



A TALE OF TODAY: YINKA SHONIBARE CBE TO OPEN AT CHICAGO'S DRIEHAUS MUSEUM

The First Exhibition in the Museum's New Contemporary Art Program Aimed at Exploring the Contrasts and Connections Between the Gilded Age and the Present

Chicago, IL—February 7, 2019—On March 2, the Richard H. Driehaus Museum will open *A Tale of Today: Yinka Shonibare CBE*, the inaugural exhibition in the Museum's new contemporary art series. The London-born and -based artist, who was raised in Nigeria, has drawn on both his English and African history throughout his career, to create visually compelling art in a variety of media. The upcoming exhibition at the Driehaus—the artist's first museum exhibition in Chicago in over five years—will feature photographs, sculpture and installations. A through-line in Shonibare's practice has been an exploration of the intersection between the attitudes and trappings of the past, such as the Victorian Age, and the values and mores of the present. It is for this reason that the artist was selected to launch the Driehaus Museum's new series, which will provide opportunities for audiences to see the history of the Gilded Age through different lenses, and explore the social, class, racial and economic issues that make that history relevant to society now. *A Tale of Today: Yinka Shonibare CBE* is organized by the Driehaus Museum and runs through September 29, 2019.

Formally titled *A Tale of Today: New Artists at the Driehaus*, the Driehaus Museum's contemporary art series will continue over the next three years, with variations on the program that explore new perspectives and feature new artists—with an emphasis on engaging artists of color as well as underrepresented communities within Chicago. In Spring 2020, the Driehaus will collaborate with Chicago-based artists, including Nate Young, while the third iteration, in 2021, will be *A Tale of Today: Mark Dion*, presenting works by the American artist who is particularly known for exploring the history of knowledge and science in his artistic practice. The Museum's new series takes its name from *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*, the 1873 book by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner that originally coined the phrase that subsequently became the name for this period in American history.

"Yinka Shonibare is an artist who draws on history, politics, and fashion to explore and critique our understanding of the past with equal doses of humor, irony, and theatrics," said Richard P. Townsend, the Museum's director. "Our hope with this exhibition, and its companion programs, is to engage audiences in thinking about the past through a new frame of reference—one that is also relevant to understanding the challenges our society faces today. We look forward to transforming our amazing, Gilded Age home into a platform for contemporary art and ideas, this year and into the future."

A Tale of Today: Yinka Shonibare CBE is built around four sculpture installations and two photography series that will be installed throughout the Museum's "home," the Nickerson Mansion—renowned as Gilded Age Chicago's "Marble Palace" and located near the City's famous Magnificent Mile. The installation will, in part, engage with the Nickerson Mansion's own history as an elaborate home to an incredibly wealthy family, to better highlight the different questions about class, race, and status that are so integral to Shonibare's art.

For example, *Party Time: Re-Imagine America* (2008-2009) will be installed in the Mansion's dining room. Once the setting of the elaborate dinner parties frequently hosted by the Nickersons, it is a fine example of a late 19th-century American carved room. As was common in the period, the elaborately carved quarter-sawn oak interiors of the dining room feature motifs associated with hunting and the harvest, including foliage, fruits, and acorns. The Shonibare, in which he uses his signature Dutch wax fabric to create High Victorian costumes that complement a Gilded Age interior, will replace the original Nickerson dining table that typically sits in this space.

Similarly, *Big Boy* (2002) will be installed in the center of the Maher Gallery which originally served as the Nickerson family's domestic "museum." Although their art collection was housed in their private residence, the Nickersons—like many other American collectors of the period—believed it was their civic responsibility to share their collection with the public, and they often invited art students into their home to study and view art, or hosted receptions and lectures about art. The Mansion's second owners, the Fishers, commissioned famed Prairie School architect George Washington Maher to redesign the Gallery. The renovation of the room included the additions of the stained-glass dome and the monumental fireplace with iridescent stained-glass tile—both of which will serve as an excellent contrast to the ornate, richly colored fabric costume of *Big Boy*.

The sculpture *Child on Unicycle* (2005) will welcome visitors to the Museum's second floor exhibition space—where two of Shonibare's early photography series, *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* (1998) and *Dorian Gray* (2001) will be hung in what were originally the Mansion's former bedrooms. In *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, Shonibare recreates the moments in the life of a "rake" in five different chromogenic images. Modelled on the British tradition of the anecdotal and moralizing pictorial series such as Hogarth's *The Rake's Progress* (1732-34), Shonibare upends this most British of artistic formats by placing himself, a man of color, front and center in unexpected social settings and in gilded environments. The 12 photos of the *Dorian Gray* series features the artist posing as Oscar Wilde's legendary gentleman-cum-monster, adding a new dimension to the interpretation of the story. *Upstairs Downstairs* (1997) will be displayed in the ornate, Moorish Sewing Room. Set against a photograph of an eighteenth-century mansion, the work is comprised of brightly decorated fine china, with each plate listing the name and role of one of the invisible servants who kept the estate running. The photo is of Liverpool's Croxteth Hall, the former country home of the Earls of Sefton, and the work was originally displayed at Croxteth Hall, as part of a contemporary art intervention in the historic home.

Throughout the run of the exhibition, the Driehaus will present a series of programs and events, for a wide range of audiences. As part of the exhibition's opening weekend, on March 2 the Museum will present a panel discussion with both art historians and curators, to discuss Shonibare's work in the context of the African diaspora, his practice of creating works within historic sites or addressing historic themes, and where his work belongs within the scope of art history. Organized in collaboration with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, which will host the discussion, it includes participants: Naomi Beckwith, Manilow Senior Curator at the MCA Chicago; noted author and art historian Lowery Stokes Sims; and Richard P. Townsend, Executive Director of the Driehaus Museum. More information on time, location, and tickets is [available here](#).

Also taking place during run of the exhibition there will be a series of spoken word performances and podcasts in collaboration with Young Chicago Authors and its artistic director, Kevin Coval, who is also the founder of the Louder Than a Bomb poetry slam festival. These events will feature emerging Chicago poets of color. The Museum will also host a number of salon-style events, including: a

lecture on the life and work of Oscar Wilde; a panel discussion on the role of outsiders in driving change within contemporary artistic practice; and a lecture about the history of fashion and fabrics, with a particular focus on the 19th century Dutch prints that have featured so strongly in many of Shonibare's recent works. Programs for families and children will include fabric-making classes and workshops that explore the narratives Shonibare uses in his work. Additional information about the exhibition and the accompanying programs can be found on the [exhibition's website](#).

A Tale of Today: Yinka Shonibare CBE at the Driehaus Museum is made possible in part by loans of important works by Shonibare, including from: the Art Institute of Chicago; the American Masters Collection I; the Collection of Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman NY, courtesy FLAG Art Foundation; the Newark Museum; and the Collection of John and Amy Phelan. The exhibition is underwritten in part by Eugene and Jean Stark, Gary Metzner and Scott Johnson, and the Richard H. Driehaus Annual Exhibition Fund. Additional support is provided by the Joyce Foundation.

About The Richard H. Driehaus Museum

The Richard H. Driehaus Museum explores the Gilded Age through the art, architecture, and design of the late nineteenth century to the present. The Museum was founded by Richard H. Driehaus, who oversaw the restoration of its home, the Nickerson Mansion. Mr. Driehaus—who has a long history of funding projects in the arts and culture, including historic and contemporary art, and with an emphasis on projects engaging Chicago institutions—subsequently gave the Museum its collection. Once known as Chicago's "Marble Palace" and located just steps from the Magnificent Mile, the collection of period decorative arts is presented in an immersive experience within the Mansion. Temporary exhibitions organized by the Driehaus and its partners place the Gilded Age in context, as do vibrant educational and cultural programs designed to appeal to diverse audiences and illuminate the history, culture, and urban fabric of Chicago.

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