Yale Center for British Art Acquires Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA) Artwork Created for *Enlightened Princesses* Exhibition

NEW HAVEN, CT (June 22, 2017) – The Yale Center for British Art has added to its collection a thought-provoking, visually captivating work created by the artist Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA) (b. 1962). This sculpture was made specifically for *Enlightened Princesses: Caroline, Augusta, Charlotte, and the Shaping of the Modern World*, an exhibition that debuted at the Center in February 2017 and will be on display at Kensington Palace in London from June 22 through November 12, 2017. The exhibition was co-organized by the Center and Historic Royal Palaces, UK.

The work, titled *Mrs Pinckney and the Emancipated Birds of South Carolina* (2017), offers an interpretation of the encounter between Mrs. Eliza Lucas Pinckney, the owner of a slave plantation in South Carolina, and Princess Augusta in 1753. For the occasion, Mrs. Pinckney wore a gown made of silk fibers produced on her plantation. She brought for the princess gifts of indigo-dyed fabric, as well as three live birds native to the Carolinas, showcasing the productivity of her plantation and the wealth of the colony’s natural resources.

This sculpture focuses on Mrs. Pinckney, her dress, and her gift of North American birds to Princess Augusta. A female figure stands precariously on top of a globe that depicts the world as it appeared in 1753. Her dress, in the same style of the original garment worn by Mrs. Pinckney, is made with the artist’s signature, brightly colored, Dutch wax-printed cotton textile. The figure’s head is replaced with an open bird cage. Referencing the buntings and goldfinch that Mrs. Pinckney presented to Princess Augusta, three birds are shown having taken flight: one is on top of the cage, one perches on the figure’s shoulder, and another rests on the hand’s fingertips. In his essay “Curating the Intangible,” included in the exhibition publication for *Enlightened Princesses*, Glenn Adamson, Senior Research Scholar at the Center, noted that the birds represent both the slaves who lived and died under her control as well as Mrs. Pinckney herself, a colonial subject of Princess Augusta, who would only be given her liberty by the War of Independence, in which her sons fought for the American cause.

“Art is a form of poetry,” commented Shonibare. His work has an element of playfulness that evokes a visceral response with its contradictions and paradoxes. As the sculpture is
in response to the exhibition, he noted the context of being a contemporary artist with his work on display with historical art. “Contemporary artists often find metaphors in history to express the present. The context of the exhibition of the three princesses is a fantastic opportunity to explore these ideas,” said Shonibare.

Hazel Carby, Professor of African American Studies and American Studies at Yale University, stated that Shonibare is a master of ambiguity and contradiction in representing relations of imperial power and control. “We have to question what we understand by enlightenment and intellectual reasoning because the head of this sculpture is a cage: links between ideas of freedom and unfreedom are indissoluble, the door is open and the birds have flown. What does it mean to be an enlightened woman who has the power to enslave, to rule, but whose power can be challenged? The figure is mounted atop a globe of the colonial world of the eighteenth century but balanced precariously and even the surface of the sculpture, its skin, is an indeterminate color. It is a wonderfully provocative work of art,” noted Carby.

“This work is an incredibly important piece, enriching the Center’s ability to narrate the history of British art and culture. The creative artistry and boldness of Yinka’s sculpture invites an honest conversation about the past, and encourages consideration of current affairs in relation to the legacies of empire and slavery,” said Amy Meyers, Director of the Yale Center for British Art. “We are extremely grateful for the generous resources made available to us for this acquisition from the bequest of Daniel S. Kalk, the Director’s Discretionary Fund, and the Friends of British Art Fund.”

Mrs Pinckney and the Emancipated Birds of South Carolina is one of several Shonibare works in the Center’s collection, including Fake Death Picture (Death of Chatterton—Henry Wallis) (2011), a digital chromogenic print, acquired in 2016, which will be on display this summer as part of the Center’s exhibition A Decade of Gifts and Acquisitions. The Center owns a small oil study of the painting from which this photograph was based—Henry Wallis’s The Death of Chatterton (1856), an icon of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. The photograph was first displayed as part of Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA), an exhibition on view in autumn 2016. To complement that exhibition, the Center presented a group of works made by Black British and African American contemporary artists in an adjacent gallery. This included Shonibare’s Party Boy (2014), a digital pigment print with collaged fabric and hand-gilded with gold leaf, published by the Foundling Museum, London, and also acquired in 2016.

For more information on Mrs Pinckney and the Emancipated Birds of South Carolina, view this video on the Center’s website: http://britishart.yale.edu/multimedia-video/27/4371.
THE CENTER ACQUIRES YINKA SHONIBARE MBE (RA) ARTWORK

ABOUT THE YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART
The Yale Center for British Art houses the largest collection of British art outside the United Kingdom. Presented to the university by Paul Mellon (Yale College, Class of 1929), the collection reflects the development of British art and culture from the Elizabethan period onward. The Center’s collections include more than 2,000 paintings, 250 sculptures, 20,000 drawings and watercolors, 40,000 prints, and 35,000 rare books and manuscripts. More than 40,000 volumes supporting research in British art and related fields are available in the Center’s Reference Library. In May 2016, the Center reopened to the public following the completion of a multi-year project to conserve its iconic Louis I. Kahn building.

Visit the Center online at britishart.yale.edu.

ABOUT HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES
Historic Royal Palaces is the independent charity that looks after the Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, the Banqueting House, Kensington Palace, Kew Palace, and Hillsborough Castle in Northern Ireland. The charity helps everyone explore the story of how monarchs and people have shaped society, in some of the greatest palaces ever built. Historic Royal Palaces raises all of its own funds and depends on the support of its visitors, members, donors, sponsors, and volunteers. With the exception of Hillsborough Castle, these palaces are owned by the Queen on behalf of the nation, and the charity manages them for the Secretary of State for Culture, Media, and Sport (registered charity number 1068852). For more information, visit hrp.org.uk.

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Image credits: (All of the images above) Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA), Mrs Pinckney and the Emancipated Birds of South Carolina, 2017, fiberglass mannequin, Dutch wax-printed cotton textile, birdcage, birds, leather, and globe. Yale Center for British Art, Acquired with funds from the Bequest of Daniel S. Kalk, the Director’s Discretionary Fund, and the Friends of British Art Fund, photographs by Stephen White; Yale Center for British Art, exterior view, photograph by Richard Caspole; Kensington Palace, photograph courtesy of Historic Royal Palaces, UK