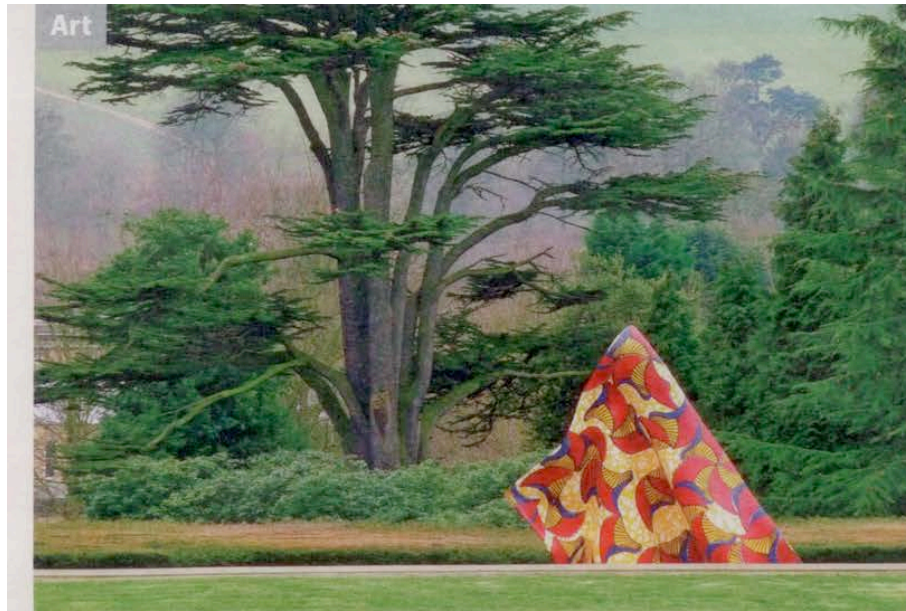


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 Hugh Pearman  
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A jolt of colour: one of Yinka Shonibare's 'wind sculptures'

now permanently sited outside the National Maritime Museum, in Greenwich. In 2012, he installed a spinning ballerina in an acrylic bubble on the side of the Royal Opera House, in Covent Garden, her head a Victorian globe, her gorgeous tutu made by the ROH's costume department.

For the Yorkshire show, he became intrigued by the challenge of making something as floppy and perishable as fabric – the sails of his Victory, say – into something solid and enduring, not needing to be enclosed. He has managed it. In two places at the top and bottom of the YSP's walled garden, you will find his batik-inspired fabrics seemingly billowing from the ground, frozen in motion more than 20ft high. On a dull day, against the dark green background and leaden skies, they provide a jolt of colour.

Here, as with Nelson's Ship in a Bottle and the Globe Head Ballerina, the challenge was to find the technical means to achieve the ambitious concept. I won't give too much away – the technique involves reinforced glass fibre and concealed steel rods – but the effect is effortless. These pieces, called "wind sculptures", might be seen as sails or as an outtake from another of Shonibare's creations, a dandified Victorian waving a handkerchief, say. But they work equally well seen as exotic plants or marine organisms. The YSP, which likes to keep memories of its temporary shows, is to install one of these pieces permanently.

Indoors, you see his famous batik-patterned spacemen floating overhead as you enter the park's main building, along with their lunar module, named Martin Luther. When you enter the main run of galleries, his immediately charming "food factories", carrying bags of fruit, like baroque bacchanalians, share space with his Revolution Kids. These are products of both the London riots and the Arab Spring, where the figures (often headless and of indeterminate sex and race) become half animal, with the heads of calves or foxes. They carry replicas of Colonel Gaddafi's famous golden gun. They brandish BlackBerries.

As usual, Shonibare gets his serious message across with grace and humour. There is a cartoon-like aspect to some of his work, such as the aliens in primitive flying machines, who could be sinister, but turn out to be an endearing family, or the serious-looking cannon caught in the act of firing what turn out to be harmless fabric balls. There is humanity here. Public art? This is the real thing. ☐

*Yinka Shonibare MBE: Fabric-ation, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, near Wakefield, until Sept 1*

## Everything's just dandy

**If you're tired of stale public art installations, Yinka Shonibare's work is a breath of fresh air, says Hugh Pearman**

It's easy to be confused about "public art". The term is never applied to the stuff in free-entry art galleries. We might own the National Gallery's Van Dycks and Titians, but no: "public art" is meant to be weatherproof outdoor stuff. In the past, this meant statues, monuments, architectural ornament and, in the postwar era, those bronze pieces by everyone from Moore to Botero, unfairly known as "turds in plazas" and generally commissioned to salve the consciences of ambitious developers or their local-authority stooges.

Then things changed. Urban regeneration agencies saw art as a cheap way to make a mark, to show something was happening, quickly. Docklands authorities used artists to dress up new roundabouts. Antony Gormley's Angel of the North started a move towards gigantism that has led to things as strange as a Northumbrian spoil-tip sculpted into an earth goddess, the ghastly giant statue of not-quite-embracing lovers in St Pancras station, Anish Kapoor's mongrel Orbit tower in the Olympic Park

and Mark Wallinger's (much better) stalled proposal for a giant white horse in Ebbsfleet, a Thames Estuary new town.

Elsewhere, a new breed of artist-architects found a rich seam of work in dark, declining corners of town. Hence the rash of coloured lights under railway bridges, lines of meaningful text or symbols incised into pavements and walls, back-lit etched glass screens in underpasses, bespoke bollards, artfully rearranged street furniture and suchlike. These tend to be high-maintenance. Few things are sadder than stumbling on an abandoned public art initiative – broken, rotting, smashed. Not valued, unlike your average stencilled Banksy, which nobody is consulted over, but which seemingly everybody wants.

Now we have something new again: you might call it "tradition with a twist". Hence, a Wallinger white mini horse will be unveiled on Tuesday outside the British Council's offices, just off the Mall, in central London. You could see this as a comment on the equestrian

monument tradition or even, ha-ha, the horsemeat scandal; actually, it's one of 30 models produced as a fundraiser for the Ebbsfleet project.

Two days later, the Serpentine Gallery, in Kensington Gardens, will launch an outdoor sculpture, Rock Upon Another Rock, by the Swiss artists Fischli/Weiss. It's just that: two Welsh igneous glacial boulders, one on top of the other, standing 18ft high, looking somewhat neolithic and deliberately unstable. It will be there for a year. This insouciant, ironical piece promises to be way better than most of the agonised-over public art we are routinely offered.

Yet I would recommend an escape: from such metropolitan grandstanding. Take yourself to Wakefield and go to the ever-resourceful Yorkshire Sculpture Park, where the headline show this year is the biggest British exhibition yet of works by Yinka Shonibare MBE, titled Fabric-ation. You'll also find outdoor Moores, Hepworths, Caros, Miro, various Goldsworthys and a James Turrell Sky-space – but they mix this up with indoor galleries for smaller and more fragile works, video and sound art.

Shonibare has only recently got into outdoor art – his characteristic use of bright patterned Indonesian/African fabrics does not make this easy – but he managed it in 2010 with Nelson's Ship in a Bottle, his installation on the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square. This wry postcolonial take on HMS Victory is

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Armed to the teeth: Revolution Kid (Fox Boy) by Yinka Shonibare