wondering, why am I doing this?

And I'm not the kind of person to try to analyze this situation that it is almost impossible to analyze. So I sort of believe it comes when it comes, without too much force of thought. So I became conscious, but I wasn't looking for answers. So conscious and then did it. Now all of the sudden I realized it's not only patternmaking-most of life situations has a lot of things to do with the space in between-means including time, lights element, and the living spaces that's a contained space, inside and outside exterior.

And then I started to-that all started to hit me a little bit. And then I became very conscious about relationship of the mark-size of it, spacing of it. It's actually an endless situation. You have one paper, one dot; you could make endless combinations by moving location, making a different size of the dot, and that would give you a completely different situation. That is because if you have an edge of paper as a contained space, the framed space, and then you move this dot, and then if you increase the size, it changes the volume relationship with the space in between.

So that was the beginning of patternmaking. But even at the beginning, one dot, it's almost endless possibilities. So there is-I don't think-I mean, for me at least, there is no way that I could articulate what that means, but I could see all of the patternmaking involves not only mark, but space in between is as important as mark itself. It took me years to realize that. After I realized that, it made my concept completely different and my approach.

MS. MCINNES: You have always worked fairly large, but you have in the last 15 to 20 years worked very large, particularly someone working in ceramics. And obviously those monolithic pieces, the dango pieces that we'll talk about in a few minutes, they have such a physical presence, but they also activate the space around them very differently. So was that awareness coming at that time, or was it earlier?

MR. KANEKO: You know, wanting to make a really oversized, large-scale piece is-one, it's definitely an interesting technical challenge using clay. It becomes really difficult. So it's sort of a way of learning to get to know clay in different ways. Unless you go over some limit, you really never expand your experience and understand. So that was one interest.

But the other thing was, I was always interested in making some piece-I have to look up because, you know, when I went to Europe-this is, like, mid-'80s-the first time I went to Europe-and spent about three months driving around and going to see churches. I mean, take the tourist to kind of sightseeing, but I was moving around three months. And every time I walked into a church, the space in the church has a very high ceiling and it's sort of liked aimed to the point. So you walk in,

and you are forced to look up.

And I thought these optics were very, very interesting in that way. Psychologically, when you look up, most people feel different things. I don't know why, but I don't know anybody who is really sad when they are looking up. Usually people look up when they feel good and feeling up. And if you don't feel-if you feel down, people are looking down walking. So looking down and looking up just-this very simple position of human gesture, I started to feel-it causes huge influences in the interior feeling in your heart. And that is why, therefore, I thought architecture for church was very innovative because it makes you to look up; I mean, brings your feeling up.

So I wanted to see the same thing happen to my work. It happened to me looking at a big tree or big mountain. When I look up, I feel some powerful mysterious feeling. That was sort of base of my curiosity. If I made my piece as tall as possible, and if I look up, how do I feel? It wasn't, you know, how big can I make and stuff; it all came from my conceptual questions.

MS. MCINNES: But when you started that realization, that space played such an important part of your work, you were thinking less of pattern making or object making and you were activating the space. Did it happen at the same time you shifted scale or-because it suggests that it happened about 20 years ago, which is when you started making the dango.

MR. KANEKO: No, my awareness of this space in between the thing might be influencing a lot of my things, and especially development of my patternmaking and the way of putting pieces in the exhibition space. I usually designed the exhibition space-which piece has to go where-pretty much exact spot. For that reason, I really care about distance between the wall to the piece, piece to the next piece, in size, in height creation, and all of that, and then people's movement, where they might come in-most of the people-where they might go out. And all of that is thought out in my exhibition floor plan.

So, it's almost like the same as making painting or drawing or patterns and stuff. But this issue I started to realize, actually, when I was in graduate school, because one of the things interesting in graduate school is, I'm not really used to going to some school and then work as a group. I'm not really that great about group activity or anything. I'm so used to working in my studio by myself. Nobody comes and says, you know, why are you doing this? Nobody asked me. But once you go to school, everybody says, what are you doing? Are you crazy? Or, you know, what is this? And then, I don't have a reason, or I just feel like I'm doing it. And then usually they don't buy that. You have to come up with a smart answer.

And so I start saying-you know, well, that answer may be completely off from the reality of it, but in the academic field, lots of times you are forced to come up with certain kinds of answers to your act.

Otherwise it's not valid. So I went to graduate school for two years. It is this completely different environment. I wasn't used to it. And then, so, the same thing happened and they-everybody said, "Why are you making so much patterns and stuff?" It doesn't take too long to get your nerve or-[laughs]-or get to your thought and say, yeah, that is true; why am I doing this? I can't keep on saying, I don't know; you know, it just happens.

But at the same time, my attitude, you know, makes me to think hard enough to come up with some great answer. But all of a sudden one-yeah, maybe it's a relationship between the mark itself. I was really busy to make a mark. When I'm doing stripes, I was concentrating on just the design of it. I realized I can't make a stripe with one line. That is like a sort of stupid thing. I mean, anybody

knows that. It really took me a long time. I need at least more than one line to make stripes.

Then there is space in between the marks, which is as important. If you put the same kind of line spaced three-quarter inch or five inch and 10 inch away, it would make a completely different kind of a statement as a pattern. So I realized it is a space. And then between the marks, then I started to think about-it's almost exactly the same thing as music, because sound-I mean, you can't make music with just a noise or sound. You need silence in between the sound; otherwise you can't make a musical composition.

MS. MCINNES: You need the rests.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah. Or even John Cage gave up. [Laughs.] He did a silent thing. I mean, it had a beginning and an ending.

MS. MCINNES: The silence.

MR. KANEKO: So I started to realize about music, patternmaking, and the general life of this space. And then all of the sudden I realized, Japanese Shinto ideas-you know, a lot of time-idea of kami. Shinto is sort of like a sun goddess [Amaterasu]-it's one day, but one week, one year, and then the full circle. That time passed by. These elements are very important for Shinto ideas. And then that idea of kami includes everything in nature. And then I started to realize what I'm trying to do, so really that is what it is.

So reducing down my statement of idea of anything in the sculpture form, or any other form, is sort of-on the surface it looks completely different from that concern. But at the base it's a very, very-almost one singular-my curiosity and the idea of trying to find the-how to make a space alive and how to make a relationship of things in a different way by placing things in the defined spacing, and stuff like that.

So not too many people see my work realize my main concern is with space itself, not the object-just not the focus on the object. When we talk about sculpture, everybody thinks of form and sculpture-existing thing, right there first. But that thing doesn't exist, actually, if there is nothing around it. Or it might exist but in a completely different way.

So now I always think, not just a piece; just in relationship to the others. And then sometimes it doesn't have really the greatest spatial relationship, because of the environmental limitation. But if you really are aware of that, you can make most of the world to exist in really that defined spaces, and then come up-make a really great statement with the space around them. So that is why, maybe, I like the architecture.

MS. MCINNES: Right. And you have moved into this sort of architectural realm with the large wall pieces. But just to pursue this element of scale, because certainly scale has a very dynamic relationship with space, can you speak to that issue of scale, because you're someone who is, again, known for breaking out of the, sort, of traditional tabletop scale of ceramic sculpture into very large pieces, or these architectural wall pieces. Has scale played an important role for you?

MR. KANEKO: Sure. I mean, either we like it or not, scale is a really serious and important issue for the object maker. And it depends on how each individual feels about the issue of scale how you deal with it in different ways. But to me, you can't avoid it, no matter what you do, the scale issues-

[Audio break.]

-that is a very difficult thing, because if you start talking about large-scale piece, there's always nature to compare.

MS. MCINNES: It's all relative.

MR. KANEKO: You know, there's a mountain there, and people say, wow, this is a huge piece. It's like 12 feet tall, and they take it to stand next to some really tall tree, like, you know, 90 feet, 100 feet tall. It looks like peanut sitting next to a big tree. So the skill is a kind of, I think, such a judgment that human being developed to try to compare two things, or more to evaluate the size relations. So if everything else in the world, let's say, became same size, there is no scale issue because everything is same, so you don't have to compare the size. So it becomes different thing, but that's not the world we are living. So you say okay, this is a big apple and this is a small apple. Or, that doesn't happen with two apples of the same size. We always compare and then say this is large or small.

So that large-scale piece has a same problem as a small-scale piece to me, as a visual artist. When you make a large piece, sure, it has a completely different physical experience and there's lot of other things happens other than the small piece could offer, but once you start comparing them to mountains and trees, here it is. It just disappears. And the small thing has a lot more difficult time to have a really strong physical appearance and conceptually to grab you, like, feeling. I call a small piece, if it is a successful piece, it has a spiritual scale. Again, as I said, you compare things-is it large or small-and to do that, observer has to be outside of at least two things, so that observer could see object A and object B, and they say, hey, that's bigger. But if observer lost the distance between the object, then that can't happen, because we can't compare.

So when I'm making small piece, I don't want to give a chance to the viewer to step back and then look around and look at my piece. I just want them to just grab right into it. They look at it. They're drawn to it. Just go straight into the piece. If that was possible, this viewer is not outside the work anymore. They're feeling inside the work. Therefore, they can't compare this and that. They are it.

So that's why I think, if I did make a small piece to draw people immediately into the piece, I call that a pretty successful piece for me as a small object. And then, I call that a spiritual scale. So that's my interest. And it goes same way to the large-scale piece, too, in a lot of ways, because as I said, if you start comparing with nature, then the big piece could be just like a dust. So the point to the scale, to make a sense as a visual artist, is just pull them into it. Then, they just don't have a chance to compare. They will become the thing itself almost. Then, I think, the artist did a very good, successful job on whatever the piece they are making.

MS. MCINNES: You were mentioning just a minute ago about your graduate experience, and one thing that struck me again yesterday in talking about your early experiences with Jerry Rothman and Peter Voukos and Paul Soldner is that most of that generation used the vessel form as a starting point to sort of play out various ideas. And almost immediately, you have used some larger, almost platter forms, but flat forms that seem almost more dislike. But generally speaking, you have always been a sculptor. You have not worked with the vessel form. And I think that makes you very distinctive for someone coming into the ceramic field in the early '60s. Were you taught about the vessel form, or because of your painting background, were you immediately drawn into using the clay more as a canvas?

MR. KANEKO: I was taught-I did it awhile when I went to Chouinard and then with Ralph Bacerra, but as I told you, I was a special student. So the assignment he was giving, lots of time, I didn't really have to do it. He didn't enjoy my behavior, but he really couldn't do too much, because I wasn't

looking for credit or anything.

But it was interesting to watch people. I must say, probably besides me, most of the people are highly interested in throwing, so everybody was doing throwing, and it was really great to watch how the clay could move out of your hand, and then a couple fantastic throwers in the classes, and I was always amazed.

But for some reason, it didn't grab me enough to make me to think that would be my major thing. I did make some pots. And I know a little bit of how to do it, but even now, I'm not really that interested in doing it by myself. I'm always interested in well-made thrown pieces. There are great people making great stuff with the wheel. But that doesn't happen in my case. I'm not sure where that came from, but it might have something to do from my painting experience. I was already interested in sort of deformed what I see to abstract way, to increase my emotional feeling as a mark-making on the canvas. So I was already at that stage when I was painting.

So that thought might have influenced me by looking at what everybody was throwing, even though they are beautiful form, beautiful pot, it's sort of like a wow, when you see the realistic drawings that are beautifully done and technical. But to me, it's missing something, just a little bit, something. So maybe that's why I wasn't really that interested in throwing pottery. Too technical, even though it's a big challenge. I know it's a lifetime challenge.

MS. MCINNES: What you say suggests that you have a slightly different relationship to the material of clay than other ceramic artists. What is it about that material that keeps you engaged with it?

MR. KANEKO: You know, the clay is a really amazing material to me. In this country, it usually starts from powder. Nobody goes to the clay mine to dig it. So let's say almost all the ceramic people dig into the powdered clay. Nowadays, it's already bagged clay. Lots of people think that the clay comes in the bag, you know? So you start powder and you mix it and then form it. It has an interesting change.

Firstly, you have to dry and then bisque-fire and then glaze-fire. Nobody said, you want to go through all of the process until you finish it. And you could stop at any point, but over 99.9 percent of people finish. Why? It's a sort of historical concept that it has to be fired. It comes from a functional idea for your functional pottery. Sure, if you want to use or make a functional pottery, it's better to fire it. And the higher the temperature you can fire, it's probably better.

But when it comes to the art itself, it's not the case. It has a fantastic characteristic in different states. That's what I was really interested, and especially while it's wet. It has amazing ability of recording any kind of pressure you give to the clay and just hold that shape. That itself is an already endless characteristic in an amazing material possibility.

MS. MCINNES: You have-and this is not clear looking at photographs, but it's evident when you see your work physically-the surfaces undulate and they have a really wonderful organic quality. But when you step back, they become this surface, this sort of canvas, is what I would call it, for your painting and your mark-making. And certainly, you handle this surface in a very distinctive way. Can you speak about your use of color and also your application of pattern onto your surfaces?

MR. KANEKO: This is a pretty difficult question to actually give you a clear answer. Use of color is obviously my real personal choice about what I like and what I don't. You would hardly see green in my work. That's the one color I have a very difficult time to use it. I'm interested. Now I'm thinking about doing it, but at least the last 30 years, when I started to do ceramics 40 years ago, very few

pieces has a green. So my selection of color is real personal with what I like and what I don't.

And I don't know where that selection comes, and usually I pick one color to one spot. Think about if you define color as next to it; the color I put here would start reacting completely different way with it. So I start thinking about orchestration of the colors around the work as a whole and then make a good, sort of like a symphony. Everything has to-I mean, to me, it has to make an interesting harmony to become one, to be there as one statement. So choice is always very fluid, and it changes. And then, sometimes just floating around in my head, I can't make myself to put one color on here. And then, for some reason, it happens sometimes, it goes pretty quick and then sometimes a day in between. So it's a very organic process.

MS. MCINNES: It sounds very organic, and yet I know with your background in painting (and I have a background in painting), when you're actually using paint on canvas or on paper, you see the color. You know you put the red on; you put on the yellow. It's quite different with glazes. So how have you dealt with that?

MR. KANEKO: I could say it's a pure experience. And at the beginning, I had a hard time, because it changes color drastically after you fire it.

MS. MCINNES: Right. In your conversation about how one color reacts to another, it seems that while it's an organic process, it's also highly conceptual using glazes, because once you put them down, they're not the color that they're going to be after firing them. So you're not only applying something, you're applying something that you're thinking will hopefully turn out in the future.

MR. KANEKO: You have to see the fired color.

MS. MCINNES: Exactly.

MR. KANEKO: See, that takes like 30, 40 years to really start seeing it. I don't see the colors. I mean, I see it, but I could see the fired color even though it's not fired. See? That's just going through lots of exercise and practice and going through the experience. There is no other way, unfortunately, to get to that point. So in my case, I'm getting pretty close to being able to see the fired color when I'm applying the-beginning, or whatever, on a bisqueware.

MS. MCINNES: And I know you do a great deal of drawing and painting. Do you always work out your ideas primarily in drawing, or is drawing a separate activity?

MR. KANEKO: The drawing and painting is-drawing is for drawing's sake, painting is for painting's sake. But I know I'm the one doing it, so there is in the deep some places it connects. But I don't think about intentional influences and side influences from ceramic to drawings to painting or whatever. But it ends up having lots of similarity, too.

MS. MCINNES: And one other thing that your work-some pieces-and this goes back 30, 40 years to the present-have a wonderful sort of playfulness to it, the ashi forms, the three-legged forms, have a great sense of mobility and playfulness. What's the element of play in your work? Are you conscious of it?

MR. KANEKO: You know, I'm not really that conscious. But some of the openness in the element of playness maybe comes from the experience of living in California in the late '60s and early '70s. Especially in the ceramic field, a movement called funk movement and stuff like that didn't exist in the other field, but it really became a pretty important thing. It didn't last that long, but it was-and California was the center of that funk idea. And I was aware of it, and then, these thoughts and the

experience probably had a pretty strong influence to my three-leg piece. This is just looking back from now.

MS. MCINNES: Sure.

MR. KANEKO: And then, about mark-making and the prettiness of it is like-I have a sort of both extremes-like I have a really tightly controlled mark and then really very organic mark, and then try to make some kind of a conversation between these two different characteristics of the mark. So I do use lots of free-kind of a playful role-I don't know if I could say playful-but free kinds of designs and colors and drawing, dripping and splashing and scratching through.

So lots of time-I think I started to go to Hawaii about already 10 years ago every winter, and then I would go in the studio there and then start drawing. And because I like nature, so I sort of wanted to include that into my drawing, and then started drawing, like, ocean in abstract way, and then I have lots of drawings, like tropical squall and rains and the wind. These are all like-if you try to translate it with colors and lines, it's a great subject to do it. So lots of drawing had that tropical wind, and I have a drawing of the ocean where it's a whale and it's just nothing's there and just like lines. And you're looking for whale and you hardly ever see whale from the ground so it's-[laughs].

MS. MCINNES: In addition to that sense of movement, there are other pieces and here I'm thinking of some of, particularly, the darker pieces you did in Europe at the EKWC [European Ceramic Work Center, s'Hertogenbosch, Netherlands] in '96 that are not only monolithic in form, but have this iconic quality. I mean, the black or the play with the matte black with a shiny black, and you've done a number of pieces with the black and white. How do you think of those pieces in relationship to your other more colorful work?

MR. KANEKO: There is a definitely defined concern between the-some of them are like really geometric, simple marks, or some of them are very complex, colorful marks. The ones which have a simple mark or area have that half matte black and then shiny black, or black and white, these are sort of my interest to try to change existing form, the way you see it. If you didn't paint it that way, people would see it like, let's say, very simple angle like that. This plane is white, and as far as form, people see the basic form with a different colored surface. But maybe if you put, let's say, black bottom half, then whole form changes, even though it's exactly the same form-statement of whole form changes. But if you split it in half vertically, black and white, it changes completely different. Or if you make like a black and white, make it turn in different shape, like a 90 degree turn or so on, then it changes, too. So how to dissect the shape-the same shape-and then make it completely different, makes a different relationship within the piece itself-is one of the interesting things I'm trying to work out.

Other ones going, like, lots of color and let's say polka dots and stripes or whatever-both sides, it's a same kind of feeling all the way around the piece.

MS. MCINNES: It becomes a field.

MR. KANEKO: It has a different issue. Then you see it as one field of the similar amounts, but then when you walk around, piece changes, and that similar field starts giving you completely different visual effect. Like, let's say it's polka dot. If you look straight in, that's pretty much round, but if it's a side wall, you see it-you just see the one small line there. So between round to just one small line, it changes, and halfway between it becomes like an oval. So it changes. And then if you walk around, it changes gradually. It just makes a fantastic, you know, visual.

[Audio break.]

MS. MCINNES: Okay, this is disc number three, Jun Kaneko, May 24, 2005.

And Jun, at this moment, why don't we stop and look back on a few of your major projects and residencies from the last two decades? First, you came to Omaha in the early '80s, while you were teaching at Cranbrook. Was that with a Bemis [Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE] residency?

MR. KANEKO: It wasn't the Bemis yet. It was Ree [wife, Ree Schonlau Kaneko] who was doing summer workshop, who-what did you call that?

MS. MCINNES: The Omaha artwork-

MR. KANEKO: No.

REE SCHONLAU KANEKO: Alternative Worksite.

MR. KANEKO: Alternative Worksite is the official sort of name. You started that-

MS. KANEKO: Eighty-one.

MR. KANEKO: Eighty-one right? I came in-no, you didn't.

MS. KANEKO: Eighty-two.

MR. KANEKO: Eighty-two. So that was the first one, I believe. It sort of happened by accident, too. I ran into her in Seattle-I have to be exact-the Pilchuck Glass Art School. And then she says, "I'm doing a summer workshop," and then she invited me. That's how it started. And I came first year; I was just like a guest artist and did a regular workshop with a bunch of students. The second year, when she asked me, I said, "You know, if I can, I would like to do my own project." And I knew by then they had-Omaha Brickworks has a fantastic old beehive kiln, which I've never used before. The scale itself was really amazing. So we arranged a site and so I could come and use the kiln. And that's how it started.

So that wasn't really the project. Conceptually, I didn't have a clear mind. I was just interested in that industrial scale and the possibility. I didn't know what I was going to do. And I was-jokingly, I said, well, I decided to make as big a piece as possible to go through the doorway. This is a brick beehive kiln, so the doorway is small, you know, and they were firing bricks, so you don't need a big door. So the doorway was about six feet by five feet. So I wanted to make a little higher piece. Only way to do it was to dig a trench from outside to inside to gain the height. [Laughs.] So I made a piece a little higher than doorway and then I dug the trench from all the way outside, to inside and then when we fired the piece, we drag it over to this trench and then lower it and then drag it out and then bring it up from this. And so -

MS. MCINNES: That was easier to do than to change the frame of the door?

MR. KANEKO: That's true, because once you take it out of the door, the whole crown of the beehive kiln would collapse, too. So this was the only easy way out to do it. And then, as I said, I wasn't really prepared for that project, not only conceptually, but technically, too. So because I thought about-okay, I will make largest piece go through this door, so that's how almost that dango shape started to happen. What is the maximum-obviously, top is round. So if you look at it, and then

lengthwise you have gone longer, because once whole thing goes through the doorway lengthwise, you can go a little longer. So that dango was-from side view it almost has a shape of a candle. You know, if you look at it from the side a little bit wider, that's because of the sculpture of proportional things that I thought it might work. So, made it longer.

MS. MCINNES: This is the beginning of your dango pieces?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah.

MS. MCINNES: It's also the beginning, wasn't it, of your relationship with industry, which has turned out to be so terrific for you. I mean, you were interested in using the industrial sites. Had you done something before then?

[Audio break.]

MR. KANEKO: -in an industry in Japan called Otsuka Ceramics that is the same year. It's two months earlier. That was just a few months before, but it's the same year.

MS. MCINNES: And what did you make with them?

MR. KANEKO: The Otsuka Ceramics is a tile company, but they have the ability to make the largest tile in the world. They're very straight and thin, like a three-quarter inch thick, maybe. And then now, today, they can make 13 feet long by three feet wide.

MS. MCINNES: Fantastic.

MR. KANEKO: So what they do with it is they usually take a picture of something or old Japanese woodcut print and then roll it up like really large-12 feet by 20 feet, let's say-and they make a silk screen and just face it and fire it. I mean, put it in hotel lobby or something. So when I saw that in '81, I was shocked. The technical ability of making tile, but I thought they were very poor about their imagination of how to use that fantastic tile. They just put, you know, some picture or some scenery or something.

I mean, so they gave me a tour and they asked me what I thought. So I told them-this is very unlike Japanese man to say, because I was already out of Japan too long, you know-so they ask me questions, so I told them straight up what I felt. [Laughs.] And I said, "You know, I'm just totally amazed with your technical ability; this is just amazing. But, on the other hand, when I looked at how you are using it, I was also totally amazed in the opposite negative way, because there is no imagination. I mean, to create that kind of technical thing, someone has to have a great imagination to achieve that technical possibility. But when it comes to use of that material you are making, you have no imagination." I said, "I can't make any relationship between here. It's the same company. I don't know what's going on. This is really confusing."

So I went home. A couple of days later, the president called me, "Listen, that was the toughest criticism we've ever got. Nobody told us these things, but I can't forget it. It hit my head so strong, I can't forget it. So can you come back and then talk to me, and can you do something with our material? What you meant by make a use out of your material-totally interesting with your imagination and the concept."

So I went back and talked to him and said, "You know, I never thought about it. This is a great new opportunity, so I don't know what I'm going to do. But I like the challenge of it. I'd like to think about it and do it. But you have to realize, I'm not familiar with this kind of material." I mean, you can't bend it.

You can't do anything with it. All you've got is just straight tiles. And then, well, I may be able to paint it, but it's not my idea. You know, like a painting-an abstract painting is great. I mean, that's fine. But it's sort of similar to, you know, printing a scene-a photo of scenery and a traditional Japanese woodcut print and transferring it on the surface. It's a little different, but there is so much similarity there, too.

So I said, "I want to try to make something three-dimensional, but I don't know what. And I don't know how much material I'm going to take. This is the deal. I'm not going to guarantee a successful piece, because I don't have any idea. But I'll try my best. And the next thing is, I don't want to hear from anybody once I start that you're using too much material or anything like that. So once you make that commitment, let me know, because these tiles were expensive." These are like-just one single glaze-one tile cost \$2,000.

MS. MCINNES: Did you do the tiles, or did you do those ceramic slats?

MR. KANEKO: I asked him to cut these big tiles and then glaze it. See they were proud, so proud. This is the world's biggest tile. I said, "Chop it." [Laughs.] And they looked at me-you are an idiot, you know?

MS. MCINNES: You were destroying precisely what they were known for.

MR. KANEKO: Right.

MS. MCINNES: But you made-that was *Parallel Sounds*, wasn't it?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, yeah. So I mean, lengthwise, I kept pretty much the length. I couldn't go full length because the structure of-I was worried about structure strength, so I chopped it in a little bit. But width-[inaudible]-I sliced it maybe four-no, maybe three inches. I asked them to slice three-inch strips. I got 200 of them at the beginning. They couldn't figure out what's going on here.

So we started to do some glazes. They have fantastic technicians. That's no doubt about it. Glaze technicians that just like magic. I said, "Okay, that's a little bit too much. Can't you shoot this color that way and then knock off the shine a little bit here," and next day exactly what I said, just kind of, "You mean this?"

MS. MCINNES: That's fantastic; that's great.

MR. KANEKO: This was amazing. So this was my first experience. It just happened by accident, too, you know? So, and then that was our first industrial opportunity and then after that, they started to do artist-in-residency program. You know, [Robert] Rauschenberg spent so much time there, too. You really never know what happens with a little thing like this, and then-

MS. MCINNES: And then that was followed two years later by your work at Arabia [Arabia Museum, Helsinki] in Finland, wasn't it?

MR. KANEKO: Right.

MS. MCINNES: And was that the moment that you started doing the wall tiles? Because you were taking out your test ones?

MR. KANEKO: Right, yeah. You know, every time you go to some existing industrial site, if you are thinking about using their materials, the first thing you have to do is you've got to get to know

what's available, what it does as a material, and possibility of it. So I ended up running a whole bunch of tests to just develop your understanding and knowledge, how to use existing stuff to make it work for your idea.

So that's what I did in Arabia. Arabia definitely had a lot of different glazes and colors, and they've got one of the world's biggest, you know, ceramic dinnerware companies-used to be. So the selection was in front of me, too much-too much is there, so you have to think about, what do I really need, and then just be really selective and then pick things that I really need, out of thousands of stuff. Then, start making tests and combine with these things and see what happens. And so, I made a whole bunch of tiles while I'm doing-I'm looking at lots of colors and temperatures and tests and talking to the engineer. But I was doing both at the same time. So tile would be dry enough by the time I'd decide which material to use, and then I painted all of these tiles-I think 160 or 200 tiles I made-in about four or five days. And then after one week I was glazing, and then maybe within 10 days, I got the whole bunch fired.

And then I made a good-sized tile. I think that was about maybe 12 by 16 inches, each tile. Thinking about it, it came out good. I'll use it for some piece. If it doesn't, I just trash it. But every tile came out okay, and while I was unloading kiln, there was a big floor space right next to the kiln, so I wanted to see it. I didn't want to put it on the shelving unit or cart. So I just started to put it on the floor, and then after I unloaded everything, I looked at it and all of a sudden I realized, these tiles as one unit, it looks really great.

And that's when I thought about making tile walls. But what I liked about it was you can make a different composition with the same tiles. So you have flexibility of changing visual activities with the same tiles after you fire it, which I can't do with a sculpture or form-one piece and it, sometimes, you know, if I wonder if I did put something over there, how it looks after a fire. You just can't do it. But this tile wall allows you to really switch around and make a different composition, different thing. I was so enjoying that freedom and different freedom in ceramics, and then scared, too. It's a unit, so you could go really big-the biggest one is, as one piece, it's 350 feet long. Two walls, so that's 700 feet.

MS. MCINNES: Oh, across from each other?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, it's like a subway station. That is a process -

MS .MCINNES: Where is that?

MR. KANEKO: It's in Boston, Aquarium Station. So that's 700 feet total, and then one piece in Salt Lake City, Salt Palace, is pretty big. That's 160 feet, and one side is 20 feet, one side is 10 feet. It's all, like, decrying the height.

[Audio break.]

MS. MCINNES: And that led to another residency. This was about in 1996, so it was 12 years later. Oh, hold up. I'm trying to keep track of all your residencies, and you travel around quite a bit don't you? [Laughs.] It's hard to keep track, but I think your next major project was the well-known Fremont [CA] project at Mission Clay, and that was in 1992. So it was exactly 10 years after you started the beehive project in Omaha. And up to the present, that's been your largest-scale single object. Can you tell us a little bit about how that project came about?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, this Fremont project is the track that was owned by sewer pipe maker called

Mission Clay Products. It's a third-generation operation, and the son, the youngest one, was a ceramic artist. And because they had a pipe company, it relates to his interest, so he started to do a workshop there, inviting artists to use clay pipe. I think he was doing that about two, three years. And then, I think he thought about me, might be interested in coming. So he called me, but I wasn't really interested in using pipe. So I said, "I don't think it would work for me." But we were talking on the phone like half an hour and I said, "What kind of kiln is it? And how did you start? Who came?" And stuff like that. And then, I asked him, "What's the size of the door?" [Laughs.]

He said, "I think it's nine feet." I said, "You've got to be kidding," because my knowledge of a beehive kiln is like a door is lying about seven feet, you know. And then he says, "I'm pretty sure it's nine feet or maybe even a little over nine feet." He said, "I'm sitting right across from one of the beehives in the office. If you hold it, I'll go measure the height of the door." So I said, "Okay, I'll wait." He came back and said, "Yeah, it's nine and a half feet." I said, "Wow, can I come and see the kiln?"

And this was in California, and I was going to go to Japan, like, the next week. So I said, "Okay, I'll stop by on my way to Japan." I ran to check on a definitely really great-looking kiln and a nice side. So I talked to him, "You think there is a possibility of doing just my project without having a classroom or workshop?" And he said, "Probably, because the owner was his parent. So he said, "Well, I have to talk to everybody about that. But I'm pretty sure." So he called me back and said, it's okay to do it. So that's how it started.

And in this time, I knew it could be really difficult and technical issues, so I spent two and half years to do technical research, clay-molding tests and glaze fit and everything.

MS. MCINNES: Before you even got to Fremont?

MR. KANEKO: Right. So preparation time was pretty long, and then they have another kiln, which is the one I'm doing now in Pittsburg, Kansas. Same owners. They have a really huge ceramic testing lab in Pittsburg, so they used to test my clay and glaze and stuff for this Fremont project. So some of the older people working there know me. [Laughs.] Anyway, so I spent two and a half years, and then started and spent another two and half years to complete it.

At the beginning, we made six tall pieces, which is a fabrication size 11 feet, fired size it's about 10 foot, four inches. We built six of these large ones inside the kiln, because it's oversized for the door. We have to tip it to angle the kiln.

MS. MCINNES: You had to tip the entire beehive?

MR. KANEKO: No, no, the entire piece.

MS. MCINNES: Oh, all right, okay.

MR. KANEKO: So we made these in the kiln, bisque-fired, and then painted and glazed it, and then fired glaze. But we made smaller pieces so we could lower it in the kiln and standing up, like an eight-foot-tall piece, enough to fill the kiln so the fire may be better. And so we did that.

But when we were fabricating, we had a technical problem, which I was sort of expecting, you know, because not too many people really made this kind of piece. And even though I was careful, did it two and half year's research, when I found a problem in the bottom of the piece, it started to crack.

MS. MCINNES: And that was before the bisque fire?

MR. KANEKO: Before the bisque fire. That's when we were already 10 feet high. Next day, we were going to close. And then somebody said, "There's a crack down there." I said, "You know, it's pretty dark 10 feet down." I said, "You've got to be kidding." And we didn't have any lights shooting down or anything. He said, "I think there is a crack." So I said, "Go get the flashlight," and they brought it and then sure enough, there's a crack. And then check the next one, there's a crack. Check the other one; it's the exact same crack. And I said, "It's got to have a reason being same." And it took me about three days to figure it out. And I was trying to repair; I went all the way down into the piece. But it's a big piece so-and then the third day I came to conclusion. I'm just doing touch-up job. I'm not fixing the structure because they are already built-in structural problem.

So the third day I came up from inside the dango and told everybody, okay, let's take it down-whole thing. Thirty tons of clay, you know, so they were crying. And we took it down, and I figured the reason for that crack is we had lots of systems to help to shrink, obviously, but we had a bungee cord around the piece-but what I didn't figure out was that it pulled the wrong way because it's oval shape. Lengthwise, it pulls, but a shallow part of the oval, it doesn't create enough compression to push it inside. It's all one-directional pull, but that shallow part is a big surface on top. It's about 70 percent of the whole weight is this side and that side. And that's why it's not moving in, so it split from the middle like straight. So I did-I tried to strengthen the middle part the next-[inaudible]-but I was talking to my friend in Japan trying to figure it out. He said, "Well, you know, I never made a big piece like you're doing, but one thing we do in Japan when you're making a teapot, you push the bottom out"-

MS. MCINNES: With your palm?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, so that makes a dome and then when it shrinks, it gives a cushion so it doesn't spread. If it's straight, there's no place to absorb the difference in the shrinking and it starts spreading. I said, "That's a great, genius idea."

MS. MCINNES: So the solution came from a small teapot for this 10-foot sculpture?

MR. KANEKO: So I think we made a piece, one or two with that bottom-but I wanted to try a lot of different ways. So we made at least one, I think two, like a dome-shaped bottom. The other one has an interior cut out, like oval-shaped and they have sort of a thing coming up, like an oval type inside, about 10 inches-

MS. MCINNES: Like a flange type of-

MR. KANEKO: Yeah. That way it will absorb the difference of the shrinkage, and then the bottom, the hardest part, is gone-cut out. So every system we used worked out second time around.

MS. MCINNES: And before I forget, we talked about this a little bit, but not on tape, that the dango is the Japanese term for dumpling, and it describes that generally sort of a rounded form, which for you can either be this kind of monolithiclike, very tall vertical piece that has rounded edges or the smaller-I say smaller, they're about four feet high-sort of rounded, more ball-shaped or even the triangular. You use the same term for all of those.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, well, you know. I'm not very good at titling pieces, or maybe I don't have the patience. So it started as just sort of a type of work in Omaha. It's a rounded piece and it looked like dango, so we started to call it dango. But no really deep thought behind it; it's a type of work. And I just kept on continuing because I'm still making these shapes, but nothing beyond that.

MS. MCINNES: In fact, right now, your current project is very similar to the Fremont project, with the same company, Mission Clay Products, but with a larger beehive kiln that's standing in Pittsburg, Kansas. Between those two projects, the current one and the one in Fremont, you also did a residency over at the European Ceramic Works Center for low-fire work, the Dutch series. What in particular did you explore at that moment? You were doing tile pieces also?

MR. KANEKO: You know, at the beginning, I wasn't very interested. They approached me and I said, "You know, I'm not sure if I could do it in low-fire glaze." It's a completely different relationship between the clay volume to glaze itself. So I said, "Before I make a final decision, I'd like to come and take a look at the place." So I was going to go to Europe anyway for looking around, so I stopped by at the European Ceramic Work Center and I looked at lots of glaze test there, really organized.

So the Center is essentially pro-run, not only providing a facility to ceramic artist, but non-ceramic artists. There are lots of them, maybe more than 50 percent now. So these people don't have any typical background and understanding and they just have a visual concept and they want to make something. Therefore, a lot of them are nearly impossible to do it in ceramics, and then the technical backup support is really required in just an enormous way. They have all these information, as much as they can, and then, you know, sample glaze fire tile.

So when I looked at all of these colors, I thought maybe it's at least worthwhile to try it. I wasn't still convinced if I could make something that I feel very good about with the low-fire glaze, because I was so-I mean, I was prejudiced about low-fire glaze. Every time I see it with the beautiful bright colors and stuff, but it definitely has a feeling of the skin. It doesn't bite into the clay body or the relationship to the pot itself. My piece is not really that high-fired or anything, but I sort of like that. It digs in a little bit into the clay and that relationship. But with a low-fire glaze, I always felt skin and then clay.

But when I saw their test tiles, I said, this is probably worthwhile to try it. So I said okay, I'll do it. I'd like to do it, but if I do it, I want to do it, like, two sessions-three months to fabricate, three months to glaze. And so it was, I think almost nine months or 12 months project. I went three months. They did do drying control for me, and then they did do the whole bisque-firing for me before I came back. And that's why I was able to make quite a bit of work. I made a lot.

And then, I went back second time, too. I forgot what year. The second time I knew I just wanted to try the possibility of the new glaze combination and then maybe surface, so instead of making three original pieces, I limited myself to 100 wall tiles or wall slabs, like the big ones. That's about 20 inches by 28 inches, or something like that. And then I didn't want to lose too much time to do fabrication and drying and bisque-fire, so I asked them if that's okay if I shipped all bisqueware from here. Then I could just-[audio break]-so that was actually productive. I think the whole thing was a month or six weeks. I did-and then most of it came out really good. So-

MS. MCINNES: Oh, really. And you had that fabulous catalogue from that group of workers, which you really enjoyed.

With the time remaining, I would like to ask you some broader issues about writing and criticism and values. First, what other artists have been important in your life, either in terms of your own development as an artist, either within the field of ceramics or outside?

MR. KANEKO: The very first influential artist was a Spanish artist. And, you know Antonio Tapies?

MS. MCINNES: Oh, sure.

MR. KANEKO: I was very impressed-his thought and painting-when I was 17 years old. That is, like, immediately after I started to paint. And it's funny. I have a very similar quality to ceramic surface-the painting he was doing at that time. So he is still one of the really important artists for me. So I would say he is a very first influential one, and then Lucio Fontana.

MS. MCINNES: Oh, really? In terms of his canvases?

MR. KANEKO: Canvas and clay work.

MS. MCINNES: Both.

MR. KANEKO: Both, but more like a canvas.

MS. MCINNES: And was it because of how he made the slits in -

MR. KANEKO: It's just like that. Yeah. It's like a-it was shocking, like a concept to break through the normal thinking of the painting idea to just cut the canvas and then try to make it work or make sense or punch a hole, or whatever. So that was really interesting, besides his visual, you know-I like Fontana's visual to the way he treated. So Italian and the Spanish, when I was young, had really influenced me.

And later on, when I came to the U.S., definitely the first influential person was Peter Voukos. When I saw his pieces at Marer's place-and I could keep on going, but, you know, like, Noguchi, and Brancusi-the sort of same type of artists. But they are probably strong, I think, influence to my concept.

MS. MCINNES: You have mentioned five artists to me, only one of whom is seen as a ceramic artist. This raises this issue that you're looking outside of the field of ceramics for inspiration. But you have chosen to be primarily a ceramic artist, although you certainly, again, do paintings and drawings. Ceramics in the United States and-you were talking yesterday-in Europe has a marginal place in terms of the fine arts. I mean, it's often sort of seen at the sidelines. Do you feel that keenly or do you-are you conscious of that sort of marginal position? Or is it something that you have worked with. For instance, Jim Melchert always talks about working from the margins. Do you think that that has affected how your work has been received critically by people?

MR. KANEKO: I really don't know exactly what you're trying to-

MS. MCINNES: Well, it's basically still the marketplace for fine arts. Collectors and curators think in terms of painting and sculpture. But when you are a sculptor, you work in ceramics, and ceramics has traditionally not been valued as high as painting and, say, sculpture in bronze or marble. I was just wondering if you had any thoughts about that?

MR. KANEKO: Well, definitely there is an existing conceptual difference between the ceramics and all other material in the art field. And then ceramics is usually valued much lower value than any other thing. And it's-if you made the same thing with a bronze, usually cost could be a few times more and then normally you raise no questions about it. And so there is definitely that gap right now. But at first, my personal thing goes, it is not really my concern, because I'm doing ceramics because I really like the material. And fortunately, I'm able to make a living by doing that, too. So I am not really forced to think about any other alternative or changing-

MS. MCINNES: And how do you feel that your work has been received by critics? Do you think it has been perceived with the type of complexity that it deserves?

MR. KANEKO: You know, there are-again, there is a huge gap between the critics, between the general art critics truly. I mean, they look at your piece made out of clay. I think basically when anybody looks at a clay object, it's-there aren't enough practice-for looking at it, regardless of which critic, because it's not around the market too much, compared to the other things like a painting or like a sculpture. There is a hundred times more things around.

So I bring critics to look at things, and they saw the crits sides of development-develop crits-within their mind, they have enough practice when they look at the art, painting or other sculptures-when they look at the art, at clay, for such-for a funny reason, I think most of the critics think, oh, this is made out of clay first. That already shuts out a lot of freedom of the thought, and they limit the way of seeing it. So I think there is a big gap there. That is why it's very difficult to find good critics for the clay object.

MS. MCINNES: Whose words do you value the most who have written on ceramics?

MR. KANEKO: You know, it's hard to say, but the funny thing is, my really important concern doesn't come from the clay or ceramic and the idea of the ceramic. It is just an idea of what I said. Like, you know, what is a ma[musical space in Japanese]? That goes with everything. So that is my strong concept and then concern, and then-not yet-nobody really looks through that my concern-nobody did that. I talked about these issues, how I'm interested, I'm concerned about how I could develop my work around this idea.

But for some reason, nobody paid enough attention-wasn't able to look through with their eye and what I'm talking about, and then make a critical evaluation on my thought of doing it. So in that sense, I feel probably with some of these writings about me, it's better if they don't have too much knowledge in a ceramics sort of field, because it could help, but it could go the other way. Because if you know certain things, the way of looking of it gets influenced by your knowledge, for sure.

You know, like-I don't know if you know-Yasunari Kawabata. He was a really important art critic and essay-he wrote novels in Japan. He was actually a Nobel Prize winner. He passed away, and I think a long time-maybe over 10 years ago, he-Yasunari-Y-A-S-U-N-A-R-I. And then Kawabata-K-A-W-A-B-A-T-A.

MS. MCINNES: No, I haven't heard of him.

MR. KANEKO: I was reading his short essay. You know, he did lots of art criticism. And he said, one of the hardest things for me to be is when I enter through the exhibition space, try to make my mind as empty as possible, so I don't get influenced by previous knowledge. So I try to leave my knowledge in the back of the entrance doorway, but lots of time, it's very difficult-it's impossible.

And so he is saying, the success of my writing comes from how successfully I was able to leave my knowledge of the art when I enter through the exhibition space and look at the piece without thinking about these things-face to it, and then leave, and then come to certain feeling and idea and then start using your knowledge. But when you are looking at things, trying to make yourself as empty as possible, to just to absorb, is the most difficult challenge. And I think it's true. I mean, it goes-the same thing for the artist when they are looking at their own work and evaluating it, too.

MS. MCINNES: Perhaps a novelist would be the person to approach your work in the most cogent matter.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, it would be.

MS. MCINNES: Interesting. I also wanted to ask you, given the fact that you've traveled so much internationally, do you have any thoughts about where ceramic art is moving? Any kind of directions that you see a number of people working in?

MR. KANEKO: You know, I really don't know too much, but maybe Korea is one of the upcoming places. Their supporting system for younger people is really, you know, positive support. Obviously they are stronger-strong ceramic background, but at the same time, they have a very strong contemporary background they have been developing. It is an interesting mixture.

Japan, to me, has a little too much of the historical background. So anything new is really-a little bit difficult to come up. It's not that openly supported from critics, from school system, or, you know-do whatever you want. I mean, we support you and see what happens. These things really doesn't happen. But in Korea, maybe it's a little bit-even though they have a stronger ceramics background-but Korea doesn't have a tea ceremony concept, okay. Ceramic was basically like a production thing, almost all of it, not everything, but Japan has a huge chunk of history-developed this tea ceremony concept. So it's a different influence to the culture. It reaches, I think, a little harder to break through.

MS. MCINNES: I see what you're saying.

MR. KANEKO: China, it's so huge, I don't know. It's like everything just boiling now. It's going crazy and I know something is happening, but I really don't know.

MS. MCINNES: I was thinking in terms of design-the relationship of all of the new design technologies, computer prototyping. Given your experience working in industry so productively, do you see that kind of technology having an impact on ceramics in the near future?

MR. KANEKO: The same kind of impact happening in computer technology?

MS. MCINNES: Well, there is computer prototyping, where you can actually design on a computer and they can make a three-dimensional model. I just didn't know if you have been seeing evidence of that starting to change the field of ceramic art.

MR. KANEKO: I am pretty sure in industry that will happen a lot. You know, the ceramic industry is one of the biggest industries, actually. They make the ceramic engine. They are-I mean, it's not on the market yet, but it's close to coming out to the market, and then the thing in ceramic knife and ceramic engine and it's-and then space-a space age and a space shuttle, they have lots of ceramic materials. And then the fabrics-it just keeps on going, you know.

So use of computer, especially when they are trying to form like an engine-car engine, water jet, or whatever-maybe it becomes a really big thing. But as far as, like, including it in art, I don't know. It is a really interesting point now. A lot of people-the younger artists are not very familiar with using hand too much or touching materials. And their expectation of seeing some result is much quicker than older guys like me. I would say, oh, I'm going to try this four or five years. They think I'm nuts, you know. They expect some answer or result after just pushing one button-that's the computer age-and then what you get as information would be like genuine information. But it's not. It doesn't add to your experience.

This a problem, because of the amount of information you can get nowadays is outrageous and it's unbelievable. Let's say, if you're having some kind of a glaze problem and it drives you to sort of make a change. I bet you can find the answer in the computer. But that answer-how to use that is

your, sort of, intuition.

MS. MCINNES: Right. And also there is the removal of the hand. I mean, the sense of touch is a certainly a value that is close to many people. It's not just the visual art form, but it's a very tactile art form. And that comes across in your work when you see it-the drips of the glaze, or the overlapping of the glaze, or the bubbles in certain places that you have. It has a very tactile quality.

Do you think that ceramic artists, perhaps because of that sense of material, have a different set of values than the larger art world, or do you feel that basically all art operates from the same set of values?

MR. KANEKO: No, I don't think all art operates on the same set of values. Definitely if some artist chose to work with certain material as a major material more than the others, there are lots of concepts have to come from the material that you are working with. Like, if you're working with steel, or ceramics, or painting, or drafting, but I think it offers completely different challenges-and even like a technical possibility of making form, it changes. And therefore your reaction to evaluating whole situation changes. I really believe that we can't avoid not to get influenced by the material we are working with.

MS. MCINNES: And that raises one thing that I did not want to skip over, which is that you also have been working in glass, as well as ceramics. I have seen a number of fused pieces that are, sort of, leaning panels. Can you talk a little bit about your experience with glass, and how that is either similar or different from your ceramic sculptures?

MR. KANEKO: The similarity is probably my concept of arranging the pattern I'm aiming for, like spacing, color choices, and maybe volume relationship and stuff like that is similar to what I'm doing in ceramics. But different sets of-there is a big difference in material. It's like the glass, could be transparent or translucent, and then really to transmit the light is a completely-I mean, with ceramic you can't do it-except if the very thin surface with clear glaze over-sure, the light goes in and bounces back. So-and you could play with that in different ways. But not like a thick piece of glass. And then if you combine with the color of the glass with the distance between the surface to the bottom-to the color of glass and then the way light bounces in between the shape itself-really offers, I mean, amazing different possibilities.

So this is the difference. Otherwise, technical things, sure. There are lots of different concerns, different-

MS. MCINNES: Well, one difference is that you were describing how you send a very detailed drawing, which is then fabricated for you. So you are not-so while you get colors, and sometimes you get planes of colors in the same way that I see planes of color on your drawings or paintings, or even on your dangos, you're not actually applying that color-I mean, except conceptually.

MR. KANEKO: Well, some of them I did-

MS. MCINNES: Oh.

MR. KANEKO: Two panels upstairs-actually, I go there-that is sort of impossible to give them instructions there. So I-lots of them, I go there and do it, or I either make a base of a-let's say, if I wanted to have these kind of like a three side-like a triangle-and they hang it and put the art inside or something, I go there and they make a base of that color stripes in different arrangements. That is sort of like a very spontaneous approach, and I just play with it until I feel just right. So, no, I can't

ask him to do that. But if I'm sandwiching a color of glass in different order and certain thickness, that I could just send-just the information to the fabricator.

MS. MCINNES: And while we are on the topic of different materials, we talked about the role of drawing and painting, which is so central to your work. There are some beautiful rice-paper paintings that you have made. Can you speak a little bit about how the painting practice fits into your overall production and your life as an artist, and are those works that you do adjacent to most of the sculptures? Do you do those at a particular time when you need sort of a more spontaneous relationship with the color?

MR. KANEKO: Outside of Omaha, I mostly do two-dimensional pieces.

MS. MCINNES: So when you're traveling to places or living in other sites, you paint or draw-

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, I get-once I'm here, I start doing some ceramic pieces, and it's very hard to find a stopping point-like, even one week or two weeks-

MS. MCINNES: Oh, I see.

MR. KANEKO: It's continuous. I'm not working one thing. If I'm working on one thing, that may be possible, but I'm doing simultaneously-I have got 15, 20 pieces-one is glazing, one is being fired, one is fabricating, and this, and that-you're just going like that, and then you try to find a stopping time to painting and drawing in Omaha, it's almost impossible, even though I have a big studio upstairs. I'm still trying to figure out-I told myself, if I don't have a studio, I will never figure it out. So I built it last year. I'm not doing good work on that success, so -

MS. MCINNES: So most of the work that I see up there is when you have been in, say, Hawaii, or elsewhere.

MR. KANEKO: Or Maine.

MS. MCINNES: Or Maine?

MR. KANEKO: Yeah.

MS. MCINNES: Great. And finally, before I forget, I saw upstairs in one of your studio's spaces, the whole series of drawings that you're doing for the opera, *Madame Butterfly*, which is going to be produced in Omaha. Can you speak about that project and how it came about?

MR. KANEKO: You know, I don't know how it came about. [Laughs.] They came to me and asked me, "Can you a design for Madame Butterfly's costume," and, "Hey," I said, "What? Who got that idea? Where is that from?" And nobody-I still can't figure where it came from. But I'm pleased they are challenging or interesting enough for me to think about it. But I really have no idea. So I said, "I don't know what I'm getting into. I don't even know if I have the ability to do it, but it sounds very interesting, so give me a few months. I have to check first what is involved." So I started to do some research, and then about three or four months later, maybe I should try it. And so I told them, I'll try to do it.

MS. MCINNES: And it has been over a year, hasn't it?

MR. KANEKO: Oh, yeah. It's nearly two years.

MS. MCINNES: And when is it actually going to be put on?

MR. KANEKO: Next year, March 17-they are doing four performances and the 17th is the premier opening for this one. It has been a really interesting challenge. This is something I have never done and it's so complex; I try to do the best job in the costume and stage design and just the visual part of it. If you are not concerned with other things, it's not that difficult. But to make a stage work, you have to meet with all-checking the requirements. You know, back projection, is there enough space, or you design them okay, or, you know. And is this end too sharp for the singer to come down, or is that too high, or is that too low?

I mean, it goes on and on and on. It's not just the designing part of it. It's working with the technical assistant, coming up with the answer. So it is a total cooperation in some ways, even costumes. I want to build it this way but where-or maybe that's-

[Audio break.]

-too difficult for a singer to wear and then sing. Or maybe it doesn't work-like I'm building a costume-like I'm sewing this way and that way. It might be a better way of doing it. It goes on and on and on.

MS. MCINNES: So you are working with a whole new set of people.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah.

MS. MCINNES: And new concerns.

MR. KANEKO: Yeah, we just had-a month and a half ago, everybody flew in and 13 people-three days meeting. Every day, like, 12 hours-really intense. So it never happened to my own projects because-[laughs]-I'm doing whatever the hell I want to do. [Laughs.] It's a different concept and it has to work as a group effort, because you just can't do it by yourself. So that is a new thing for me to learn. It's very interesting though.

MS. MCINNES: Interesting and very exciting.

MR. KANEKO: It's very time-consuming.

MS. MCINNES: Any last words before we wrap up? Perhaps questions I have forgotten to ask?

MR. KANEKO: Well, I don't think so.

MS. MCINNES: Well, thank you very much, Jun.

MR. KANEKO: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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