

GARDEN
OF RESONANCE:
THE ART OF
JUN
KANEKO

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THE EXHIBITION

Towering above or nestled discreetly amid the moss and leaves of Portland Japanese Garden, Jun Kaneko's artworks are as varied as nature itself. No matter how different in shape or material, to him each piece is a surface primed to unleash his boundless creativity. Throughout his 60 years of activity, Kaneko has ventured into many forms of media: painting, drawing, glass, and clay. With every material, he sets out to test and expand their visual and physical qualities. *Garden of Resonance: The Art of Jun Kaneko* presents a key selection of his mesmerizing, otherworldly sculptures merged into the Garden's spaces, along with a collection of his small format works on display in the Pavilion Gallery.

To allow his artworks to connect with their surroundings and with viewers, Kaneko refuses to define his work's story. Instead, he aims for the art to resonate with the space and people around it. To him, space is not something abstract, but is alive and organic, creating interactions between his works and the environment they're situated within. Walking through Portland Japanese Garden, a space that is at once familiar and filled with a sense of exploration, Jun Kaneko's works accentuate the landscape. Experience is the key to engaging with the world around us and Kaneko's art calls to be felt through each person's individual lens. We invite you to clear your mind and experience these works for yourself.

Artwork is available for purchase:
please inquire with staff onsite or at art@japanesegarden.org

Quotes found throughout this guide are by Jun Kaneko.

 Kozo Miyoshi,
shot at Fremont Project ca. 1993



“When I am painting, suddenly I arrive at a feeling that this is it. It’s done. One second before that, I would never have guessed the painting would be finished in the next moment. Days later, I may try to understand what made me feel that the work was done. Was it the composition? Was it the color? Nothing gives me a convincing answer. I just look at it and I feel that it is done. This feeling happens when I make that one last move to give the best sense of everything happening in the work.”

THE ARTIST

From Nagoya, Japan to California, and eventually Nebraska—Jun Kaneko's life is as layered as his work as an artist. From a young age, Kaneko's passion for drawing superseded his interest in formal education. With his mother's support, he pursued art during the day and completed his high school education at night.

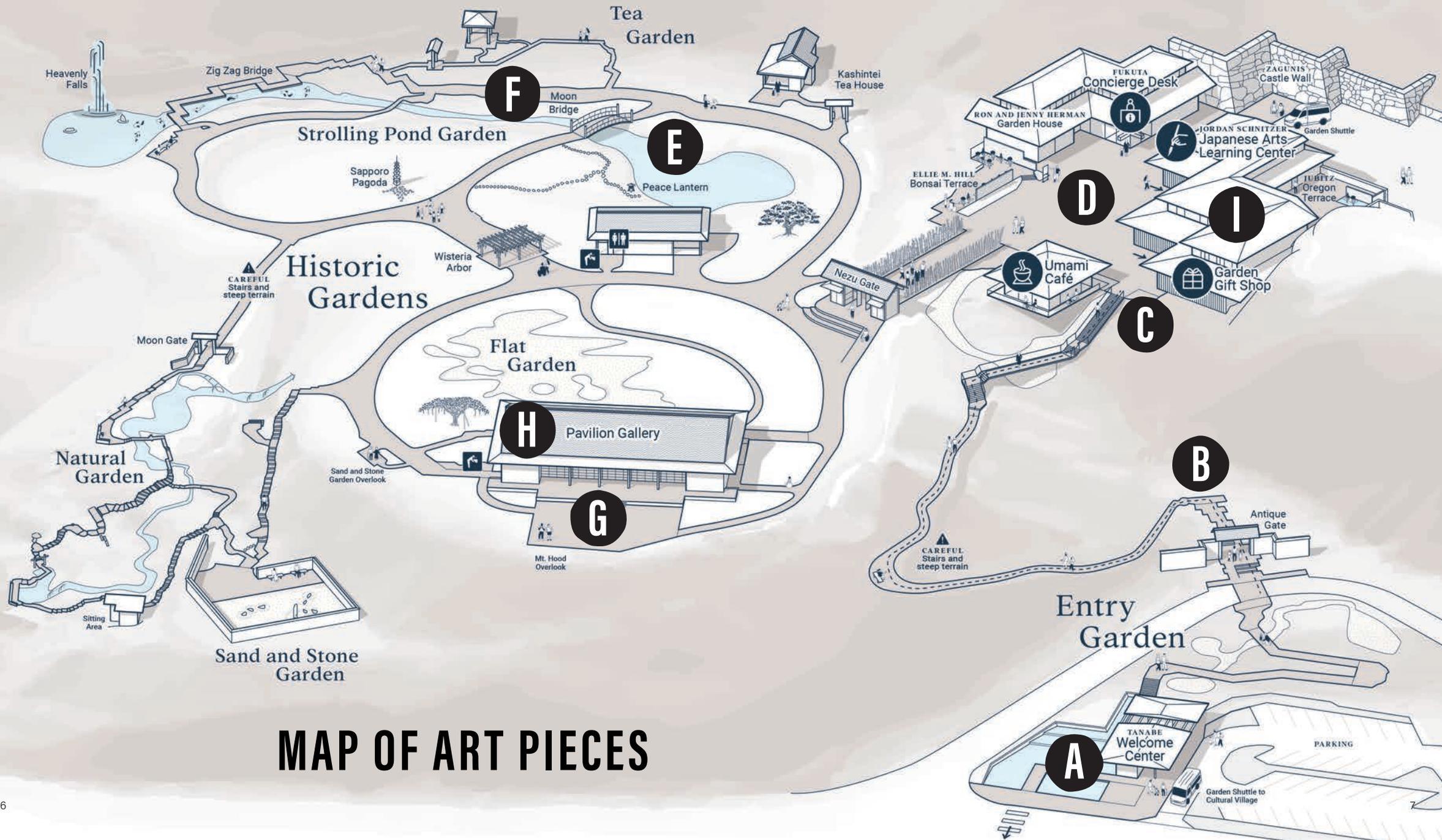
In 1963, with aspirations to become a painter, Kaneko packed his bags and bought a one-way ticket for Los Angeles. Brazen and determined, not knowing the language and without enough cash to purchase a return flight, Kaneko embarked on an odyssey that would shape his artistic trajectory and personal destiny. While in Los Angeles, Kaneko was introduced to the California Clay Movement. Through seeing, touching, and rearranging ceramic sculptures, his interest in the possibilities of clay was ignited. After a motley education in clay arts, Kaneko went on to teach, exhibit, and participate in artist residencies across the globe.

In 1982, at the invitation of Ree Schonlau, Kaneko was invited to a workshop in Omaha, Nebraska. Using an industrial-grade beehive kiln on the grounds of Omaha Brickworks, Kaneko began to experiment with giant, hand-built, oval clay structures.



📷 Laurie & Charles Kay

These 3,000-pound colossuses were the genesis of his signature “Dango,” elliptical sculptures of different sizes that would exemplify the public image of his artistry for more than 40 years. Jun Kaneko eventually settled in Omaha, a place that enabled him to produce on a large scale with few interruptions. With the vision and guidance of Ree, who married Jun and was at the vortex of his career and evolution as an artist and creative brand, the Kanekos have had an unparalleled impact on Omaha's community. They've created studio and exhibition spaces, established residency programs, and founded KANEKO, a creativity center to inspire future generations.



MAP OF ART PIECES

A

The first sculpture you encounter when approaching the Garden embodies Kaneko's taste for experimentation. Placed in the fountain near the Tanabe Welcome Center, the work looms like a prehistoric monolith made of crystallized rock. As the spectator approaches, the sculpture's reflection in the fountain doubles the work's presence. The towering shape feels foreboding and intimate at the same time. The surface at once looks solid and liquid, like cascading water. By firing the work in a large industrial kiln used for making pipes, Kaneko injected the glaze with wavy gradations that almost seem to capture the fire's movement across the surface. The effect is striking from near and afar.



Jun Kaneko, *Untitled*, 2005,
hand built and glazed ceramics,
103" h x 55.5" w x 23" d



B

Leading up the Entry Garden path from the Antique Gate, you will catch a glimpse of Kaneko's take on a familiar blue and white glaze, originally from China but avidly emulated in the Netherlands through Delftware pottery. When examined closely, the surface of the darker top reveals gradations in color and thickness—a result of Kaneko's hand-painted glaze application. It is through details like these that Kaneko reminds us of the emphatically hand-made aspect of his works. Like a garment woven from water, the blue runs down the surface in a spectral veil, akin to thin threads woven together with the white underneath.

Kaneko perfected this running glaze effect years after a residency at the European Ceramic Work Center in the Netherlands. While there, Kaneko observed how artists dismissed pieces as imperfect, second-rate objects if the glaze had run. Instead, Kaneko embraced this natural quality of the glaze and began to experiment by varying the firing temperatures, position of the works inside the kiln, and glaze consistencies to tease out different effects of creating a running blue.

Jun Kaneko, Untitled, 2020, hand built and glazed ceramics, 38.75" h x 26.5" w x 16.5" d

"I was half joking when I told them that running glaze would be better than fixed glaze."



C

Ascending the stairs to the Cultural Village, you encounter other ways in which Kaneko mastered shades of blue – the color of water and sky. Greeting you at the top of the stairs in the Marguerite Drake Sculpture Terrace is a Dango with Kaneko's signature dots. Its glaze seeps downward as if pulled towards the earth by gravity.

Jun Kaneko, Untitled, 2020, hand built and glazed ceramics, 35.5" h x 36.5" w x 14" d



D

In the Atsuhiko and Ina Goodwin Tateuchi Foundation Courtyard, you encounter two large Heads, one with abbreviated facial features alongside a faceless partner. The concentric lines of one Head seem to converse with the spiral on the other, as if spellbound by their circular movement. The serene, meditative facial expression is juxtaposed with the imperfection of the lines, that have rims that seep downward in a feeling of perpetual fluidity.

Inside the kiln and out, Kaneko's Heads seem like ancient statues that at once command their surrounding space and exist in unison with it. While the lion's share of Kaneko's work is abstract, around 1993, he began to touch on representation by creating pairs of gigantic Heads, like these. Their presence invites us to look closer and engage in conversation, resonating with the purpose of the Cultural Village as a place to explore the intersection of art, culture, and nature.

Jun Kaneko, Untitled, 2014, hand built and glazed ceramics, 100" h x 54" w x 48" d and 102" h x 54" w x 48" d



F

Everyone's experience is different. Jun Kaneko acknowledges that visitor encounters with his artwork can be as varied and as original as each individual's character. Kaneko hesitates to dictate the meaning of his works, instead allowing their effect to speak to each person interacting with them. Kaneko never names his artworks—unless absolutely necessary. To him, a name creates associations. Instead, he wishes for his artworks to be allowed to tell their own stories.

Jun Kaneko, Untitled, 2019, Hand built and glazed ceramics, 38.75" h x 26.5" w x 16.5" d

"It might sound really naïve, but the real reason for doing my work is curiosity. My pure, personal curiosity of searching myself and then searching my directions, nothing more than that... I try to stay as pure as possible, to be honest to myself, to search myself, to express what I feel."

E

As you wander past the Upper Pond, two of Kaneko's blue Dango sit along the waterside. Kaneko glazes each Dango by hand, using traditional Japanese-made brushes, allowing their subtle variations in size and shape to speak to him when choosing the right design. Together or as separate sculptures, the Dango can seem like monuments from ancient civilizations or pods arriving from another world. Kaneko conceals their ceramic nature while at the same time celebrating the unique qualities of clay and glaze. The results are sculptures that are strikingly tactile and perfectly imperfect. From a distance they can seem industrial and remote, but their remoteness vanishes in how they interact with the environment.

Jun Kaneko, Untitled, 2018, hand built and glazed ceramics, 10.5" h x 12" w x 14.5" d
Jun Kaneko, Untitled, 2022, hand built and glazed ceramics, 25.5" h x 15" w x 9.5" d





Jun Kaneko, Untitled, 2017,
hand built and glazed ceramics,
88.25" h x 30.5" w x 22.75" d

G

As you arrive at the Mt. Hood Overlook, another monolith beckons. The surface is covered in an uneven glaze made from off-white slip, a clay slurry, that gives it an aged, almost archaeological look. On one side, Kaneko painted a perfect circle with glazed edges that trickle down in a manner resembling a waterfall. The circle seems like a hazy moon, with Kaneko inviting his audience to a moon-viewing in broad daylight.

On the other side, he painted a square with an oozing effect that dilutes its rigid geometry in much the same way as the circle. As otherworldly as sculptures like these may seem, each have an uncanny ability to engage with their environment, whether it be within a white cube of an art gallery or the curated nature of a Japanese garden.

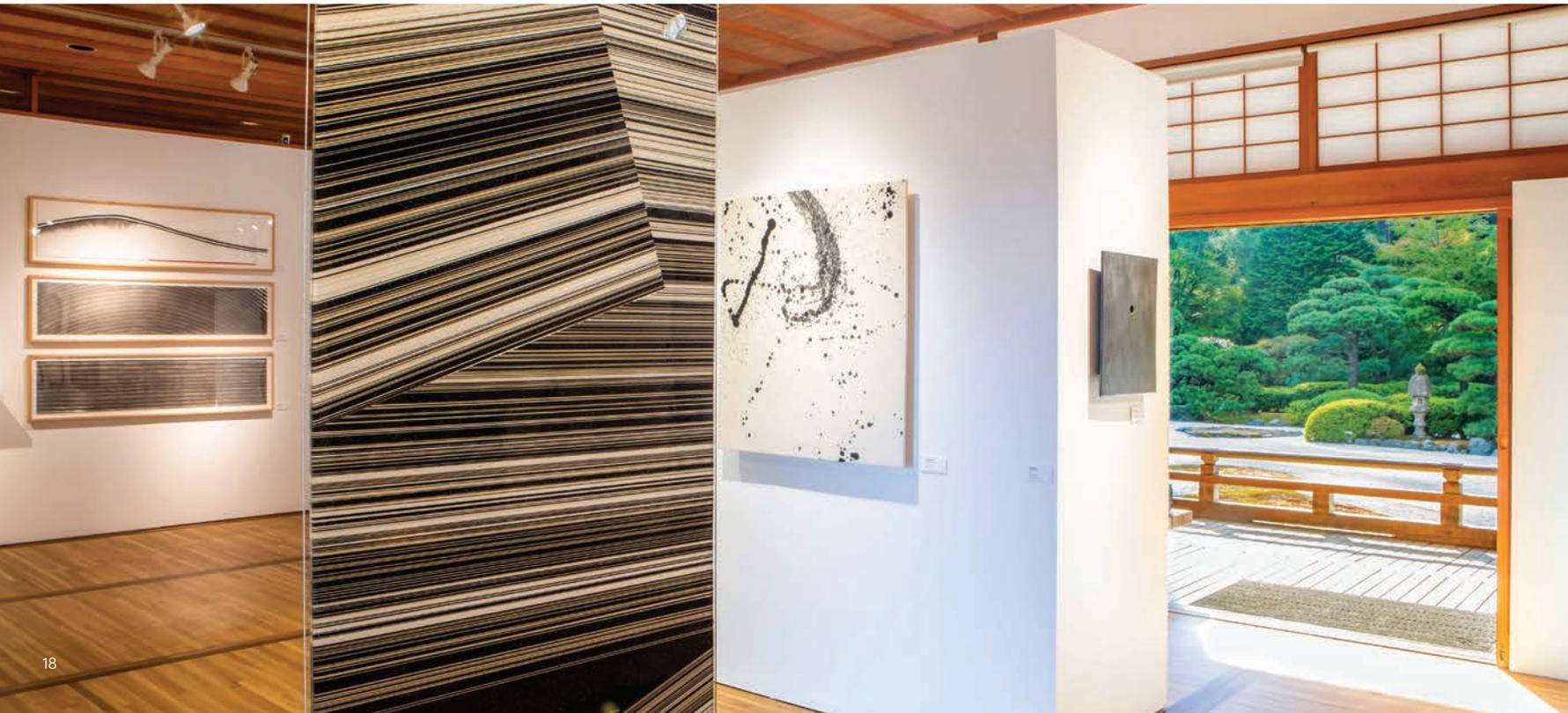
H - PAVILION GALLERY

Jun Kaneko's career as an artist is marked by an experimental spirit that reflects his lifelong aversion to rigid rules. This spirit translates vividly into his works in the Pavilion Gallery. In fact, three-quarters of Kaneko's incredibly prolific body of work has been in small-format sculptures, two-dimensional objects, and drawings. The variety of forms in Kaneko's smaller sculptures lay bare their purpose as non-utilitarian, experimental objects where the artist tests out new ways of bending the qualities of clay and glaze.

Kaneko notes that each material he uses has unique physical qualities. Everything can be a surface for artistic expression. This belief is especially apparent in his two-dimensional works like tiles, drawings, and paintings. Beginning as a painter in his teens, Kaneko's love for that medium never went away.

The drawings and paintings in this exhibition showcase his fascination with the way fluid and abstract strokes can embody his energy flow, while interacting with the surface and surrounding details. Ceramics require a slow, more deliberate process where the final colors and effects on their surfaces are revealed only after a lengthy kiln firing. In contrast, drawing and paintings enable Kaneko to see results immediately, the spontaneity of which appeals to his creative energy and exploratory spirit.

“If you are not curious, your artwork suffers a lot.”



“Everything is a surface.”

I - LEARNING CENTER

Lines are ever-present in Kaneko's work. On permanent display in the Jordan Schnitzer Japanese Arts and Learning Center are a series of Kaneko's wall tiles, a gift from Portland's Bullseye Glass Company. Individually, each tile is an abstract work of art, but in combination they take on the role of an almost site-specific installation that transcends its parts. Kaneko likens the rigid yet organic lines that define some of his work to the ridges of a Japanese rock garden. The tiles together create a feeling of looking at the ripples of a quiet ocean or the surface of the Sand and Stone Garden.

WHY ART IN THE GARDEN?

Portland Japanese Garden is a work of art in its own right; incorporating the native plants and scenery of the Pacific Northwest with concepts based on traditional Japanese Garden principles. As a living, growing, and changing piece of landscape art that strives for a sense of unity between nature and architecture known as *teikoku ichinyo* (庭屋一如), a Japanese garden is a natural venue to explore art and new thought. Originally founded to serve as a bridge between cultures, the past 60 years have seen Portland Japanese Garden's mission evolve to elevate the impactful role art plays in nurturing mutual understanding. For nearly 15 years, our art exhibitions have shared the essence of Japanese culture, while reflecting the beauty of the Garden.

As you explore this monumental exhibition of Jun Kaneko's work, we invite you to consider the Japanese concept of *ma* (間), an awareness of space. *Ma* communicates a sense of place in respect to one's relationship with the whole, making the space around and between things, the silent pauses in speech, or the negative space in a composition, important and meaningful. How does *Garden of Resonance* influence your experience of Portland Japanese Garden?

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