

"Made in L.A." Is the Show the City Needs Right Now



Shiokava shares a similar story. A friend of and , the Brazilian-Japanese sculptor and assemblage artist has lived in L.A. since 1964, but he never really got his due. His discarded-wood sculptures are totemic, fragile, and folksy. Somehow they're , , , and surf culture all rolled into one.

The third retrospective casts light on Smith, a little-known free-jazz player who created a musical language called Ankhraism ("ankh" is the Ancient Egyptian symbol for life, "ras" is the Ethiopian word for leader, and "ma" is short for mother). It's a bit tough to dig into, his notations scrawled out on sheets of music that are framed on the wall and in display cases. Free-jazz plays in the background, but it takes some effort to become absorbed in this gallery.

Even the younger artists in the show evoke a sort of reconsideration, or excavation. Daniel R. Small and Gala Porras-Kim, both born in 1984, have filled their respective galleries with archaeological materials. Small's project, "Excavation II," looks like an ancient Egyptian room at [the Met](#),

but the artifacts are actually pieces from the set of Cecil B. DeMille's 1923 film *The 10 Commandments*, which the director had [buried in the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes](#) after filming wrapped. These are interwoven with large murals based on DeMille's version of ancient Egypt as it appeared in a series of paintings produced for the Luxor Casino in Las Vegas in the 1990s. Small's project offers a look at how cultures are digested and codified by Hollywood.

Porras-Kim, on the other hand, worked with UCLA's [Fowler Museum](#) to display objects in its collection that have been mislabeled or uncategorized—a bag of feathers, a pair of shells, or a beaded pillow that somehow lost its provenance. She has given the old objects new life and created new objects around them, such as a Mesopotamian-style jug that she's carved holes into, suggesting its contents once comprised the feathers, shells, and other smaller objects in the room. It's a bit of trickery that helps the viewer re-frame the objects as valuable, and not just destined for a dusty box in the back of the Fowler's archives.

Rafa Esparza, a young artist who made a name for himself at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) by laying adobe bricks across the floor of the gallery, has also excavated objects. He buried several chairs and mailboxes in Elysian Park, a historic area of Los Angeles where thousands of mostly Mexican families were displaced in the late 1950s in an attempt to entice the Dodgers to move to the city. He has placed the objects on an adobe-block floor in an open-air gallery above the courtyard. The act of building the adobe blocks is one Esparza has deployed over the years, bringing living earth into the gallery space and allowing it to serve as a democratizing force in the space.