

## **Finding a Place: Nigerian Artists in the Contemporary Art World**

**Olu Oguibe**

In the late 1980s a new generation of Nigerian artists began to register their presence in the art world, especially in the metropolises of the West. They include Sokari Douglas Camp and the late Rotimi Fani-Kayode, both of whom had immigrated from Nigeria to the United Kingdom. In the 1990s others have come to prominence, also. These include Osi Adu, Oladélé Bamgboye, Mary Evans, Donald Oditia, Chris Ofili, Folake Shoga, Yinka Shonibare, Iké

Udé, and myself. Works by these artists have found their way into international biennials, group exhibitions, and other forums. Likewise, scholars, critics, and other writers in Africa, Europe, and the Americas have begun to write about the work of these artists with increasing frequency. Conversant with the techniques and discourses of new forms,

and versatile in the requisite politics of the international mainstream, these artists envision themselves and their practice alongside their contemporaries from other parts of the world.

Although most of these artists were born and raised in Nigeria, all live in expatriation as part of the culture of itineracy which marks the end of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Some were taken abroad at a young age by their parents. Others left in their late teens for higher education. Still others left the country, either as children or adults, to avoid civil strife or political persecution, especially in the late 1960s, during the bitter civil war of 1967–70, which displaced hundreds of thousands of Nigerians, and in the 1980s, when military dictatorships came to power. In all instances, however, the artists have maintained close ties with Nigeria, most of them visiting regularly, or returning at some stage in their lives to visit or study.

Whatever the circumstances of their relocation to the West, expatriation has accorded these artists greater opportunities to penetrate and navigate the insular world of the international contemporary mainstream. The fact that some of them have studied in the dominant centers of contemporary art, especially New York and London, for example, has accorded them access to specific conventions, spaces, curators, and critics. They also understand and have increasingly mastered strategies of alignment and positioning without which their presence in the West would have no significant positive effect on their careers. In addition, they exhibit the patience and dedication required to forge the alliances that have enhanced their professional opportunities. Last but not least is their determination to achieve visibility—to forge a career in the center rather than to accept the limitations of the periphery.

If location, access, familiarity with prevailing discourses and preoccupations, and strategic alignments are crucial factors in the efforts of these artists to find a place within the contemporary mainstream, the emergence of an equally new generation of forward-looking curators and critics has also made a significant difference. In the past decade such power brokers have caused a growing fault in what for long remained a stolid, almost impregnable wall of exclusion. With the subsidence of the museum as an all-powerful institution,

**4. Iké Udé. *Condé Nast Traveler*, 1994. From the series *Cover Girl*. Cibachrome. 8½ x 11½ (22 x 29.2) Courtesy the artist.**

1. For a detailed discussion of this condition, see Olu Oguibe, *Cross/ing: Time.Space.Movement*, exh. cat. (Santa Monica: Smart Art Press, 1998).

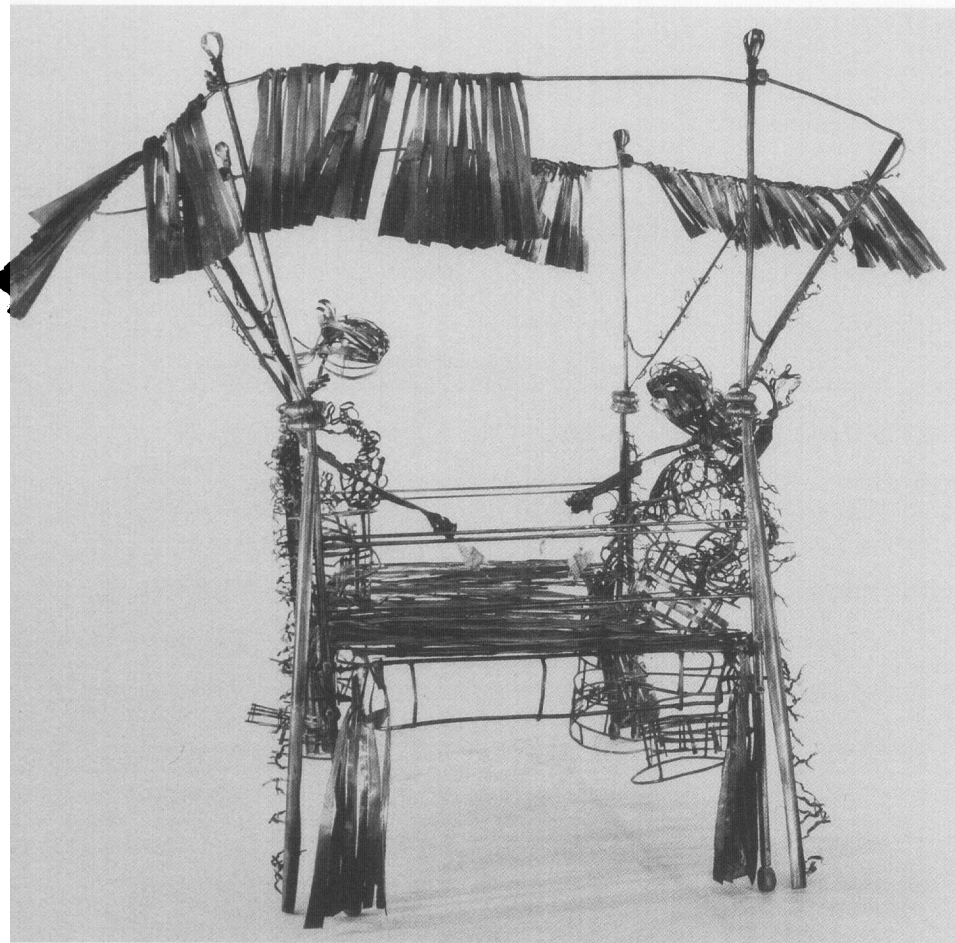
there has been a shift in favor of the independent curator, whose allegiances are more ambivalent and flexible. Such curators, working under less institutional pressure, have proved more willing to experiment and to initiate cross-cultural collaborations. In the 1980s and 1990s, also, segregationist positions in the centers of contemporary cultural practice came under increasing scrutiny, for which an entire contingent of non-Western scholars, artists, and critics must be partly credited.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, a more international awareness has begun to emerge among certain curators, critics, and administrators, with the result that platforms that for long remained bastions of Western exclusivity are beginning to open up, albeit ever so cautiously, to artists from the non-Western world. In the 1990s, particularly, independent curators and critics such as Octavio and Antonio Zaya from Spain; Rasheed Araeen, Jean Fisher, and Sean Cubitt from England; Adelina von Furstenberg from Switzerland; Peter Weibel from Austria; Guillermo Santamarina from Mexico; and others have in different ways expanded opportunities for non-Western artists to get a foot in the door of the international mainstream. By offering such artists opportunities to exhibit their work alongside their Western contemporaries or by bringing critical attention to them and their work, this generation of curators contributes to an environment in which contemporary artists from around the world may aspire for visibility.

Perhaps even more decisive is the emergence of Nigerian and other African practitioners within this cadre. In an era that some have described as the Curator's Moment, the progress of a number of Nigerian artists on the international contemporary art scene owes significantly to the increasing influence of individuals such as the Nigerian-born, New York-based curator Okwui Enwezor. In 1994 Enwezor founded *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, which is now published by the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University. This journal has not only brought relative visibility to a number of African artists and initiated serious discourse on contemporary African art, it has also attracted many important critics, thus creating a forum for dialogue. Enwezor was also artistic director of the Second Johannesburg Biennale in 1997—the first black African to serve as artistic director of a major international biennial; in 1998 he was appointed the artistic director of Documenta XI. Through his curatorial work and his writing, he has showcased the work of artists such as Bamgboyé, Fani-Kayode, Odita, Shonibare, and Udé, among others, placing them alongside their contemporaries from other parts of the world. He and others have questioned how the condition of diasporicity has remapped the global terrain of contemporary culture by questioning hegemonic concepts of ethnicity, nationality, and authenticity, of center and periphery.

2. It was with the intention to provide a shared platform for such scrutiny that the Tate Gallery in London, in collaboration with the Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA) hosted a symposium on internationalism in 1994. For debates that emerged from the symposium, see *Global Visions: Toward a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press/inIVA, 1994).

**Sokari Douglas Camp** made her mark on the British art scene in the 1980s with her large-scale, motorized sculptures. Born in Buguma on the Niger Delta in 1958, she moved to England as a teenager, where she was raised by her brother-in-law, the anthropologist Robin Horton. In the 1970s, she moved to San Francisco, where she studied briefly at the California College of Arts and Crafts, before returning to England to enroll at the prestigious Central School



1. Sokari Douglas Camp. *Church Ede*, 1984. Steel, cloth, motors. 93½ x 117½ x 104 (237.5 x 298.5 x 264.2). National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C. Museum purchase, 96-55-1. Photo Franko Khoury.

at St. Martins in London, from which she graduated in 1984. In between her travels abroad, Douglas Camp spent periods in Nigeria, during which she studied with the Yoruba master sculptor Lamidi Fakeye. In Nigeria, she also came under the mentorship of the choreographer and dance scholar Peggy Harper. Through Harper she made the acquaintance of the Austrian sculptor Suzanne Wenger, matron of the Oshogbo school, which thrived in Nigeria in the 1960s.

*Alali Aru*, one of Douglas Camp's earliest works, is a sculptural interpretation of a pageant float or festival boat inspired by the annual marine festivities of the Kalagbari group of the Niger Delta. Although her boat is stationary and the occupants are not represented, Douglas Camp motorizes the oars, creating the illusion of rowing. She also surrounds the boat with an audience of stylized figures. These she animates with a time-based mechanism that intermittently enables them to clap in applause.

This performative element, she informs us, was inspired by an encounter with a Yoruba priestess named Amonia Hosfall. It was Hosfall, and her experiences with Kalagbari performance arts, that encouraged her to "make things about movement and space."<sup>3</sup> To accompany another early work, a funerary bed titled *Church Ede* (1984) (fig. 1), she created an orchestra of mechanized drummers that recall examples from her culture. Among the Kalagbari, a deathbed would be decorated with bunting and flowers for the deceased's wake. The funeral itself would also feature drummers and dancers, among the mourners. Inspired by the death of her father, *Church Ede* re-creates the wake scene in steel, without the body of the deceased, its uniqueness residing not only in its performative kinetics, but also in its power to evoke through a stringent poetry of absence.

Douglas Camp gave British sculpture a jerk by bringing an element of vitality, originality, and boldness to it. Given the British taste for the lifeless and funereal—which has triumphed in Rachel Whiteread's casts of turned-out ghost houses and Damian Hirst's dead animals preserved in formaldehyde—Douglas Camp's work symbolizes life, movement, elegance, inventiveness, and technical skill. Even so, her relative visibility on the British art scene has had as much to do with the privilege of graduating from Central School and the Royal College of Art, where she won the Henry Moore Scholarship, as with

3. Sokari Douglas Camp, in interview with Patricia Ainslie. *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 3 (Fall–Winter 1995): 38.



2. Sokari Douglas Camp. Installation view of *Spirits in Steel: The Art of the Kalabari Masquerade*, American Museum of Natural History, New York, April 25, 1998–January 31, 1999. © American Museum of Natural History. Photo J. Beckett.

the formal and iconographical attributes of her work. Also, at the beginning of her career she was keen to avoid marginalization by dissociating herself from so-called black exhibitions and spaces. This led to a mild controversy when, on the advice of her dealers, she declined to participate in the definitive black British exhibition of the decade, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, at London's Hayward Gallery in 1989.

The above notwithstanding, Douglas Camp was all but abandoned in the early 1990s by London's commercially driven art dealers and galleries, some of whom apparently found her themes difficult to market. Subsequently, her foothold on the international scene rested increasingly on the growing interest of ethnographic and natural history museums in her work. As her sculptures shifted away from the initial exploration of form and its possibilities, these museums came to see her animated dancers and masqueraders as a useful means to illustrate a make-believe, natural context for their ethnographic collections of African art. This was the basis for her exhibition *Spirits in Steel: The Art of the Kalabari Masquerade* at New York's American Museum of Natural History in 1998 (fig. 2). This symbiosis has provided a market for Douglas Camp and has ensured that she continues to enjoy visibility.

**Rotimi Fani-Kayode**, certainly the most celebrated Nigerian artist of his generation, had established himself as one of the most significant photo-based artists in England by the time of his death in 1989 at age thirty-four. Having left Nigeria with his family when he was eleven to escape a civil war, Fani-Kayode grew up in England. He moved to the United States to study at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and at the Pratt Institute in New York. After he finished his studies, he returned to England. His choice of art as a career earned the disfavor of his aristocratic father as much as did his sexual orientation as a gay man. In an essay published in the journal *Ten-8* in 1988, he aptly described himself as an outsider "on three counts": a failure to his family, a gay man in an intolerant, black community, and a black artist in a largely racist society.<sup>4</sup>

As the founding chair of the black photographers group, Autograph, Fani-Kayode helped shape the discourses of race and sexuality in the visual arts in England in the late 1980s. During this period, black artists and curators challenged conventions within the British art world that denied them access and representation. They used their work to address difficult political and historical issues such as colonialism, British involvement in foreign countries, and lingering racial intolerance in British society. Under such racially charged circumstances, it was pertinent for black artists to partake in this challenge to the establishment, but it was difficult for them to raise certain questions within their own community, especially regarding sexuality. Fani-Kayode was able to

engage both arenas, working closely with other black artists to confront the establishment, while addressing black discomfort with gay sexuality. He did not reject the mainstream even as he critiqued it. He recognized that the cracks that emerged within it in his time were best taken advantage of to open it up further.

In his work, Fani-Kayode combined a sophisticated understanding of the aesthetics of religious eroticism with an activist devotion to the politics of race and sexuality, which the critic Kobena Mercer has dubbed "eros and diaspora."<sup>5</sup> In *Black Male, White Male*, his portfolio from the early and mid-1980s, Fani-Kayode moved between images of Yoruba gods and devotees, such as *Sonpono*:

*The Smallpox God* (1987); seemingly profane, homoerotic images, such as *Bronze Head* (1987); and direct engagements with race and homosexuality, such as the complex and partially autobiographical *White Bouquet* (1987) (fig. 3). In this black-and-white photograph a white man presents a bouquet of flowers to a black lover. Both men are nude with their backs to the viewer. The black man lies on a white sofa with his face turned away in a gesture of either wrathful

3. Rotimi Fani-Kayode. *White Bouquet*, 1987. Gelatin silver photograph. Courtesy the estate of Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Autograph, London.



4. Rotimi Fani-Kayode, "Traces of Ecstasy," *Ten-8*, no. 28 (1988): 36.

5. Kobena Mercer, "Eros and Diaspora," in *Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Alex Hirst*, ed. Mark Sealy and Jean-Loup Pivin (Paris: Éditions Revue Noire, 1997).

rejection, shame, or playful coyness. While offering his present, the white man bends his head in either penitence or a lover's romantic entreaty. Nothing else is revealed, no opinion betrayed, and the viewer is left to battle with the challenge of interpretation. As Fani-Kayode crosses the slippery terrains of race and sexuality in *White Bouquet*, we find a defining element also evident in his other works: a rhetoric of ambiguity that reminds us not only of the highly charged nature of the discourses that he engaged and of his own location within them, but also of his adopted guardian principle, the Yoruba deity Esu, messenger and interpreter to the gods. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates provides a long list of Esu's qualities, significant among which are "individuality, irony, indeterminacy, open-endedness, ambiguity, sexuality, disruption and reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty, encasement and rupture."<sup>6</sup>

At once the guardian of meaning and the embodiment of indeterminacy, Esu is the divinity of the crossroads, an apropos location for a gay, black, expatriate Nigerian artist living under the subtle racism of Thatcherite England. Even Esu's sexuality, encoded in myth in the story of a maternal curse that left him with an eternally erect penis,<sup>7</sup> resonated with Fani-Kayode. In a number of works he inscribed his own penis as a locus of self-definition and penance, a trope of salvation and a curse, the ultimate crucifix. Like Esu, he proved himself a master of the crossroads, a shrewd navigator able to create work that takes on uncomfortable questions of race and sexuality in a manner that implicates both his host society and the viewer—work that is nevertheless powerful, beautiful, and engaging enough to earn the attention and respect of his contemporaries. Although Fani-Kayode's career spanned only six years, from 1983 to 1989, his work belongs in the canon of late twentieth-century British art.<sup>8</sup>

**Iké Udé**, who lives and works in New York, belongs to a younger generation of Nigerian artists who have emerged in the 1990s. Born in Makurdi, Nigeria, in the early 1960s, he moved to New York in his late teens to study art. After graduating from college in the late 1980s, he began his career as a painter, but later changed to photo-based work and installation. His installation *Cover Girl* at the nonprofit gallery Exit Art/The First World in New York in 1994 established his place on the contemporary scene. In this space, he constructed a news agent's kiosk in which he displayed mock-ups of popular magazines, from *Condé Nast Traveler* to *Vogue*, which he designed and produced himself. On each magazine cover, he combined images and texts that address issues ranging from the absence of black faces in the mass media, to stereotyping and the misrepresentation of people of color. Each cover addresses and challenges a theme directly relevant to the magazine's readership. On the cover of *Condé Nast Traveler* (fig. 4), for instance, he presented a popular diagrammatic image of slaves in the body of a slave ship, buried in a background of red as if in a sea of blood. Through this image, he displaced the magazine's association with leisure travel and pleasurable adventure with a historical reference to forced relocation and cruelty.

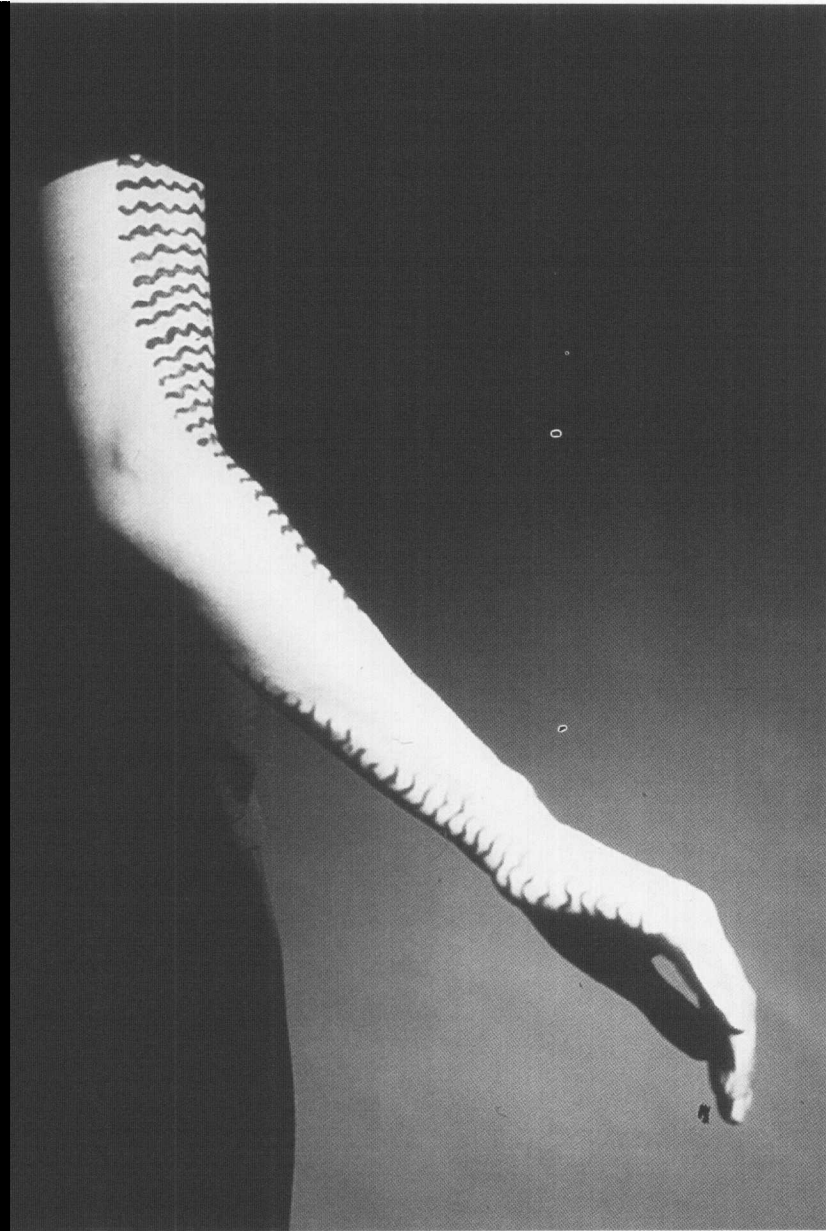
On his cover of *Parents* he presented a black nanny wheeling a white child in a pram. However, rather than using the stereotype of an old and full-bodied Aunt Jemima for the nanny, he uses a young black woman in jeans

6. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 6.

7. See Melville J. Herskovits, *Dahomey, An Ancient West African Kingdom*, vol. 2 (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 205–6.

8. Mercer, "Eros," 109.

5. Iké Udé. *Uli*, 1998.  
C-print. 16 x 14 (40.6 x  
35.6). Courtesy the artist.



and T-shirt in a modern U.S. suburb. The image of the young maid threads a *path of ambiguity*, at once referencing the prevalence of cheap, Third World domestic labor in the contemporary United States, as well as engaging the complex issue of race and trust in U.S. society. Such themes have previously

been perceived as the preserve of certain sections of the U.S. ethnic map. Though an outsider, Udé nevertheless ventures into them, working squarely in the terrain of the postmodern, where issues of race, sexuality, glamour, popular culture, and representation are broached in one fell swoop. Although his use of magazine covers is not entirely novel, what is unique is the relentlessness with which he has used the medium to address these themes together rather than in isolation.

In subsequent work Udé has broadened his techniques and media to include monoprints, photography, and body art. While his gradual emergence in the international contemporary art arena might be partly explained by the quality of his work, institutional factors have also played a role. At different moments in his career, for example, he has been a close acquaintance of or collaborator with prominent artists such as Carrie Mae Weems, who once roomed with him and in some of whose works he appears as a model, and Lyle Ashton Harris, with whom he has collaborated.<sup>9</sup> He has also worked with critics such as bell hooks and Greg Tate and entertainers such as RuPaul and Quentin Crisp, among many others. Udé further consolidated his place on the New York cultural scene in 1995 when he founded the culture magazine *aRude*, which draws contributions from established and emerging artists, critics, and literary figures. The launch of *aRude* was a glamorous affair that attracted the most visible elements of the younger generation of New York's cultural elite, with entertainment provided by Greg Tate's jazz band, *Women in Love*.

Looking further toward his Nigerian heritage, in the late 1990s Udé began to experiment with *uli*, the ephemeral body- and mural-painting tradition of the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, one of the country's three largest cultural groups. These impermanent, lyrical designs, traditionally painted by female artists on the bodies of their clients or family members, or on houses and compound walls, were used during marriages, memorial services, and other ritual occasions. In his works Udé paints the body of a model with *uli* motifs and then produces a photograph of the decorated model (fig. 5). His motifs are loosely based on classical *uli* but also

9. An example of their many collaborations is the well-known work *Sisterhood* (1994), in which Udé and Harris pose as gender-benders.



6. Yinka Shonibare. *Victorian Couple*, 1999. Wax printed cotton textile. Approx. 60 x 36 x 36 (153 x 92 x 92) and 60 x 24 x 24 (153 x 61 x 61). Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.

10. Other modern artists who have worked with *uli* include Uche Okeke, Obiora Udechukwu, Tayo Adenaike, and myself. For more information on these artists and the tradition, see Simon Ottenberg, *New Traditions from Nigeria: Seven Artists of the Nsukka Group*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

include his own innovations. Through painting, he fully shares the experience and process with his sitters and leaves them with ephemera in the tradition of his sources, while in the photographs he introduces both new media and permanence to this experience. While the transience of *uli* is uncompromised, its vulnerability is nevertheless mediated.<sup>10</sup>

Although **Yinka Shonibare** was born in London of Nigerian parents in 1962, he grew up in Nigeria before returning to England, where he studied at the Byam Shaw School of Art and then at Goldsmiths College of the University of London, England's fountain of conceptual art. Shonibare began to exhibit his work in 1988. By 1993, when he had his first one-person exhibition at London's Centre 181 Gallery, he had already participated in several key group exhibitions, including *Interrogating Identity*, which traveled through the United States in 1991. In 1992 Shonibare was one of the artists in the

Barclays Young Artist Award exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in London. In 1994 he was one of five artists in *Seen/Unseen*, an exhibition of leading African artists in Britain that I curated for the Bluecoat Gallery in Liverpool. He also participated in 2 out of 4 *Dimensions* at Centre 181.

Shonibare's contribution to the Centre 181 exhibition was a work entitled *Double Dutch*, composed of small "paintings." Some consisted of bright acrylic on fabric; others consisted of just the fabric—Dutch wax, a popular printed fabric used by millions of people across sub-Saharan Africa and increasingly in the West among people of African descent. This fabric became a symbol of nationalist revival in the wake of political independence in Africa, a sign of the new continent, of pride and difference. Politicians discarded their Western business suits in favor of Dutch wax jumpers and embroidered gowns. In the





7. Yinka Shonibare. *Diary of a Victorian Dandy: 19:00 Hours*, 1996. Photograph. 72 x 90 (183 x 228.6). Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.

1970s the material made its transition into the iconography of the Black Power movement in the United States and Britain, and its residues are still to be found in such neighborhoods as Harlem in New York and Brixton in London. In time tourists and exotica hunters bought into the myth of this “African fabric,” with its bright, decorative patterns and flowing, open-ended forms.

But just how African is this fabric, this mark of African identity and black authenticity, this cipher of uniqueness and difference? As Shonibare observed in an essay for *Seen/Unseen*, the irony of this African fabric is that it is in fact only “a colonial construction, as its origins can be traced from Indonesia to Holland (hence Dutch Wax), to Manchester (from where it is) then sold to Africa where indigenous variations on the fabric have been appropriated for local use.”<sup>11</sup> While for Westerners, including diaspora Africans, the obvious appeal of the fabric lay in its “authenticity,” Shonibare observed that this was only a fictive authenticity, whose functional principle was seduction (fig. 6). By appropriating this fabric, Africans were concerned with establishing a sophisticated mark of identity that derives from the multiple, global histories and trade routes that have given rise to Africa’s modernity. The matter of authenticity was not at all at issue, and would only arise as a figment of the Otherizing imagination and desires of the West in search of difference.

Shonibare was fascinated by the processes of seduction, the power of fiction, and the vulnerability of desire. *Double Dutch* takes its title from three

11. Yinka Shonibare, “Purloined Seduction,” in Olu Oguibe, *Seen/Unseen*, exh. cat. (Liverpool: Bluecoat Gallery, 1994), 15.

sources, including the British colloquialism for babble or incomprehensible talk and the fabric's Dutch origins. In the installation, Shonibare successfully seduced those who were attracted to the fabric because of its supposed "African" origin. However, his formal concerns were about the meaning and possibilities of painting at the end of the century. In the process, he drew attention to questions of perception, the ineluctable nature of identity, and the dangers of interpretation and mediated knowledge. He also brought ideologies of origin and purity under crisis. If fabric produced in Indonesia, printed in Holland, and marketed through Manchester could take on an African identity in the minds of adept seekers of authenticity, then notions and ideologies of authentic origin are nothing but nonsensical babble, after all.

The conceptual sophistication of Shonibare's game of seduction has made some uncomfortable. As Mercer observes, "English critics have come away from Shonibare's work feeling that it is not quite African enough."<sup>12</sup> This notwithstanding, he has continued to explore seduction and inauthenticity as central themes in his work. In recent installations he has created lush, make-believe Victorian parlors into which he inserts himself as a lone, black gentleman among white aristocrats, a character navigating the corridors of wealth and power in an era of intolerance (fig. 7). Shonibare's new tableaux are as fictional as they are historically grounded. His aristocratic settings belong as much to Victorian England as to Victorian Lagos, which, as records confirm, were not at all distinguishable one from the other. Shonibare digs as deep into his Nigerian heritage among the nobility of Lagos as he does into British history and eccentricities. In addition to these sources, his work is very much informed by his own experiences as a child in England in the 1960s and as a youth growing up in the funk-culture of urban Nigeria in the 1970s.

Shonibare is savvy and confident as he engages the spaces of the British mainstream, counting as much on his familiarity with it as on his sound grounding in contemporary Nigerian culture. At Goldsmiths College he became proficient in visual languages and discourses in the traditions of Conceptual and postmodern art, the core of his installations and projects, which in turn has made his work viable on the international scene. As a young artist brought up in the center, he ridicules demands for ethnic authenticity on his part, being no less British or Nigerian by fact of his ancestry or location. Nonetheless, he navigates that center with a strong awareness of the disadvantages that accrue from the fact of that ancestry, and the strength that it brings to his work.

It is tempting for those unfamiliar with the work of these artists to imagine that because they operate within the space of the international mainstream, their art must be different and distanced from their heritage. Likewise, some are inclined to imagine that insularity and protection from that mainstream guarantee faithfulness to tradition and claim to some form of authenticity. Nothing could be farther from the truth. As may be gleaned from this brief discussion, rather than distance themselves from their Nigerian heritage, these artists apply their knowledge of that heritage to their work, but on their own terms and not as a condition or imperative. It is not entirely fortuitous that two of the artists I have mentioned, Udé and Bamgboyé, both use

12. Kobena Mercer, "Art That Is Ethnic in Inverted Commas," *Frieze*, no. 25 (1995).

13. Jennifer Higgie, "Chris Ofili," *Frieze*, no. 42 (September–October 1998): 86–87.

14. I have addressed the obstacles that contemporary artists of African origin encounter on the international scene in my earlier essay, "Art, Identity, Boundaries: The Rome Lecture," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 3 (Fall–Winter 1995): 27–33.

orthographic signs in their names. It is a deliberate act of insistence on specificity and clear identity in the mire of a globalized world.

Even so, these artists do not perceive themselves as cultural ambassadors any more than do their Western contemporaries. They reject the burden of ancestry and ethnicity as a matter of fact. Having come through multiple cultural circumstances, they lay claim to the entirety of their experiences and consider themselves as much part of their societies of relocation as any others. Among their contemporaries, they suffer the peculiar affliction of never being discussed without some reference, no matter how benign, to their "stranger" status. Even the most sympathetic critics seem unable to avoid references to ethnicity when discussing their work. In an otherwise sympathetic review in *Frieze* in 1998, for instance, Jennifer Higgie is compelled to remind us that, though "of Nigerian descent, Chris Ofili is English [sic], and feels no more affinity with an African aesthetic than he does with the tradition of American or European painting."<sup>13</sup> Such defensiveness, which the artists themselves are often driven to, also, is situated in the context of the inherently treacherous and demanding nature of the terrain in which they find themselves.<sup>14</sup> To contend with such circumstances, these artists carry with them a pronounced sense of self-awareness and clarity, and determination to ensure that they are at home in the world.

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