

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Yinka Shonibare CBE RA

Describing himself as a 'post-colonial hybrid', Yinka Shonibare CBE RA creates work that explores issues of race and class through the media of sculpture, painting, photography, film, tapestries and public works.

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 elected as a Royal Academician by the Royal Academy, London in 2013. In 2019 he was awarded the decoration of Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire or CBE. In 2021 he received the prestigious Art Icon Award from Whitechapel Gallery, London.

Shonibare's practice questions the meaning of cultural and national definitions. His signature material is the brightly coloured 'African' batik fabric he buys at Brixton market in London. 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.

In May 2021 Shonibare will have his largest European survey exhibition, 'End of Empire' at Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Austria. Shonibare will have his seventh solo exhibition at Stephen Friedman Gallery, London in June 2021, titled 'African Spirits of Modernism'. Drawing on themes of human hybridity and transformation, this new body of work juxtaposes icons of European Classical antiquity with African artefacts from Picasso's own collection.

Shonibare was commissioned by Okwui Enwezor in 2002 to create one of his most recognised works 'Gallantry and Criminal Conversation' at Documenta 11 in Kassel, Germany, which launched him on to an international stage. The artist 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. In September 2008 his major mid-career survey commenced at the MCA Sydney and then toured to the Brooklyn Museum, New York and the Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

In March 2016 as part of the 14-18 NOW programme of World War 1 Centenary Art commissions, Turner Contemporary's Sunley Gallery, Margate, UK was transformed by two major works by Shonibare, 'The British Library' and 'End of Empire'. 'The British Library', an installation of over 6,000 books bound in Dutch wax batik fabric, was acquired by Tate Galleries in 2019 and exhibited at Tate Modern, London. At the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017 in a pavilion dedicated to artists from racially and culturally diverse backgrounds based in the UK, Shonibare exhibited and also took the role of mentor to a young artist. In 2018 Shonibare curated the Arts Council Collection in a touring exhibition 'Criminal Ornamentation' that toured regional museums the UK. Also in 2018 Shonibare curated 'Talisman in the Age of Difference' at Stephen Friedman Gallery, London which brought together the work of forty-six artists from across Africa and the Diaspora.

Over the past decade, Shonibare has developed an extensive portfolio of public works. In 2023, a new public sculpture commissioned by the David Oluwale Memorial Association will be unveiled in Aire Park as part of Leeds 2023, the city's landmark year of culture. In July 2020 the sculptural commission 'Bird Catcher's Dilemma' opened at Salzburg Museum, Austria, celebrating 100 years of the Salzburg Festival. Shonibare's 'Nelson's Ship in a Bottle' was the 2010 Fourth Plinth Commission and was displayed in Trafalgar Square, London until January 2012. This work was later acquired by National Maritime Museum and is now permanently installed outside the museum's new entrance in Greenwich Park, London. In 2012 the Royal Opera House commissioned 'Globe Head Ballerina' and this was on display on the building's exterior overlooking Russell Street in Covent Garden, London until 2017.

Examples of Shonibare's monumental 'Wind Sculpture' series have been exhibited in locations across the world. Iterations of this body of work have been displayed at Ndubuisi Kanu Park, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria (2015–2016); Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC (2016); Central Park, New York (2018); Princeton University, New Jersey (2019) and The Greenway Public Park in Boston, Massachusetts (2020). Sculptures from the series are permanently installed Howick Place, London (2014) and Davidson College, North Carolina (2018). A new iteration of the series, 'Material (SG) I', was unveiled at Whitman Walker Health Centre Commission, Washington DC in 2019 and the second edition will be installed at 360 Rosemary, West Palm Beach, Florida in 2021.

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For the last ten years Shonibare has run 'Guest Projects' in the ground floor of his London studio, an initiative that gives access to free project space for one month to artistic practitioners of any discipline. Shonibare recently announced his ambitious new Artist Residency project, Guest Artists Space (G.A.S.) Foundation, due to open in Lagos, Nigeria in 2021. The Foundation is a non-profit dedicated to facilitating international artistic and cultural exchange and developing creative practices through artist residencies and international collaborations.

Recent solo and major notable museum exhibitions include: 'Radical Hybridity', M WOODS Art Community, Beijing, China (2020); 'The Bird Catcher's Dilemma', Museum of Salzburg, Salzburg, Austria (2020–2021); 'Justice for All', Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, England (2020); 'Justice for All', The Arts House, Singapore (2020); 'The British Library', Tate Modern, London, England (2019–); 'Cowboy Angels', The British Museum, London, England (2019); 'The American Library', Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky, USA; 'Creatures of the Mappa Mundi', Hereford Cathedral, Hereford, England (2019); 'A Tale of Today', Richard H. Driehaus Museum, Chicago, Illinois (2019); 'Yinka Shonibare MBE: Flower Power', Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan (2019); 'The American Library', Van Every/Smith Galleries at Davidson College, North Carolina, USA (2018); 'Yinka Shonibare MBE', Fitzrovia Chapel, London, England (2018); 'End of Empire', Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, England (2018); 'Ruins Decorated', Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa (2018); 'Yinka Shonibare MBE', Busan Museum of Art, South Korea (2018); 'Yinka Shonibare MBE', Howick Place, London, England (2018); 'Paradise Beyond' Gemeentemuseum Helmond, Netherlands (2016 - 2017); 'Recreating the Pastoral', VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art, Carlow, Ireland (2016); '...and the wall fell away', Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, England (2016); 'End of Empire', Turner Contemporary, Margate, England (2016); 'British Council UK/Nigeria', Lagos, Nigeria (2015–2016); 'Wilderness into a Garden', Daegu Art Museum, Daegu, Korea (2015); 'Pièces de Résistance', DHC/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art, Montréal, Québec (2015); 'Cannonball Paradise', Gerisch Stiftung, Neumünster, Germany (2014); 'Yinka Shonibare MBE: Egg Fight', Fondation Blachère, Apt, France (2014); 'Yinka Shonibare MBE: Magic Ladders', The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA (2014); 'Selected Works', Gdansk City Art Gallery, Gdansk, Poland; travelled to Wrocław Contemporary Museum, Wrocław, Poland; 'Yinka Shonibare MBE', Royal Museums Greenwich, London, England (2013); 'FABRIC-ATION', Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, England; travelled to GL Strand, Copenhagen, Denmark (2013–2014); 'FOCUS: Yinka Shonibare, MBE', Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, USA (2013); 'Imagined as the Truth', San Diego Art Museum, San Diego, USA (2012); 'Human Culture: Earth, Wind, Fire and Water', Israel Museum, Jerusalem (2011–2010); 'Looking Up', MBE, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Monaco (2010) and 'El Futuro del Pasado', Alcalá 31 Centros de Arte, Madrid, Spain, then toured to Centro de Arte Moderno, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain (2011).

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