

YINKA SHONIBARE, MBE

Willy Loman: The Rise and Fall



15 October – 20 November 2009
Private View Thursday 15 October 2009, 6 – 8pm

Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present Yinka Shonibare, MBE's fifth exhibition 'Willy Loman: The Rise and Fall.'

"Theatricality is certainly a device in my work, it is a way of setting the stage...There is no obligation to truth in such a setting so you have the leeway to create fiction or to dream."

Shonibare in conversation with Anthony Downey. 'Yinka Shonibare, MBE' Pub. MCA Sydney & Prestel New York (2008) p.41.

The earliest known documentation of a fatal car crash provides a pictorial metaphor for the new body of photographic and sculptural work included in this exhibition. Photographed in 1898, 'The First Fatal Car Crash' records death as a spectacle for the first time. A curious crowd surrounds the carcass of a motor vehicle, its once powerful form now lying redundant in a heap in this haunting image. Over a century later, Shonibare creates a similar scene of destruction in a sculptural dramatization of the death of Arthur Miller's infamous protagonist, salesman Willy Loman. Here, a life-sized cross section of the doomed vehicle in which Loman died of his own volition, confronts viewers head-on. The character slumps lifelessly in the driver's seat, having finally met his pitiful end. Willy Loman becomes a contemporary protagonist in this powerful body of new work, suggesting a parallel between Miller's 20th century examination of greed and the human condition, and the present day.

"I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid...Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person."

'Death of a Salesman' Act 1, Part 8, pg. 40.

The narrative of Loman's demise continues in a new body of photographs. Working from a series of etchings of Dante's *Inferno* made by Gustave Doré in 1861, Shonibare has situated the character in a photographic re-imagining of Dante's Nine Circles of Hell. These stark and confrontational tableaux pose the question; where would Loman be found in this symbolic afterlife? The third circle of hell as prescribed for the 'Gluttons;' the fourth circle for the 'Avaricious;' or perhaps the eighth circle, as reserved for the 'Thieves?' Inspired by 20th century history paintings these large-scale works present the crowd of humanity as a surging mass of bodies, though here the crowd is anonymous and naked. Typical of Shonibare's previous enquiries into a wide range of historical sources, timescales are collapsed and narratives are distorted in these commanding works.

This exhibition also marks a development into a new medium for the artist; the 'Climate Shit' drawings are a new body of work on paper created over the last year. Part stream of consciousness, part collage, these drawings convey an immediacy as the artist responds to the turbulence documented in the media alongside his own daily experiences. Hand written text, line drawing, gold leaf and collage collide to create kaleidoscopic compositions. Airplanes hover above a dizzying landscape of wind turbines, economic graphs and news of rising oil prices. The contrasting delicacy of sensuous gold foil and batik flowers suggests the collision of economic, aesthetic and personal realms.

Yinka Shonibare, MBE (b. 1962, London) lives and works in London. His Fourth Plinth commission 'Nelson's Ship in a Bottle' will be unveiled at Trafalgar Square in April 2010. His major touring survey exhibition recently closed at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and will reopen at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, in November 2009. A solo commission by the artist for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston will open in 2010. Other recent solo shows include *A Centenary Commission*, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Ireland (2009); *Party Time: Re-Imagine America*, Ballentine House, Newark Museum, New Jersey (2009). Recent group shows include *The Second Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art*, The Garage Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscow (September 2009); *The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2009).

In late July 2010 Shonibare will curate an exhibition at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, with works from their own collection to mark the opening of the recently re-furbished permanent collection Galleries.

Stephen Friedman Gallery will be participating in **Frieze Art Fair**, Stand D4 from 15 – 18 October 2009 with a solo presentation of 'the dark gate', by Jim Hodges. Hodges' solo exhibition 'Love, etc.' opens at the Centre Pompidou, Paris on 14 October 2009.

Forthcoming exhibition: **Kendell Geers**, 27 November 2009 – 16 January 2010

Gallery hours are: Tuesday to Friday, 10am-6pm and Saturday 11am-5pm
For further details please contact Bethany Pappalardo on +44 20 7494 1434