

# SBMA: Yinka Shonibare

## And Other Astonishing Works...

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

**L**IKE A PLAYFUL, WILD RIDE, the work of Yinka Shonibare explores themes of colonization in surprising, imaginative ways.

Shonibare's work "is visually seductive," said Julie Joyce, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, reflecting on Shonibare's work. "The power of colonization is present. Complex layers of ideas reference the abuse of power during the colonial Victorian era."

SBMA is presenting Shonibare's artwork for the first time in the Western United States in the exhibition *Yinka Shonibare, MBE: A Flying Machine for Every Man, Woman and Child and Other Astonishing Works* through June 21st.

Shonibare was born in London in 1962 to Nigerian parents, and his artwork reflects his hybrid existence. In an interview with Jan Garden Castro for *Sculpture Magazine* in 2006, Shonibare commented that "... 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."

The exhibition includes a family of Shonibare's trademark life-size, headless mannequins on flying machines, two large scale photographs, and *Un Ballo in Maschera (a Masked Ball)*, a film which imaginatively dramatizes the 1792 assassination of King Gustav III of Sweden through dance. "My aim with this film has been...to push the boundaries by finding



Girl and Boy on Flying Machines by Yinka Shonibare



Yinka Shonibare

new ways to interrupt the narrative moment in cinema and by reconsidering costumes and its possibilities," said Shonibare to *Artforum* in 2005. "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." The 2004 film is projected on the wall in a screening room and repeats every thirty minutes.

The exhibition also marks Joyce's curatorial debut since joining the SBMA. Joyce came to Santa Barbara from the Luckman Fine Arts Complex at Cal State Los Angeles – although, she's had quite a career, including positions at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Santa Monica Museum of Art. She holds a BA in Fine and Communication Arts from Loyola Marymount University and an MA in Art History and Museum Studies from USC.



Julie Joyce, SBMA Curator

"I thought I wanted to be an artist, but it became overly competitive. That's when I stumbled upon an art history class," she said. "I started in the gallery world and quickly learned I wanted to curate and set up exhibitions. What I loved was the hands on experience and connoisseurship of working and talking directly with artists."

Joyce first came to know of Shonibare's work by happenstance while wandering through galleries in Mayfair, London. "The gallery was closed, but there was one of Shonibare's figures in the window," Joyce described. "It was a recreation of Fragonard's *The Swing*, but from the perspective of the young man. The woman on the swing wore this rich, Rococo style dress made from African batik. It stopped me in my tracks."

SBMA is located at 1130 State St. Hours are Tuesdays through Sundays, 11am-5pm. General admission is \$9 for adults, \$6 for seniors, students, and children 6-17, and children under 6 are free. Admission on Sundays is free. For more information, call 963-4364 or visit [www.sbma.net](http://www.sbma.net).



Film still from *Un Ballo in Maschera (A Masked Ball)* by Yinka Shonibare