

## Stephen Friedman Gallery

### Frieze London

Leilah Babirye  
Booth B03  
11 - 15 October 2023

### Frieze Sculpture

Leilah Babirye  
Yinka Shonibare CBE RA  
20 September – 29 October  
2023



Stephen Friedman Gallery presents a solo presentation by Ugandan artist **Leilah Babirye** for Frieze London and new sculptures by Babirye and **Yinka Shonibare CBE RA** for Frieze Sculpture 2023.

Babirye's solo exhibition includes a series of dynamic hand carved and ceramic sculptures of varying scale alongside new works on paper. Babirye's multidisciplinary practice transforms everyday materials into objects that address issues surrounding identity, sexuality and human rights. In this body of work, the artist imagines creating a community of queer Ugandans.

Adorned with debris collected from the streets of New York, Babirye's sculptures are woven, whittled, welded and burnished. After her ceramic works are fired, Babirye begins to unconventionally splatter, drip and splash them with glaze. Her works are often embellished with 'jewellery' of found materials such as cans, nails and wire. American art critic Jerry Saltz has said about Babirye's practice; "It is important to break the rules in ceramics more than in almost any other medium, because it is alchemy and of the earth and is belly-magic." Babirye's choice to use discarded materials in her work is intentional – the pejorative term for a gay person in the Luganda language is 'abasiyazi' meaning sugarcane husk. "It's rubbish," explains the artist, "the part of the sugarcane you throw out."

Babirye's ongoing 'Queer Identity Card' series is rendered in exuberant acrylic paint on paper, depicting ambiguously gendered subjects wearing bright lipstick and dressed in vivid colours; like passport photos or identity cards. This series attests to the discrimination of the LGBTQ+ community and the poverty, the violence and the lack of legal protection and healthcare provided to them.

Babirye was born and raised in Kampala, one of the most powerful of Uganda's kingdoms. The Buganda people are proud of their ancestral lineage and traditions - members of its clans consider themselves as siblings, regardless of their distant birth relationship. Referring to this clan system, Babirye employs the term "kuchu"— a "secret word" in her native tongue known only by those in the queer and trans community. Babirye playfully envisages an alternate queer and transgender history, unified in its support and protection of its people.

For Frieze Sculpture, Babirye presents 'Gyagenda', her first bronze sculpture. The title is a Luganda idiom, which is a moniker often given to young people seeking to gather their chosen families in the wider world. Babirye moved to New York in 2015 from her native Uganda, receiving asylum in 2018. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, her experience of being exiled from her home country has inspired not only her artistic practice, but her prolific activism in support of LGBTQ+ and human rights worldwide.

# Stephen Friedman Gallery

## Contact Us

For press enquiries please  
contact:  
press@stephenfriedman.com

For sales enquiries please  
contact:  
sales@stephenfriedman.com

For further details please contact:  
info@stephenfriedman.com

## Social Media

Facebook:  
/Stephen-Friedman-Gallery  
Instagram:  
@stephenfriedmangallery  
Twitter:  
@SFGalleryLondon

Also exhibiting at Frieze Sculpture is Yinka Shonibare CBE RA. 'Material (SG) IV' is a striking four metre sculpture which represents the harnessing and freezing of wind in a moment of time and resembling a vast sheet of fabric billowing in the breeze. The sculpture combines solidity and strength with lightness and flexibility. It is a commanding alternative to conventional monuments of personal power, instead exploring universal experience of historical change. Elegantly rippled and curved, its twisting form features Shonibare's signature hand-painted Dutch wax batik design. Batik was originally inspired by Indonesian design, mass-produced by the Dutch, and eventually sold to the colonies in West Africa. In the 1960s the material became a signifier of African identity and independence and in Shonibare's hands, the "perfect metaphor for multi-layered identities."

Concurrently, Shonibare presents the first exhibition at Stephen Friedman Gallery's new London location with 'Free The Wind, The Spirit, and The Sun' until 11 November 2023. The exhibition includes a group presentation of African artists, and artists from the African diaspora, curated by Shonibare. Some of these artists participated in Shonibare's residency program, Guest Artists Space (G.A.S). Foundation, which is located across two sites in Lagos and Ijebu, Nigeria.

## Notes to editors

### Leilah Babirye

Leilah Babirye (b. 1985; Kampala, Uganda) is a multidisciplinary artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She studied art at Makerere University in Kampala (2007–2010) and participated in the Fire Island Artist Residency (2015). In 2018, the artist was granted asylum in the US and presented her first solo show there in the same year. Stephen Friedman Gallery hosted her first solo show in the UK and Europe in June 2021. In May 2022, Babirye created a site-responsive work for 'Black Atlantic', a Public Art Fund project at Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York. She recently spent the summer in residence at Yorkshire Sculpture Park to create new work towards her major solo exhibition opening in the Chapel in 2024.

Her work can be found in public collections including The Africa Centre, London, UK; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California; Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry, UK; Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, Annandale-On-Hudson, New York; Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island; Sammlung Goetz, Munich, Germany and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

### Yinka Shonibare CBE RA

Yinka Shonibare CBE RA was born in 1962 in London, England and moved to Lagos, Nigeria at the age of three. He lives and works in London. Shonibare was awarded the decoration of Most Excellent Order of the British Empire or MBE in 2004 and Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire or CBE in 2019. Shonibare received the prestigious Art Icon Award from Whitechapel Gallery, London and an honorary degree from The Courtauld Institute, London in 2021. Examples of Shonibare's 'Wind Sculpture' series are permanently installed in Royal Djurgården Sculpture Park in Stockholm, Sweden (2022); Howick Place, London (2014) and Davidson College, North Carolina (2018). A new iteration, 'Material (SG) I', was unveiled at Whitman Walker Health Centre Commission, Washington DC in 2019 and the second edition was installed at 360 Rosemary, West Palm Beach, Florida in 2021. To mark Sharjah Biennial's 30th anniversary in February 2023, Shonibare was commissioned to create a series of new works for the exhibition. A major solo show by Shonibare opened at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in April 2022, spanning three decades. Alongside Frieze London and Frieze Masters, Deutsche Bank will present a solo showcase of the artist's multidisciplinary practice.

## Stephen Friedman Gallery

Stephen Friedman Gallery is a contemporary art gallery that was founded in 1995 with a focus on representing exceptional artists from around the world. Since its inauguration, the gallery has been based in Mayfair, London. In October 2023, the gallery expanded and relocated from its sites at Old Burlington Street to Cork Street. The first location outside the UK will open on Franklin Street in Tribeca, New York in November 2023.