

## Stephen Friedman Gallery

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Yinka Shonibare's tribute to UK diversity acquired by Tate  
Mark Brown  
April 2019

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## Yinka Shonibare's tribute to UK diversity acquired by Tate



*Yinka Shonibare with his installation The British Library in Tate Modern, south-east London.  
Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock*

### **The British Library artwork features thousands of books celebrating cultural icons.**

A library with thousands of batik-bound books celebrating the diversity of the British population has been acquired by Tate.

Yinka Shonibare's artwork The British Library has gone on display at Tate Modern after being bought for the permanent collection.

Three walls of the gallery are taken up with shelves of 6,328 books. On 2,700 of the books are the names, printed in gold leaf, of first- and second-

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generation immigrants to Britain who have made significant contributions to the country's culture and history.

The diverse list of names ranges from Alan Rickman, who is listed as being of Irish descent, and Alesha Dixon (Jamaican father) to Liam Gallagher (Irish parents) and Lionel Blair (born in Canada) to Zadie Smith (Jamaican mother) and Zane Lowe (born in New Zealand). It is an eclectic mix that also features Dido, Winston Churchill, Mel B, Sid James, Danny Welbeck and Mary I.

There are also books with names of people who have opposed immigration: Oswald Mosley, for example, alongside Norman Tebbit, Paul Nuttall, Patrick Moore, Patricia Skitmore and Richard Littlejohn. Many books have no name – suggesting, the artist said, that the story of British immigration is still unwritten.



*The installation has an area for visitors to access information about the project on tablets.*

*Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock*

The artwork was first shown in the Old Reference Library at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery for the 2014 Brighton festival. Since then it has been seen at Turner Contemporary in Margate and in the Diaspora Pavilion of the 2017 Venice Biennale.

Shonibare said the acquisition was a continuation of Tate's support for artists who "tackle some of the most pressing issues of our time. The British Library is an exploration of the diversity of British identity through a

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conceptually poetic lens. I look forward to the public engagement with the work.”

The installation, acquired with the support of the Art Fund, includes tablet screens on which visitors can scroll through the names on the books. People can also submit their own stories and a selection will be made available on the website.