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Massive sculpture exhibit to be shown at Macon museum

One of the first people Eric O'Dell consulted when the Museum of Arts and Sciences decided to host an exhibit by Japanese sculptor Jun Kaneko was a structural engineer.

One might logically ask, "What does a structural engineer have to do with a sculpture exhibition?"

Well, when some of the pieces to be displayed weigh well over half a ton, it makes for a logical step to make certain the floor of the museum can actually support the art.

Good news for the museum and for Middle Georgia sculpture fans — the floor checked out, said O'Dell, curator of the museum's exhibit.

"(Kaneko) is big-time important," O'Dell said. "He's like the (Bruce) Springsteen of ceramics. If you look at the size of his work, the guy makes the biggest stuff imaginable."

Unfortunately for the museum, Kaneko's lecture planned for today was canceled because the artist is in Germany and can't fly out because European travel restrictions caused by a volcano in Iceland — perhaps a touch of irony given how a sculptor has to heat clay to preserve his work. No makeup date has been announced by the museum, officials said Friday.

Kaneko has to often create his work inside a huge heating facility in order to have the piece fired in order to be able to move it, O'Dell said.

"Imagine the time and logistics it takes just to build them," O'Dell said.

O'Dell doesn't have to imagine the time and logistics it takes to transport the pieces and set them up. He had to hire a special mover out of Kansas to transport them to Georgia on a flatbed truck and

then install them in the museum — once it was ascertained that the floor could hold them.

A large, blue head is the heaviest piece of the bunch, weighing in at 1,300 pounds — and that doesn't include a 900-pound table that displays the head. A second piece, labeled "Untitled Dango," weighs a mere 1,100 pounds in comparison, but stands over 6-and-a-half feet tall.

O'Dell recalled with a laugh that workers told him to "find an escape route," that is, know which way he was going to jump, had something broken while the pieces were being set up so as not to be crushed.

Kaneko's work will be on display through the first week of June. In addition to his pieces, the museum will also display ceramics from Georgia artists as well as those across the country from its permanent collection. Though it wasn't initially planned, O'Dell said the exhibit is perfectly timed to coincide with the Fired Works show that Macon Arts is opening this week, and there is some cross-promotion going on.