

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Yinka Shonibare CBE RA:

**Free The Wind, The Spirit,
and The Sun**

**5–6 Cork Street
London
W1S 3LQ**

Friday 6 October – Saturday 11
November 2023

Private view:
Thursday 5 October, 6–8pm

Gallery hours:
Tuesday–Friday, 10am–6pm
Saturday 11am–5pm



Stephen Friedman Gallery presents 'Free The Wind, The Spirit, and The Sun' – a new exhibition by British-Nigerian artist **Yinka Shonibare CBE RA** – and the first to take place at its new London home on Cork Street, Mayfair. Having joined in 1996, Shonibare is one of the gallery's longest represented artists.

The exhibition includes a group presentation of African artists, and artists from the African diaspora, curated by Shonibare. Some of these artists participated in Shonibare's residency program at Guest Artists Space Foundation in Lagos, Nigeria. Paintings, sculptures, mixed media pieces and works on paper are exhibited.

Described as a "celebration of nature" by Shonibare, the first two rooms of the exhibition comprise a vibrant body of sculptures, masks and quilts. The show takes inspiration from the dada spirit; formed in Zurich during the First World War at Cabaret Voltaire by Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings, the movement challenged the bourgeois values and traditions of Western art, from the Renaissance to naturalism and impressionism. Throughout the war, dada artists often staged performances in bewildered, trance-like states, evoking African and Oceanic cultures to express animalism, originality, and freedom.

Shonibare makes references to the leisure activities of the aristocracy and westernised interpretations of African spirituality. A life-size sculpture, 'Feeling Free Like a Bird', is based on a portrait of a privileged equestrian painted by George Stubbs, whose studies of the anatomy of animals led him to naturalistic paintings of horses. The woman in the installation is riding side-saddle, reflecting society's demand for female modesty in both dress and behaviour. She is riding away from such restrictions, carrying native African birds in turn freeing themselves from their cages. These three-dimensional birds come to life from the pictorial quilts in the exhibition, which depict various species made critically endangered by climate change and pollution. The seemingly whimsical becomes an expression of the desire to escape from a world faced with economic challenges and impending environmental catastrophes.

'Wind Sculpture in Bronze (SG)' echoes the movement of wind as if it is about to dance or move away. It combines explorations into the physical effect wind has on African textiles and reflects the role it has played in the story of the movement of the African diaspora.

Stephen Friedman Gallery

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The dada spirit of the exhibition disrupts the notion of geographically determined traditions. Shonibare's 'Hybrid Masks' are a group of zoomorphic masks combining human and animal features that focus on the transformational qualities and spiritual meaning of masquerades in West African regions. They stem from ritualistic practices marking initiation and celebrating harvest and fertility. Dadaists considered these masquerades as a rejection of the whole of Western civilisation as well as an anti-war protest.

The exhibition is an expression of freedom in the creative community, and this is explored in the final room by the nine artists. G.A.S Foundation is a non-profit dedicated to facilitating international cultural exchange, developing creative and research practices through residencies and collaborations.

Notes to editors

Yinka Shonibare CBE RA

Shonibare lives and works in London. In Spring 2024, he will have a solo exhibition at Serpentine, London, UK. He will also participate in Nigeria's Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia, the 60th International Art Exhibition in Venice, Italy. Shonibare's new public work includes two outdoor sculptures; 'Material (SG) IV' is a striking four metre work for Frieze Sculpture unveiled in September 2023, and a work commissioned by the David Oluwale Memorial Association will be unveiled in Aire Park as part of Leeds 2023.

To mark Sharjah Biennial's 30th anniversary in February 2023, Shonibare was commissioned to create a series of new works for the exhibition. A major solo show by Shonibare opened at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in April 2022, spanning three decades of his practice. The artist was commissioned to transform the Gallery at sketch, London as part of a long-term programme of artist-conceived restaurants, which opened to the public in March 2022. The artist's largest European survey exhibition 'End of Empire', opened at Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Austria in May 2021.

Shonibare was a Turner Prize nominee in 2004 and was elected as a Royal Academician by the Royal Academy, London in 2013. He was awarded the decoration of Most Excellent Order of the British Empire or MBE in 2004 and Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire or CBE in 2019. Shonibare received the prestigious Art Icon Award from Whitechapel Gallery, London and an honorary degree from The Courtauld Institute, London in 2021.

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Stephen Friedman Gallery represents exceptional artists from around the world. Since its inauguration in 1995, the gallery has been based in London on Old Burlington Street, Mayfair. In Autumn 2023, Stephen Friedman Gallery will expand and relocate to Cork Street, Mayfair. The new location will be designed by award-winning London architectural firm David Kohn Architects. Later in the year, the gallery will open its first space outside the UK in Tribeca, New York. It will be designed by Trimble Architecture.

Image credits:

Yinka Shonibare CBE, Sun Dance Kids (Boy and Girl), 2023. Fibreglass mannequin, Dutch wax printed cotton textile, wooden mask, brass, and steel. 133 x 148.5 x 75.5 cm. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo: Stephen White & Co. Copyright Yinka Shonibare CBE.

Yinka Shonibare CBE, African Bird Magic (Saker Falcon) I, 2023. Patchwork, appliqué, embroidery and Dutch wax printed cotton textile. 250 x 179 cm. Framed Dimensions: 204 x 182.5 x 5 cm. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo: Stephen White & Co. Copyright Yinka Shonibare CBE.