

Artists' Cooperative Features Kenji's House



Photo by Wendy Noritake
Kenji Yokoyama.

By Diann Wilson

The North Kohala Artists' Cooperative welcomed a new show in March. "Kenji's House" is a tribute to Kenji Yokoyama, who was a third-generation Japanese fisherman, free diver and shell collector from Kapa'au. The show, by Catherine Morgan, includes her small linoleum cuts showing scenes of his house; big and small collages; and a display of figures and shells that belonged to Kenji.

Cathy has a rich history with the art world. Originally from New Jersey, her interest in art started when she was in high school. Following graduation, she attended one of the oldest arts schools in the US - the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, where she

majoried in print making.

Having always had an interest in children, teaching and building community, Morgan became part of a group of artists in Boston, where she quickly experienced the potential of artists working together to show, teach and sell their work.

Fast forward to 1991, when Cathy moved to the Big Island with her husband and three children. After a short stint in Hilo, they relocated to Kohala, which has been home ever since. She feels lucky to have found our community and has been able to repeat the experience of bringing artists together through an art cooperative.

While her show at the artists cooperative is all about Kenji, Cathy actually never met him. Seeing beauty in his house, she once sat across the street from his home and created a pastel drawing of the property. Shortly afterward, she noticed a dumpster parked in front of it. She investigated and discovered that Kenji had passed away and the new owner was going to dispose of most of the belongings left behind. Finding beauty and value in his shells, figurines and other recycled items, Morgan and friends got trucks and loaded up all they could. They eventually created a museum featuring his collections and provided information and education about recycling. Thus, Kenji has been a long-time muse for

Morgan.

The Kohala Artists' Cooperative is located at 54-3676 Akoni Pule Hwy in Kapa'au and is open seven days a week from 12 to 5 p.m. "Kenji's House" will be on display through Earth Day, April 22.

In addition to Cathy's exhibit, the Coop will be featuring an Earth Day celebration and exhibit in April. The new show will focus on rejoicing in and appreciating the four elements of: earth, wind, fire and water. This show will be unique, as it will include not only work from Coop members but will also feature art by other community members.

All North Kohala residents are invited to submit their work for consideration. Those who are interested in participating are asked to bring their art to the Coop on Wednesday, April 20, between the hours of 12 and 5 p.m. Art submitted can be offered for sale or for display only.

The Earth Day show will open April 22, with the opening day festivities running from 12 to 7 p.m. The show is free, open to public and includes presentations and evening entertainment. For further information, contact Catherine Morgan at (808) 960-3597.



Art from Kenji's House is on display at the Kohala Artists' Cooperative.

February 24, 2023

Kenji Yokoyama's Works to be Displayed

By Cathy Morgan

Little did I know that a brief encounter with an older Japanese fisherman, would set me on a 20-year journey of caregiving for his artwork and legacy.

I sat across the street in Kapa'au, sketching his charming old homestead, when Kenji Yokoyama walked down his grassy path to see who I was and what I was doing. I showed him my pastel drawing, he waved at me, I waved at him and watched him slowly walk back up the hill to his home.

Months later, I saw the dumpster outside his home, and I knew then that the old man had died. The rest of the story is our is our entwined histories.

Those who knew him said that Kenji was a quiet, hardworking fisherman, free diver, shell collector, farmer and, unknown to many, a serious artist.

His medium was the natural beauty of the shells, rocks and driftwood that he gathered on his daily interaction with Kohala's unique coastline. He was a meticulous shell researcher and journal keeper.

He filled legal size journals with notes about his dives - where he dove, who he was with, and what he saw and felt as he dove and watched the ocean floor with its sea creatures, corals and magic interactions. He filled pages with clippings and articles that had anything to do with the Pacific Ocean. Kenji belonged to the Malicological Society of Honolulu, for the study of the single valve mollusk! He wrote short pieces about Kohala for their Shell News.

This Society of watermen and women realized in the 1960s that Hawaii's ocean was consistently being robbed of her treasures. They put a 2-year moratorium on their yearly show in Honolulu which often featured these rare finds and top-of-the-line catch from all different ocean species.

They drafted the first environmental and ecological imperative, based on ancient wisdom: Take only what you need from Mother Ocean, leave the rest behind. Respect the

elders of all species and leave them to procreate their futures. At night, Kenji worked creating his sculptures, using a mortar he made with Elmer's glue, cotton from his Japanese cotton tree and rough beach sand.

During his lifetime, he made hundreds of these sculptures, all carefully constructed with attention to balance and detail.

After 50 years, his pieces are still holding strong! Kenji was most proud of his serious collection of Kohala shells, most of which are rarely found today.

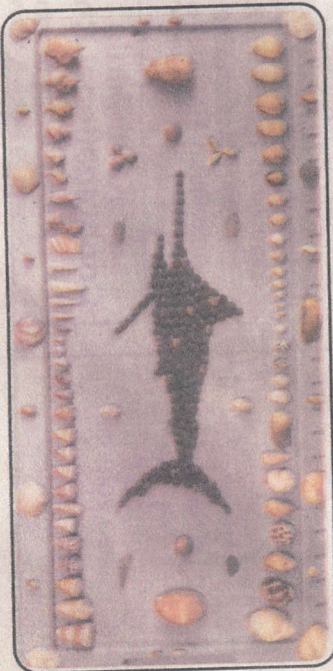
After his death in 2004, his family kept some of the best shells, gave many to Bishop Museum and others to family members. His nephew and nephew's wife from Kona have been caretaking a large part of this remaining collection. They have long wanted to return it to Kohala, where it belongs, waiting for a safe, secure place to land Kenji's shell legacy.

Finally, our community has identified the old Bond Library as a possible home. The Bond Library Restoration Project is driving the effort to restore this fine old building which will soon become the home of the Kohala Heritage Center!

Finally, we will have a quality facility to house Kohala's history and many treasurers. Conveniently located across from the Kamehameha statue, it will be easily accessible to local residents of all ages and visitors alike. The Kenji Collection project is proud to be part of this effort by offering the chance for people to collect his work and support the restoration efforts.

The Kohala Artists' Co-operative in Kapa'au will be previewing his sculptures during the month of March. The work has been blessed by Kahu Kealoha Sugiyama and is ready to be released out into the world.

Please stop by and join in this wonderful, unique exchange. If you are so inclined, donations to the Kohala Heritage Center will be accepted as a thoughtful gift for the privilege of caring for one or more of Kenji's pieces in your own home.



Kohala Artists Coöperative
Invites you to a special offering of
Kenji Yokoyama's Marine Artwork

Saturday, March 4th, 6-8pm
*collect a unique Kenji's sculpture
*help realize a museum for Kohala's history

Kohala Arts Celebrate the Bond Library



Photo by Donna Maltz

The Kohala Artists' Co-op features art from a number of local artists.



Photo by Donna Maltz

Art by Kenji Yokoyama is on display and available for purchase at the Kohala Artists' Co-op.

By Christine Richardson

On March 4, the Kohala Artists Co-op offered a wonderful opportunity for the community to support the Bond Library Restoration Project and make available to the public the amazing shell art and

ocean artifacts of Kenji Yokoyama, a fisherman and diver who lived until the age of 90 in Kapa'au. Additionally, many Co-op artists donated their art to support the restoration efforts. Kealoha Sugiyama offered a

beautiful blessing for all the art and the success of the Restoration Project. Boyd Bond, who worked hard for three years to secure the title and lease for the Bond building, joined the fun. The show has run

through March 30 and many folks have stopped by to both view and purchase the amazing art. Warmest Mahalo to the Kohala Artists' Co-op for their generosity, community spirit and good fun!