



Jun Kaneko: Untitled, 2001, glazed ceramic, 82½ by 28 by 18 inches; at Locks.

PHILADELPHIA

JUN KANEKO

LOCKS GALLERY AND THE OPERA COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA

New Yorkers know Jun Kaneko's work from the procession of three serenely monumental ceramic heads arrayed along Park Avenue last summer and fall. In Philadelphia, related aspects of Kaneko's work could be seen in a recent exhibition at Locks Gallery that coincided with a production of Beethoven's *Fidelio* mounted by the Opera Company of Philadelphia at the Academy of Music and featuring the artist's stage and costume design.

In the gallery's roof garden, six tall abstract standing forms engaged in quiet conversation, holding the space horizontally while pointing upward as well. Kaneko's big ceramic pieces ranged from below to slightly greater than human scale (others have been as tall as 13 feet). The softly curving, monolithic lozenges, which he calls Dangos (the original meaning is a round Japanese dumpling), bring to mind the works of Martin Puryear, which are also hand-

in allover patterns of dots, zigzag lines or vertical drips. Along with unexpected color accents, the patterns lighten the forms' presence—we are not to take these standing dumplings too seriously. But a sense of contemplation persists.

Inside the gallery, more Dangos stood before a series of large paintings on paper that record the development of the artist's designs for *Fidelio*. Four loosely brushed grids in sunny, declarative colors interweave on white grounds. These, like the three additional somber, dark-washed ink studies on rice paper, recall Robert Wilson's preparatory drawings for opera designs. Kaneko's *Fidelio* set involved the dichotomy of light and dark, an emblem of the opera's central drama of freedom and imprisonment. One side of the large Academy of Music stage was black from floor to ceiling, the other white. Projections of hand-drawn gridded lines in various colors morphed as they moved across these fields, as

built and organically shaped. Each of Kaneko's Dangos, like the large heads, has a distinctive skin, painted and glazed if painting themselves—a compelling element. Less effective was the conceit of matching colors to moods—pink during Marzelline's love aria, amber during Rocco's paean to gold—which sometimes devolved into triteness.

This is Kaneko's second opera design; the first was for Opera Omaha's *Madama Butterfly*. His *Fidelio* demonstrated an impeccable sense of scale, informed not only by his sculpture-making but by earlier experiments in installation and exhibition design, as well as large-scale plaza projects and other public art. In *Fidelio*, the human figures, wearing bright-colored costumes, fell into tableaux that were clarified by the schematic surroundings. Color in the form of light, washing down from above or in from doorways, also played an eloquent role.

—Miriam Seidel