



48 WALKER ST | OCTOBER 26 – DECEMBER 22, 2023

Yinka Shonibare CBE, *Abstract Bronze I*, 2023,  
Bronze sculpture, hand-painted with Dutch wax  
pattern, 78 3/4 x 57 3/4 x 49 3/4 in. (200 x 146.8 x  
126.4 cm).

## Yinka Shonibare CBE

# *Boomerang: Returning to African Abstraction*

James Cohan is pleased to present *Boomerang: Returning to African Abstraction*, a solo exhibition by Yinka Shonibare CBE RA featuring new hand-painted bronze sculptures, quilt works, and the premiere of the artist's first tapestry. The exhibition will be on view from October 26 through December 23 at the gallery's 48 Walker Street location. This is Shonibare's eighth solo exhibition with James Cohan. The gallery will host an opening reception with the artist on Thursday, October 26 from 6-8 PM. A conversation between Shonibare and Donna Honarpisheh, Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art and Research at ICA Miami, will take place at 5 PM on Friday, October 27.

Stretched and framed like paintings, Shonibare's new series of pictorial quilts, *Abstract Spiritual*, appropriates African artworks owned or referenced by European modernist artists including Pablo Picasso, Andre Derain, Tristan Tzara, Constantin Brancusi, and Francis Picabia, among others. The African works hover amidst abstract backgrounds that interweave the artist's signature Dutch wax textiles with a diamond motif recalling both the quilts of Gee's Bend and Picasso's Harlequin paintings. In this way, they point to the foundational influence of African and African Diasporic art in the development of abstraction within the Western-European art historical canon.

Shonibare's first tapestry to date, *Modern Spiritual (Fang Ngil, Kumbaduba)*, similarly explores the African aesthetic roots of European modernist abstraction. Woven in collaboration with Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh, the work depicts masks referenced by Francis Picabia, now held in the Louvre's collection. Materially, the work refers back to the Modernist era, which saw a resurgence in the tapestry medium by artists including Matisse and Joan Miró. The artist says of these new textile works, "*In Boomerang I am conveying the origins of abstraction in African artifacts and the pivotal role [African artists] played in the development of Western modernist abstraction. My motivation is to acknowledge the contribution of African abstraction to the global language of modernist abstraction.*"

Similarly merging African aesthetics with abstraction are three new sculptures that continue Shonibare's interest, begun in 2013, in freezing a moment in time and sculpting the impossible—giving form to the wind. Made in bronze, the sculptures transform a material typically used for Eurocentric public monuments into a weightless, billowing piece of cloth. Their sail-like abstract forms monumentalize the wind as a metaphor for the movement of people across the Globe, and by extension, histories of slavery, migration, colonialism, and empire. This content is further visualized through the vibrant hand-painted patterns that cover the surface of each sculpture—versions of the artist's signature Dutch wax fabric. These textiles are a recurrent motif in Shonibare's practice due to their rich and complicated history. Often misinterpreted as “authentically” African, Dutch wax textiles originated when the Dutch appropriated Indonesian Batiks and mass-produced their own version in the Netherlands. After failing to hawk their ersatz wares back in Indonesia, the Dutch sold them instead in West Africa, where they ultimately became ubiquitous. These embedded contradictions have made Dutch wax cloth the perfect vehicle for Shonibare to ignite lively visual conversations about our multilayered identities and global interdependence for over 30 years.

Yinka Shonibare CBE RA (born 1962 in London, UK) first came to prominence in the late 1990s. In 2013, Shonibare was elected as a Royal Academician, and in 2019 he was made Commander of the ‘Most Excellent Order of the British Empire’, or CBE. In 2024, his work will be included in the Nigerian Pavilion in the 60th Venice Biennale. His works have been featured in Sharjah Biennial 15 (2023), the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007), and Documenta 11 (2002). In 2022, Shonibare celebrated the opening of two new buildings for his nonprofit Guest Artists Space Foundation in Lagos and Ijebu, Nigeria. Within the past two years, Shonibare has debuted permanent public sculptures in the City of West Palm Beach, FL; the Gene Leahy Mall, Omaha, NE; the Princess Estelle Sculpture Park, Stockholm, Sweden; and The Momentary, Bentonville, AR. Shonibare has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions at venues including Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Salzburg, Austria; Arts House, Singapore; Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY; Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan; and Driehaus Museum, Chicago, IL. In 2019, Shonibare's *The British Library* was acquired by Tate London. His works are included in notable collections internationally, including the Tate Collection, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome; Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL and VandenBroek Foundation, The Netherlands.

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