

Press Release

Yinka Shonibare MBE
'...and the wall fell away'

Private view: Tuesday 27 September 2016, 6-8pm

Frieze week West End private view: Thursday 6 October 2016, 6-8pm

Exhibition dates: 28 September – 5 November 2016



Shonibare studio by Wig Worland

Opening for Frieze week in October 2016, Yinka Shonibare MBE presents his sixth solo exhibition at Stephen Friedman Gallery titled '...and the wall fell away'.

The show marks a pivotal moment in the artist's practice with the complete absence of the Dutch wax batik textiles for which he is known. Shonibare removes the fabric altogether and uses the batik designs in new forms; mural painting, screen prints on canvas and bronze and classical sculpture.

Shonibare uses the patterns as a device to interrupt the canon of classical and renaissance art and Western religious iconography. He indicates his intention to challenge and dismantle the boundaries of Western understanding in the title of the show. By leaving the 'trace' of his trademark batik motifs, Shonibare gives a personal insight into the complexities of identity, nationality and colonial history.

The exhibition is divided into two parts: Gallery One is focused on ideas of rationality in classical art and Gallery Two, on religious hybridity.

On entering Gallery One, we are struck by the absence of sculpture. Instead, an expansive wall painting is framed by the white walls of the gallery. Unlike previous iterations of these impressive installations, here there are no sculptural elements. This work sets the tone for the show as the wax batik pattern is stripped from the fabric and painted directly onto the wall.

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The intersecting circular pattern deliberately echoes the same motif used in Shonibare's commission 'The Family Album' which is currently displayed on the Royal Academy's façade on Burlington Gardens.

Inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's 'Vitruvian Man', the wall painting in the front space of the gallery is completed by an accompanying floor drawing rendered in gold and red. These two elements form one immersive work. Da Vinci's drawing was intended to demonstrate the humanist perspective that man is the measure of all things. Shonibare's proposal of a new measure is a black figure, and a hybrid of both man and woman.

In the following gallery three sculptures recognisable as Venus de Milo, Discobolus of Myron (Discus Thrower) and Michelangelo's David are hand painted with batik patterns. Much like the artist's series of 'Self Portraits (after Warhol)' in which he superimposed batik patterns onto his own face, the sculptures are transformed with the patterns 'tattooed' directly onto the sculptures. Using sculptural archetypes of sexuality, masculinity and athleticism, Shonibare manipulates the aesthetics of these forms to challenge the accepted definition of the idealised body.

Dutch wax batik fabric was inspired by Indonesian design, mass-produced by the Dutch and British and eventually sold to the colonies in West Africa. In the 1960s the material became a new symbol of African identity and independence. Since the early 1990s, Shonibare has used it to represent the flexibility of identity as much as the implications of trade and colonialism.

The series of imposing hand pulled screen-prints on canvas in Gallery Two is Shonibare's largest and most ambitious to date. A key feature of Shonibare's work is its visual appeal, and these are immediately seductive in colour and beauty. Figures from Christian and African religious iconography merge into fantastical hybrids. Shonibare is able to make these works by using new technology and drawing on a large tablet. This is the first instance in which we see Shonibare's unmistakable style of drawing on such a scale. Each canvas began with an image of a European religious figure. Shonibare dressed the faces of the saints in African masks used in religious rituals. Stock market listings from the Financial Times are then juxtaposed with Dutch Wax Batik patterns and vivid clashing colours.

"First of all [I] think about picture making itself: the history of Modernism and the aesthetic of the mask in Modernist painting. So we are going back to Picasso. And then taking that signifier of religious ritual, which is the mask, and overlapping one religious symbol with another religious symbol". By combining powerful imagery with their respective mythologies, Shonibare creates a hybrid ideology: what he calls 'a third myth'.

Shonibare's presentation of new work seduces and undermines the expectations of the audience. Removing the textiles for which he is known and using the mimesis of the fabric is an important move for the artist. Shonibare sees the material as a metaphor for interdependence: complexity and ambiguity are the cornerstones of his artistic narrative. His specific concerns here; art history, the power of iconography and religion, are powerfully brought together. With each of them he interrupts familiar references by overlaying the image with the wax batik pattern. In doing so he exercises individual agency and aesthetic creativity, which are ideas that are central to humanism. This has long been present in Shonibare's work. This exhibition should be read as a celebration of human expression, achievement, beauty and the pursuit of intellectual and religious liberty, regardless of race and time. '...and the wall fell away' demonstrates an irreverent disregard for the binaries presented in Western understandings and offers a contemporary deconstruction of the classics.

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Gallery hours: Tuesday to Friday, 10am - 6pm and Saturday, 11am - 5pm

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Social Media

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Notes to Editors:

Currently on view:

The Shonibare exhibition at Stephen Friedman Gallery coincides with a major commission titled 'RA Family Album' currently displayed on the **Royal Academy's** façade on Burlington Gardens. The Royal Academy is an important institution and on-going inspiration for the artist following his election as an Academician in 2013.

Concurrent with '...and the wall fell away' **Turner Contemporary's** Sunley Gallery, Margate, is transformed by two major works by Shonibare: 'The British Library' and a major new work 'The End of Empire' which was commissioned as part of **14-18 NOW** programme of World War 1 Centenary Art.

On view is a survey exhibition of Shonibare's work, 'Paradise Beyond' at **Gemeentemuseum Helmond** in the Netherlands, which is located close to the Vlisco Factory that produces Dutch wax batik fabric.

Also in September, **Yale Center for British Art** presents an exhibition that takes Shonibare's interest in the British historical figure Admiral Lord Nelson as its focus.

Later in October 2016 'Wind Sculpture VII' will be unveiled at the **Smithsonian Institute**, Washington D.C.

Another of Shonibare's imposing Wind Sculptures will be shown in a public park in Lagos as part of **British Council UK/Nigeria** from October to January 2017. In November there will be a public screening of three of Shonibare's films.

'Nelson's Ship in a Bottle' welcomes the public to the **National Maritime Museum** and Greenwich Park. It was the 2010 Fourth Plinth Commission, and is now permanently displayed at the entrance to the Royal Park in London. 'Globe Head Ballerina' (2012) was commissioned by the **Royal Opera House**, and she now spins on the exterior overlooking Russell Street in Covent Garden. In **Howick Place** the first 'Wind Sculpture' is displayed in a pedestrian street marking the new cultural quarter of Westminster.

Shonibare was a Turner prize nominee in 2004 and was also awarded the decoration of Member of the "Most Excellent Order of the British Empire" or MBE and he has added

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this title to his professional name. He was elected as a Royal Academician by the Royal Academy, London, England in 2013.

Recent solo and major notable museum exhibitions include:

'Recreating the Pastoral', VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art, Carlow, Ireland (2016); 'Wilderness into a Garden', Daegu Art Museum, Daegu, Korea (2015); 'Pièces de Résistance', DHC/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art, Montréal, Québec (2015); 'Cannonball Paradise', Herbert-Gerisch-Stiftung, Neumünster, Germany (2014); 'Yinka Shonibare MBE: Magic Ladders', The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA (2014); 'Yinka Shonibare MBE', Royal Museums Greenwich, London, England (2013); 'FABRIC-ATION', Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, UK; travelled to GL Strand, Copenhagen, Denmark (2013-2014); 'Imagined as the Truth', San Diego Art Museum, San Diego, USA (2012); 'Human Culture: Earth, Wind, Fire and Water', Israel Museum, Jerusalem (2011-2010)

Recent notable group exhibitions include;

'BODY/PLAY/POLITICS', Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama, Japan (2016); 'Making and Unmaking', Curated by Duro Olowu, Camden Arts Centre, London, England (2016); 'Staying Power: Photographs of Black British Experience 1950s-1990s', Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England (2015); 'The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Hell, Purgatory revisited by Contemporary African Artists, curated by Simon Njami, Frankfurt MMK, Frankfurt, Germany; travels to Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington, USA; Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain; Correo Venezia, Venice; Hayward Gallery, London, England (2015); 'Migrations: Journeys into British Art', Tate Britain, London, England (2012)

Shonibare's works are included in prominent collections internationally, including the Tate Collection, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, USA; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, Rome; Arts Council Collection, London; and VandenBroek Foundation, The Netherlands.