

# Kenzi Shiokava: Biography and Curriculum Vitae

## Biography

Kenzi Shiokava (1938–2021) was a Los Angeles-based sculptor and assemblage artist whose work embodied a profound synthesis of his Japanese-Brazilian heritage and the vibrant artistic community of South Los Angeles. Born in Santa Cruz do Rio Pardo, São Paulo, Brazil, to Japanese immigrant parents from Kagoshima Prefecture, Shiokava grew up in a challenging environment marked by economic hardship. His early life in Brazil, where art was considered a luxury, initially steered him toward practical pursuits like medicine. However, a transformative move to Los Angeles in 1964, at the age of 25, following his sister's relocation, set the stage for his artistic career.

In Los Angeles, Shiokava enrolled at the Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts), earning a BFA in 1972, and later completed an MFA at Otis Art Institute (now Otis College of Art and Design) in 1974. Initially trained as a painter, he discovered his true calling in sculpture during his final year at Chouinard, inspired by working with wood from his garden. His practice centered on wood carving and assemblage, using discarded materials such as railroad ties, telephone poles, and found objects like plastic figurines and macramé. Shiokava's sculptures, often totemic and spiritually resonant, explored themes of life, death, and rebirth, reflecting influences from Japanese Zen Buddhism, Brazilian Candomblé, and the Black assemblage movement in Los Angeles.

Shiokava's work was deeply tied to his identity as a Japanese-Brazilian immigrant and his experiences in the multicultural Watts community, where he was an artist-in-residence at the Watts Towers Arts Center. Influenced by peers like Noah Purifoy, John Outterbridge, and Betye Saar, he transformed detritus into art that spoke to resilience and cultural hybridity. His totems, carved from weathered wood, and assemblages, incorporating pop culture ephemera, bridged the sacred and profane, earning him recognition as a unique voice in contemporary art.

Despite working as a gardener for much of his life, notably for Marlon Brando, Shiokava maintained a prolific studio practice in Compton. His career gained significant recognition in 2016 when he was named the "breakout star" of the Hammer Museum's *Made in L.A.* biennial, receiving the \$25,000 Mohn Public Recognition Award. This accolade led to increased visibility, including solo exhibitions and inclusion in major group shows like *Transpacific Borderlands* at the Japanese American National Museum (2017). Shiokava's work is celebrated for its spiritual depth, material ingenuity, and reflection of Afro-Asian interconnectedness, leaving a lasting legacy in Los Angeles and beyond.

Shiokava passed away on June 18, 2021, at the age of 82. His estate is represented by Nonaka-Hill Gallery in Los Angeles, which continues to promote his work through exhibitions and retrospectives.

## Curriculum Vitae

### Personal Information

- **Name:** Kenzi Shiokava
- **Born:** August 29, 1938, Santa Cruz do Rio Pardo, São Paulo, Brazil
- **Died:** June 18, 2021, Los Angeles, California, USA
- **Nationality:** Brazilian, Japanese descent
- **Residence:** Los Angeles, California, USA (1964–2021)

### Education

- **1974:** Master of Fine Arts (MFA), Otis Art Institute (now Otis College of Art and Design), Los Angeles, CA
- **1972:** Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), Chouinard Art Institute (now California Institute of the Arts), Valencia, CA

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

- **2019:** *Spiritual Material: A Survey of Work by Kenzi Shiokava*, Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA
- **2023:** *Kenzi Shiokava*, Nonaka-Hill Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (posthumous, June 3–July 15)
- **1996:** Watts Towers Arts Center, Los Angeles, CA
- **1979:** Ankrum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- **1972:** *Kenzi Shiokava*, Ankrum Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- **1972:** Chouinard Gallery, Valencia, CA

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- **2019:** *Carve, Cast, and Coil: International Sculpture from the Permanent Collection*, Warehouse Arts Museum, Milwaukee, WI
- **2018:** *A Cris Ouverts*, Les Ateliers de Rennes Biennale, Rennes, France
- **2017:** *Transpacific Borderlands: The Art of Japanese Diaspora in Lima, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and São Paulo*, Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA
- **2017:** *Midtown*, Salon 94 Design, New York, NY
- **2016:** *Made in L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA
- **2013:** *Tapping the Third Realm*, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA

- **2011:** *Pacific Standard Time: Art in LA 1945–1980, Civic Virtue: The Impact of the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery and Watts Towers Arts Center*, Watts Towers Arts Center, Los Angeles, CA
- **2007:** *L.A. Object & David Hammons Body Prints*, Jack Tilton Gallery, New York, NY
- **2002:** International Art Show, Art Space One, Itō, Japan
- **2001:** Modern Art Museum, Izukougen-Art Space One, Japan
- **1998:** 4th Pyong Taek International Art Camp, Korea
- **1997:** *West Coast Painting and Sculpture*, Oceanside Museum of Art, Oceanside, CA
- **1997:** *Elusive Paradise* (collaborative participation), MoCA Geffen Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA
- **1994:** Watts Towers Arts Center Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- **1988:** *Four Artists*, Brockman Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

## Awards and Grants

- **2016:** Mohn Public Recognition Award (\$25,000), Hammer Museum, *Made in L.A. 2016*, Los Angeles, CA
- **2013:** Pollack-Krasner Foundation Grant

## Collections

- Watts Towers Arts Center, Los Angeles, CA (permanent collection)
- Private collections, including Marlon Brando and Jack Nicholson

## Professional Experience

- **Artist-in-Residence**, Watts Towers Arts Center, Los Angeles, CA (dates unspecified)
- **Gardener and Landscaper**, Los Angeles, CA (1960s–1990s), clients included Marlon Brando

## Selected Bibliography

- Anderson, Emily. "The World of Kenzi Shiokava." *Discover Nikkei*, June 29, 2021.
- Miranda, Carolina A. "New exhibit shows why Kenzi Shiokava was a distinctly L.A. artist." *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 2023.
- "Kenzi Shiokava Has Built a Wonderland of Assemblage Art From Unwanted Objects." *Artbound*, PBS SoCal/Link TV, March 27, 2017.
- "Kenzi Shiokava, Sculptor of Mystical, Totemic Wood Figures, Has Died at 83." *ARTnews*, June 25, 2021.
- Okano, Michiko. "Nipo-Brazilian Art and Minor Transnationalism: Kenzi Shiokava and Sachiko Koshikoku." *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2019.

## Representation

- **Nonaka-Hill Gallery**, Los Angeles, CA (representing the estate of Kenzi Shiokava)

### **Additional Notes**

- Shiokava's work is accessible through a short film produced by the Japanese American National Museum's Watase Media Arts Center for the *Transpacific Borderlands* exhibition (2017), available on YouTube:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4E2OAPeqiQ>.
- His studio in Compton, a treasure trove of found objects, natural materials, and personal artifacts, was a testament to his philosophy of transforming the discarded into the sacred.