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A Flying Machine for Every Man, Woman and Child, 2008 (detail)

***Yinka Shonibare, MBE:
A Flying Machine for Every Man, Woman and Child
and Other Astonishing Works***

First Solo Exhibition in the Western U.S. Opens at SBMA

March 14 - June 21, 2009

December 29, 2008 - Born in Britain to Nigerian parents, Yinka Shonibare, MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) is recognized internationally for his provocative sculptural installations, photographs and films that contrast African and European imagery and convention. **On March 14, 2009 the artist's first solo exhibition in the western United States opens at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.** *Yinka Shonibare, MBE: A Flying Machine for Every Man, Woman and Child and Other Astonishing Works* features an idyllic family riding human-powered flying machines modeled after 19th century drawings, alluding to the continual freedom sought by emigrants and tourists alike. Also included is a selection of works from prominent West Coast collections, as well as several recent works that speak to cultural myths and misinterpretations of colonialism. The exhibition also marks the inaugural organizational effort for SBMA by Julie Joyce, the Museum's new Curator of Contemporary Art.



Left image: *A Flying Machine for Every Man, Woman and Child*, 2008 (detail)



Right image: *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Asia)*, 2008. C-print mounted on aluminum.

Best known is the artist's sculptural work, which presents headless mannequins clothed in Victorian era dress made from atypical fabrics—brightly colored, wax-printed cloths commonly identified as African batiks. Essential to the work's meaning is the use of textiles strongly associated with Africa yet originally produced in Europe and sold to Africans by Dutch traders in the 19th century.

In an interview with Jan Garden Castro for *Sculpture Magazine* in 2006, Shonibare commented on his intentional, neatly headless creations, "...a lot of my work challenges the idea of hierarchy or aristocracy in some way. During the French Revolution, the heads of the aristocrats were chopped off using the guillotine. Basically it started as a joke, because I take working class fabrics from Africa and dress the aristocracy in those fabrics and then I take their heads off, but there's no blood or violence. It's witty in a knowing sort of way."



La Méduse, 2008 (sculpture)

The exhibition continues to underscore ideas of colonialism and subjugation with Shonibare's model of the famous, ill-fated French frigate *Méduse* (*Medusa*, in English), outfitted with Dutch batik sails and menaced by an artificial wave. An enormous C-print photograph of the miniature ship and tempest hangs on the wall next to the vitrine.

Sent to restore the French colony of Senegal in 1816, the *Méduse* drifted off course and collided into the treacherous shoals of the Arguin Bank. Due to a limited number of lifeboats, 147 passengers were left to fend for themselves over a period of 13 days, while neither the crew nor the French government did anything to help save them. Most died while all, including the 15 survivors, endured starvation, dehydration and insanity. Causing an enormous scandal, this tragic incident brought immediate attention to the heightened incompetence of the Bourbon regime, and lasting attention to

France's slave trade—as the French governor of Senegal who sailed on the ill-fated ship survived on a rescue boat while most of the crew perished on a raft. Slave trade was outlawed in France during the 18th century, but the French government turned a blind eye to the practice, allowing it to continue well into the 19th century.

The incident of the *Méduse* was recaptured several years later in French painter, Théodore Géricault's notorious, iconic masterpiece, *Le Radeau de la Méduse (The Raft of the Medusa)*, 1818-19. Like much of Shonibare's works, *Le Méduse* plays off of grand artistic traditions in many compelling ways.



Still from *Un Ballo in Maschera*, 2004 (video)

The exhibition is punctuated by the presentation of Shonibare's first film in which the artist continues his quest to question power in relation to race, gender, and history. *Un Ballo in Maschera (a Masked Ball)* 2004 presents the assassination of King Gustav III of Sweden in 1792 through the medium of dance. The characters don Shonibare's trademark African batiks but remain ambiguous in identity and sometimes gender. The artist's comments on his film in *Artforum* in 2005 also denote the golden thread running through the theme of the entire exhibition. "My aim with this film has been...to push the boundaries by finding new ways to interrupt the narrative moment in cinema and by reconsidering costumes and its possibilities. The costumes embody a paradox: They are made from fabric influenced by Indonesian design, produced by the Dutch, who tried it on the West African market, where it was appropriated as African. The point for me is that identity itself is an artificial construct."

Shonibare was born in London in 1962, and he has had numerous exhibitions, awards, and residencies during the past 12 years. Most recently, his work has been featured at the Miami Art Museum, The National Gallery, London, the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Royal Opera House and Africa Centre in London.

The exhibition was organized for the Santa Barbara Museum of Art by Julie Joyce, Curator of Contemporary Art. The installation, *A Flying Machine for Every Man, Woman and Child*, was commissioned by the Miami Art Museum, where it was exhibited in fall 2008. Other works are on loan from prominent West Coast collections, including the Seattle Art Museum; Peter Norton and Eileen Harris Norton, Santa Monica; and James Cohan Gallery, New York.

Free Related Programming:

Poetry Reading

Sunday, April 19, 2 pm

Hybridity Globalization and the Toppling of Sacred Canon

Poets read works inspired by the exhibition *Yinka Shonibare, MBE*.

Film Series

Empire and Order

A free series of films relating to Yinka Shonibare's fascination with the Victorian era and its illusory constructions of power and class. Organized by Peter J. Bloom, Assoc. Professor, Film and Media Studies, UCSB. Mr. Bloom will lead a discussion of the films following the screenings.

Tuesday, May 5, 5:30 pm

Angels and Insects (Phillip Haas, 1995, 116 min.)

Based on an A. S. Byatt novella, this elegantly perverse film examines the repression of Victorian England with a scientist's fascination. Some adult content.

Tuesday, May 12, 5:30 pm

Jabberwocky (Jan Svankmajer, 1971, 14 min.)

The Cabinet of Jan Svankvajer: Prague's Alchemist of Film (Brothers Quay, 1984, 14 min.)

A Walk Through H (Peter Greenaway, 1978, 41 min.)

This trio of surreally poetic short films offers references to mock scientific classification, an imaginary ornithologist, the Victorian world of Lewis Carroll which link this to the Empire and fictions of order. Some adult content.

Lectures

Wednesday, May 13, 6 pm

Renegade Insider: Cloth and Cultural Identity in the Art of Yinka Shonibare

Addressing the specific use of cloth in the artist's work, including discussion of the cloth markets of Nigeria and Brixton and the significant role they play.

Lecturer: Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, Assoc. Professor, History of Art and Architecture, UCSB

Wednesday, May 20, 6 pm

The Poetics of Cloth: African Textiles / Recent Art

Regarding the recent acclaimed group exhibition of the same title at the Grey Art Gallery, in conjunction with *The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Lecturer: Lynn Gumpert, Director of the Gray Art Gallery, NYU

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that presents internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA.

Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday. Free every Sunday.

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