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Yinka Shonibare fires all cannons in Madrid

The Nigerian-born, London-based artist talks about his menacing installation

By Anny Shaw | Web only

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Shonibare's "Cannonball Heaven"

MADRID. Yinka Shonibare, MBE, is, by his own admission, full of contradictions. And it is contradiction that permeates his new work, *Cannonball Heaven*, 2011, which went on show in Madrid this month. Two headless figures, dressed as 19th-century soldiers, but wearing Shonibare's trademark brightly coloured batik fabric, fire soft balls out of a cannon—seemingly harmless, but in fact full of menace. "I wanted to produce some sort of paradox: you are not going to be injured by those soft balls, but the implication behind the image is war," he says.

The headless figures in *Cannonball Heaven* also represent internal conflicts. "Headlessness in my work started off as a joke about the French Revolution," says Shonibare. "I may want to chop off the head of the establishment, but at the same time I also celebrate the fact that I received an MBE. The person who wants to bring the establishment down would secretly like some of those trappings himself. That's a contradiction in my head all the time."

Cannonball Heaven, which was commissioned by the Comunidad de Madrid, is part of Shonibare's first exhibition in Spain, on show at Sala Alcalá 31 until 15 May. Death and disaster spreads throughout the 22-piece show. Inspired by Goya, Arthur Miller, Dante and the economic crisis, Shonibare's 2009 series of photographs, "Willy Loman: The Rise and Fall", depicts Loman, Miller's protagonist in the *Death of a Salesman*, in various hellish scenes. "Climate Shit Drawings", 2009, a series of collages commenting on the environment and "the impending sense of collapse we are bombarded with", is also on show.