

## British Nigerian Artist Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA) is Featured in Focused Display at the Yale Center for British Art

YINKA SHONIBARE MBE (RA)

September 1–December 11, 2016

NEW HAVEN (September 13, 2016) — This fall, the Center presents a special installation of works by contemporary British Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA) (b. 1962), best known for his explorations of the legacies of colonialism through sculpture, installation, film, and photography.

The display focuses on Shonibare’s interest in the British historical figure Admiral Lord Nelson (1758–1805), whom he uses as an emblem of Britain’s imperial history. An important feature of Shonibare’s work is his consistent use of colorful, wax-printed cotton fabrics, which are associated with Africa but originated in Indonesia and Holland. A product of global trade and imperial markets, the fabric brilliantly captures the themes at the heart of Shonibare’s work.

The installation includes the original scale model of *Nelson’s Ship in a Bottle*, unveiled in 2010 in Trafalgar Square, which Shonibare produced for his commission as part of Britain’s “Fourth Plinth” series. Since 1999, the “Fourth Plinth” has provided a space dedicated to contemporary art commissions, and Shonibare’s was the first commission in the series granted to a black artist. It was also the first to engage directly with the history of the square, which commemorates Britain’s naval victory at the Battle of Trafalgar. Captured within a gigantic glass bottle, *Nelson’s Ship in a Bottle* is a representation of HMS *Victory*, Nelson’s famous flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar, the campaign in which the admiral heroically lost his life. Shonibare’s model ship accurately replicates HMS *Victory*, but its thirty-seven sails are made from his signature Dutch wax fabrics. *Nelson’s Ship in a Bottle* marked the beginning of Shonibare’s exploration of Nelson’s image and reputation beyond his death.

In addition to the model of this pivotal commission, the Center presents a number of related works, including a screening of Shonibare’s *Addio del Passato* (2011). The film presents the final aria from Verdi’s *La Traviata*, reimaged as a performance sung by Nelson’s estranged wife, Fanny, played by the black British opera singer Nadine



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Benjamin. The costumes worn by Fanny and Nelson in the film are displayed in glass cabinets, alongside three framed digital chromogenic prints, drawn from Shonibare's series *Fake Death Pictures* (2011). The photographs extend Shonibare's exploration of imperial heroism through the figure of Nelson. Each is based on paintings depicting deaths and suicides, including Edouard Manet's *The Suicide* (between 1877 and 1881), and each thereby depicts a different death scenario for Nelson. One of the photographs was recently acquired by the Center and is based on Henry Wallis's famous painting *The Death of Chatterton* (1856), an icon of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Shonibare's restaging of Chatterton recreates the painting in all its details but replaces the body of the young poet with that of Nelson, dressed in a naval uniform cut from patterned Dutch wax-printed cotton. Conflating the romanticized dramatization of the young poet's suicide with Nelson's heroic self-sacrifice, Shonibare seeks to challenge and complicate narratives of imperial history, heroism, and death through art historical tropes. The Center's highly finished oil-on-panel study of *The Death of Chatterton* is on view as part of the collection display in the second-floor galleries.



Shonibare's work forges resonant contemporary connections to historic works in the Center's collection. The commemoration of Trafalgar and Nelson's apotheosis were major themes in British art, which visitors can explore in the galleries. In addition, the display coincides with the Center's exhibition *Spreading Canvas: Eighteenth-Century British Marine Paintings* (on view September 15 –December 4, 2016), which for the first time offers a sustained examination of the tradition of marine painting responding to and shaping Britain's rise to prominence as a maritime and imperial power during the eighteenth century.

To further complement the Shonibare display, Gillian Forrester, Senior Curator of Prints and Drawings, has selected a group of works made by Black British and African American contemporary artists, which are also on view on the second floor. The installation includes prints from the collection made possible by the Friends of British Art Fund: the *Rivington Place Portfolio* containing works by Sonia Boyce, Isaac Julien, Glenn Ligon, Hew Locke, Chris Ofili, and Carrie Mae Weems; Joy Gregory's *Autoportrait* portfolio; and *Party Boy*, a newly acquired lithograph by Yinka Shonibare. These objects are accompanied by compelling works created by Lynette Yiadom-Boakye: *Fly*, a suite of etchings, courtesy of the artist, Corvi-Mora, London, and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; and the painting *Bluebird*, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



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### CREDITS

*Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA)* has been curated by Martina Droth, Deputy Director of Research and Curator of Sculpture, Yale Center for British Art.

### EXHIBITION-RELATED PROGRAMS

ANDREW CARNDUFF RITCHIE LECTURE, October 25, 5:30 pm

*A Conversation with Yinka Shonibare*

Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA) and Kobena Mercer, Professor, History of Art and African American Studies, Yale University

Robert L. McNeil Jr. Lecture Hall, Yale University Art Gallery, 1111 Chapel Street.

This event will be live streamed on [britishart.yale.edu](http://britishart.yale.edu). Following the conversation, a reception and exhibition viewing will take place at the Yale Center for British Art, 1080 Chapel Street.

### FILMS BY YINKA SHONIBARE MBE (RA) (LECTURE HALL)

The following films will be shown on Tuesdays from 2:30 to 4:30 pm; Fridays from 11 am to 1 pm; and on the following Saturdays from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm: September 17 and 24; October 1 and 29.

They will also be shown on Tuesday, October 25, from 6:30 to 7:30 pm.

Please visit the Center's online calendar for additional information.

*Un Ballo in Maschera (A Masked Ball)* (2004) (not rated; 32 minutes)

*Odile and Odette* (2005) (not rated; 14 minutes, 28 seconds)

*Addio del Passato* (2011) (not rated; 16 minutes, 52 seconds)

### 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 and 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 library.

Visit the institution online at [britishart.yale.edu](http://britishart.yale.edu).



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Images: Photograph of Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA), by Marcus Leith, © Royal Academy of Arts, London. The following images are all © Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA): *Fake Death Picture (The Death of Chatterton—Henry Wallis)* (detail), 2011, digital chromogenic print, Yale Center for British Art, Lee MacCormick Edwards Foundation and Friends of British Art Fund, courtesy of James Cohan Gallery, New York, and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* (maquette), 2007, plastic, Dutch wax-printed cotton textile, cork, acrylic and glass bottle, courtesy of the artist, James Cohan Gallery, New York, and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; *Nelson's Jacket*, 2011, Dutch wax-printed cotton textile, fiberglass mannequin, wood and glass vitrine, courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery, New York; *Fanny's Dress*, 2011, Dutch wax-printed cotton textile, fiberglass mannequin, wood and glass vitrine, courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery, New York; *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* from the Fourth Plinth Commission in Trafalgar Square, 2010, fiberglass, steel, brass, resin, UV ink on printed cotton textile, linen rigging, acrylic, and wood, Collection of the National Maritime Museum, London, image courtesy of James Cohan Gallery, New York, and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Yale Center for British Art, photograph by Richard Caspole.