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YINKA SHONIBARE

NANCY HYNES • JOHN PICTON

RE-DRESSING HISTORY

NANCY HYNES

In the fall of 2000 Yinka Shonibare had a solo show at Camden Art Centre, an installation piece in "Intelligence: New British Art" at Tate Britain, and a digital work in the new Welcome Wing of the Science Museum. Suddenly, he seemed to be everywhere in London. And his reach wasn't limited to Britain. He had solo shows in New York and, in 2001, in Rome and Johannesburg. He had a piece in the notorious "Sensation" exhibition and recently won an honorable mention at the Venice Biennale. His work is eye-catching, excessive, often beautiful—but why the interest in Shonibare, and why now?

Part of the answer lies in the increased range of his art and the sophistication of his manipulation of popular icons. His work has expanded in subject matter and media over the past three years, leading to a significant body of paintings, photographs, installations, and semisurrealistic objects which comment with wit and humor on themes of history, identity, and fantasy. Sometimes he plays with scale—Jane Austen and the Brontes are presented as figurines on a tabletop, toying with their position as "giants of literature" (Fig. 3)—and sometimes with race, as in the image of the black footballers repeated throughout the fabrics used to furnish his elaborate *Victorian Philanthropist's Parlour* (Figs. 1, 2), or the café-au-lait-colored skin on the huntsmen in the installation *Hound* (Figs. 4–6). He often uses "African" fabrics in his paintings and installations, ethnicizing in unexpected places, startling the viewer into asking, "Why are the spacemen wearing this?" and then, a moment later, "Why not?"

For Shonibare, the cloth is an apt metaphor for the entangled relationship between Africa and Europe and how the two continents have invented each other, in ways currently overlooked or deeply buried. The basic historical joke is that while the fabric (sometimes referred to as Dutch Wax) looks "African" and is of the sort often worn to indicate black pride in Brixton or Brooklyn, it is, in fact, printed fabric based on Indonesian batik, manufactured in the Netherlands, Britain, and other countries (including some in west Africa) and then exported to west Africa, where it is a popular, but foreign, commodity. The implication, then, is that nothing is as authentic as it may seem.

This cloth has proved to be a rich and adaptable material, both literally and

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1. *Victorian Philanthropist's Parlour*, 1996–97. Reproduction furniture, fire screen, carpet, props, printed cotton textile designed by the artist; dimensions vary according to installation, approx. 2.6m x 5.3m x 4.88m (103" x 209" x 192"). Commissioned by London Printworks. Collection of Eileen and Peter Norton, Santa Monica, California. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.

Opposite page:

2. Detail from *Victorian Philanthropist's Parlour* showing a textile designed by the artist.

metaphorically. It is flexible—it can be molded and stapled into many forms, painted upon, dressed up or down, used to line walls or cover furniture—and it is rich in color and design—one can choose from thousands of designs and color combinations, with numerous historical references. Shonibare's ironic use of this printed "African" fabric, combined with Victorian signifiers ranging from overstuffed parlor furniture to corsetted dresses to a hunting party, has become a signature mark. What is African? What is European? Who creates and consumes these identities?

But his work did not always take such a postmodern tack. Shonibare was born in Britain, but moved with his parents to Nigeria when he was three. Returning to Britain from Lagos at the age of seventeen, he started art school as a painter. He explains that his interest in identity began while studying at Byam Shaw. At one point, Shonibare became quite taken with *perestroika* in the Soviet Union and made a series of works on this theme. An art tutor, upon seeing the series, told him that the work "didn't reflect himself very much." Shonibare went home and won-

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dered what this meant, who that "me" could be. "I'm a citizen of the world, I watch television," he explains, "so I make work about these things."[1] Then he realized what the tutor was after: he wanted to see some element of Shonibare's identity as an African in his work.

Shonibare went on to make a series of paintings playing with these notions of identity by placing images of "African" objects from the British Museum next to those of "modern" domestic appliances, taken from an Argos catalogue. An Ife head next to a coffee maker; a Lega stool beside a telephone. "Which is me?" he asked, writing essays and creating artworks that took apart taken-for-granted notions of identity. His approach was to question identity rather than celebrate it, to tease out signifiers and toy with them mockingly. He explains that his attitude at the time was "All right, if you want African, the kind of primitive stereotype, then I will give it to you" (interview with the author, 1995).

After finishing his first degree at Byam Shaw, Shonibare completed an M.A. at Goldsmiths College, London University, the influential art school that has been home to so many of the currently fashionable young British artists, or YBAs. At Goldsmiths, known for its emphasis on conceptual work and theory, he read Foucault and Derrida. This, he insists, was very important for his work. Their approach to the deconstruction of categories, the structural problem of signifier and signified, and the idea of a power structure created through various systems of signification gave Shonibare a powerful interpretive framework for his personal experiences as an artist from the African continent living and working in London. This background led him to a visual practice that deliberately incorporated common signifiers of "Africanness" in order to deconstruct them. One of these signifiers, as Shonibare notes in an interview I conducted in 1996, is cloth:

> *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* by Magritte, is important for understanding my work. You know how his piece presents a pipe and then says it is not a pipe. You can't smoke it. Sometimes people confuse representation for what it represents. But they are not that physical thing, they don't exist in the world in that way. So if you see a woman walking down a road and she's wearing African cloth, you might think—now there's African-ness, true Africanity. But that cloth, those clothes, are not African-ness.

Shonibare began using African-print textiles in the early 1990s. He first used the cloth to replace canvas, stretching squares of various printed fabrics across square frames of different sizes, and arranging them in a grid on the gallery wall. Then he painted flat surfaces onto the fabrics, both on the sides and on the face, blurring the distinction between canvas and frame. The result was very deadpan, slick, and minimal. An early work in this style won Shonibare a Barclay's Young Artist Award in 1992, which led to a group exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in London (and his first review in *African Arts;* see Court 1993).

Then he decided to push the notion of the exotic further, by using what he describes as "excessive" colors and paint. The pieces were mounted on a wall that was itself painted a bright color, thus both marking the white cube of the gallery and emphasizing the patterns of the textiles themselves. Now he added thick daubs of paint to the front of the panels, sometimes to the sides, using heavy impasto and deliberately crude designs. He explains that he "took out all the subtlety, and I decided that I would be deliberately primitive and exotic. Because within the 'civilized' setting, one is supposed to be restrained and not go overboard" (interview with the author, 1996).[2]

The artist has continued to develop this style of painting, experimenting with scale and color in pieces like *Feather Pink* (1997), *Deep Blue* (1997), *Baby Blue* (1998),[3] and, most recently, *100 Years* (Figs. 7, 8). The painted patterns seem uncannily to be literal representations of the printed designs without actually being so; they echo their shapes and visual rhythms to mesmerizing effect. They also turn both art historical and social categories upside down. Shonibare presents the modernist heroic canvas—the huge rectangle painted on the wall, within which multiples are arranged, is the size of a Rothko or a Jasper Johns—but then breaks it up into little pieces. He uses "ethnic" cloth, but it is an industrial, mass-produced, modern product; the paint then becomes the handmade, personal, and "primitive." The pieces are minimalist yet excessive. It is perhaps no surprise that he admires the work of British artist Helen Chadwick, who took signifiers of femininity and pushed them to an extreme. Her huge vats of melted chocolate, shown at the Serpentine Gallery in the mid-1990s, were both seductive and nauseating.

Shonibare's developing intellectual critique was informed by his own experience of physical disability. At the age of nineteen, while doing a foundation course at the Wimbledon School of Art, he contracted a viral infection that left him completely paralyzed for a month and in a wheelchair for three years. Although able to get about, he has impaired mobility, including limited use of his left side. This, he insists, made him both more determined and more creative as an artist: "Historically the people who made huge, unbroken modernist paintings, were middle-class white American men. I don't have that physique; I can't make that work. So I fragmented it, in a way which made it both physically manageable and emphasizes the political critique" (conversation with the author, August 2000).

In the mid-1990s Shonibare began playing with the fabrics on other surfaces. In *Sun, Sea and Sand* (1995; see ills. in Ikon Gallery 1999:12–13), hundreds of small bowls were wrapped with textiles and arranged on the floor, creating an Op Art effect. From bowls he moved to fashioning elaborate, late-nineteenth-century Victorian dresses and corsets from African-print textiles. Sometimes the dresses were fixed to the floor, as if on a mannequin, and sometimes suspended from the ceiling, as if illustrating an imagined passage from Marquez. Shonibare's first piece in this style, *How Does a Girl Like You, Get to Be a Girl Like You?* (Figs. 9, 10), was shown in the 1995 "Art of African Textiles" at the Barbican Gallery, London. Purchased by Charles Saatchi, it later appeared in "Sensation," the notorious exhibition based on Saatchi's collection (at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1997 and the Brooklyn Art Museum in 1999).

The Victorian era, with its heady mix of empire and colonialism, corruption and constraint, provided a rich source of material. One of the most impressive pieces of this period is *Victorian Philanthropist's Parlour* (Fig. 1), created in collaboration with London Printworks. A parody of "period" rooms in museums, the work presents a late-nineteenth-century parlor with a twist—the fabrics covering the opulent furniture, walls, and draperies are printed with the repeated motif of black footballers. The artist designed the fabric himself, and the historical ironies are impossible to resist, as is the work's inherent theatricality. With the external walls deliberately left rough and unfinished, it feels like a stage set where the cast has gone out for a cigarette. And it begs for a script. Who would live here? Is this the home of an "African" Victorian, or of a Victorian who has made her or his fortune from Africa?

For a while, Shonibare's installation work seemed defined by this union of African-print fabrics with the Victorian period, and perhaps limited by it. However, by the late 1990s, his subject matter had expanded to include aliens and astronauts, along with elaborate spoofs of classic European high culture, from Hogarth and Fragonard to Jane Austen. New themes were introduced, such as the nuclear family (Fig. 11), and familiar themes were explored in new contexts, such as the colonial aspects of space travel. At the same time Shonibare began experimenting with a wider variety of media, including several photographic series (which he directed but did not shoot) and digital work.

This increased range of material and method has allowed the artist to make witty yet pointed political critiques across

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a spectrum of cultural concerns. He has long been intrigued by Surrealism, particularly the Surrealist approach to objects. Some of his early direct nods to Surrealist objects didn't quite work. *Cha Cha Cha* (1997), a pair of women's shoes covered in African-print fabric and lined with luxurious yellow velvet which refers to the famous *Ma gouvernant* (1936), seemed more Vivienne Westwood than Meret Oppenheim (Hynes 1998a). But moving away from fashioning garments to fashioning figures, whether alien or human, real or imagined, has strengthened Shonibare's juxtapositions. And his widening range of themes has allowed him to continue putting the African-print cloth in novel contexts, keeping the ironic incongruities fresh. The resulting tableaux grow closer to the Surrealist's aim of the "chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table," although his work may perhaps always be too studied to capture the spirit of chance.

As Shonibare's range has grown, so his use of the cloth has become increasingly sophisticated. What began as a seemingly one-line joke, similar to Chris Ofili's[4] initial use of dung, has grown into something more subtle and complex. The careful eye is rewarded with visual puns and playful, ironic detail; the jokes are now as multilayered as the petticoats of a bustled dress. In *Cloud 9* (Fig. 12) the flag being planted on the moon by an astronaut wearing a spacesuit made of "African" fabric is not a national flag but a flag of suburbia, a textile printed with motifs of cars and box houses. It could be America in the 1950s or the French colonial period of Babar the elephant—a celestial Celesteville. The piece wryly reminds of the links between colonization and exploration, and gently mocks the American dream of the final frontier while also allowing room for black aspiration. In *Vacation* (Fig. 13), which shows two adults and two children in spacesuits (complete with backpacks) on holiday, the umbrellas on the printed fabric of the adult's spacesuits are a sly reference to Surrealism.

The artist's ability to select significant cultural images and give them a postcolonial twist has sharpened. Some of the criticisms implied in his art historical tableaux are particularly cutting. In *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews Without Their Heads* (1998; see ill. in Ikon Gallery 1999:42–43), Shonibare restaged the famous painting by Gainsborough, but the figures are dressed in African-print cloth and shown without either their estate (no landscape as backdrop) or their heads.[6] In *The Swing* (Cover), exhibited in a recent show at the Stephen Friedman Gallery in London, he reinterpreted a famous work by the eighteenth-century French painter Fragonard. This piece accentuates the erotic charge of Fragonard's painting, positioning the viewer so that one literally looks up the young woman's skirts as she swings, one shoe flying. In her richly patterned, brightly colored gown, made of "African" textiles, she is beautiful and seductive—a ripe fruit on the verge of rotting. Where the body gracefully leans back in seeming abandon, and one expects to see a smiling, enraptured face, it ends. A metaphor for a powerful and decadent era? A postcolonial transformation of a famously individual figure into the faceless (and now headless) "native"? Or a reference to department-store mannequins: the female as fashion victim, and the painting as fashion plate? Shonibare, as always, leaves us guessing.

The lack of heads in *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews*, *The Swing*, and other works such as *Victorian Couple* (Fig. 14) is startling; it depersonalizes the figures, which become similar to dressmakers' dummies, and hints at postcolonial revenge. Only aliens and humans wearing space suits and helmets retain their heads. But even here, the heads are not visible, since the visors are blacked over. This creates a tantalizing ambiguity; a Black British guard at the Tate Britain confessed to me that he once became so curious that he tried to pry up a helmet to see underneath (but failed). In this

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3. *19th Century Kids: Emily Bronte, Mary Shelley*, 2000. Dutch Wax cotton textile, fiberglass figures, wooden tables; height (with table) approx. 165cm (67"). *Bronte:* Collection of Eileen and Peter Norton; *Shelley:* Collection Billiton SA, Ltd. In "Yinka Shonibare" at Camden Arts Centre, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery.

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way, Shonibare's tableaux seem a ghostly inversion of George Segal's work: what is most interesting is not the body alone, but what the body becomes wrapped in.

One of Shonibare's ongoing strengths is his ability to suggest narrative and characters without containing them. Although often linked to colonialism and identity, his pieces are not defined by this connection. "I hate conclusive things," insists Shonibare. "I think once a piece is conclusive, it's dead. The mind should be allowed to travel and have fantasy and imagination. People's minds need to wander" (in Hynes 1998b:15). This suggestiveness gives his work an accessibility and popular appeal rare in contemporary art. It also manages a sophisticated linking of narrative—albeit multiple narratives—with the highly conceptual.

The theatricality of Shonibare's work has been enhanced by his move into photography, with its references to television and cinema. Shot "on location" in an English stately home with a cast of actors and actresses, *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* (1999; see ills. in Ikon Gallery 1999:46–49) uses a series of five photographs to depict a day in the life of an imaginary dandy (played by Shonibare himself).[6] The luridly colored photographs, hung in large, gilded frames, play upon Hogarth's *Rake's Progress* and ubiquitous English costume dramas. Here Shonibare's theatrical sense becomes almost filmic—the shots look like stills from a movie set. A single image from the series was displayed in London underground stations, and at first glance it looked like a film poster. But for whose film? A biopic on some recently discovered historical figure, or a fictional fantasy?

In the recent piece *Dorian Gray* (Fig. 15), Shonibare delves into the darker side of the dandy. The literary and filmic references are more direct in this series of twelve large photographs (based on a 1945 screen adaptation, directed by Albert Lewin, of the novel by Oscar Wilde) than in *Diary*. The images are shot entirely in black and white; color enters the series only in the photograph depicting Gray's physical degeneration. He stands in horror, looking at himself in the mirror, a figure with suddenly wild, graying hair and rotting skin. Yet in Shonibare's retelling it is the death of the painter, not of the painting, that removes Gray from high society and leads

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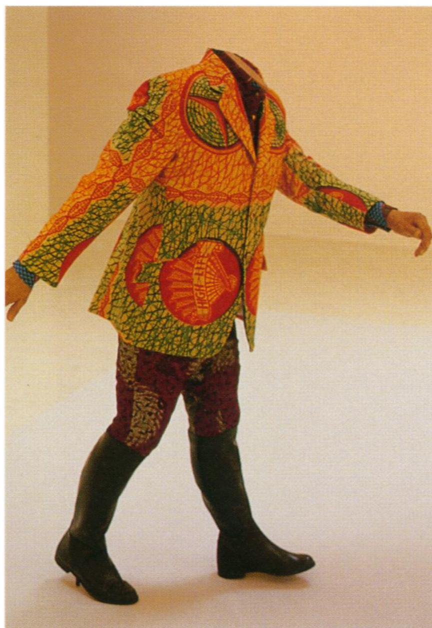
to his physical transformation and death. The artist's casting of himself as Gray leads to intriguing speculation on the identity of the painter, who is white (as is everyone else depicted—except Shonibare). Is he part of Shonibare himself or a metonym for the contemporary art world that is currently so eager to embrace him?

Shonibare links the increased scope of his projects to his winning a Paul Hamlyn Foundation award in 1998. The £30,000 prize led him to more research, new ideas, and an impressive range of new work. The painting *100 Years,* made up of a hundred separate pieces, is the largest he has yet attempted. He also tried ambitious projects in new media. Among these, in addition to *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* and *Dorian Gray,* is *Effective, Defective, Creative* (2000), his piece for the Welcome Wing of the Science Museum in London. The result of research with fifteen pregnant women, it displays digitized images of eleven unborn fetuses, with the words "effective," "defective," and "creative" flashing in bright colors across them.[7]

Shonibare has clearly mastered a wide variety of visual idioms. The figures in his installations are reminiscent of Victorian fashion plates, Nigerian masqueraders, low-budget sci-fi films and shop-floor mannequins. Costume dramas, bug-eyed aliens, sportsmen, and spacemen are reinvented in his complex, imaginative tableaux, fed by a childhood in Lagos spent watching the Muppets and "Upstairs, Downstairs" on television. He has a knack for choosing key cultural images and giving them a sharp twist. "If you've actually lived in two cultures," he explains, "you know that there are subtle things that are read differently. If you know them, you can choose to play on these things, titillate them, deliberately be camp" (interview with the author, 1995).

But this does not mean that Shonibare or his work should be interpreted as some sort of cultural translator/translation between separate worlds; rather, it suggests that his pieces can and should be read for his skillful playing with multiple cultural norms and visual references. Throughout his career he has participated in exhibitions with explicitly British, African, or international themes. In 1995–96 Shonibare had a piece in the Barbican's "Art of African Textiles" exhibition and a painting in a show in Chelsea devoted to contemporary responses to British Op Art in general and Bridget Riley in particular. The following year he participated in the Sydney Biennale. In 2001 he has a piece in the "African" pavilion at the Venice Biennale and will also, in collaboration with the Philadelphia Fabric Workshop, rebuild the *Gemini 6* spacecraft in a project called *Space Walk.*



JOHN PICTON

Shonibare says he has sometimes felt pressure to "be black" in his work—a stereotyped blackness, based on notions of the primitive and the exotic that are very similar to, but not exactly the same as, notions of "African-ness." At a gallery talk in London, a young Black British woman asked him if he had a problem with being black. He replied that he didn't have a problem with being black, but he did have a problem with other people's ideas of what being black should mean for his work. Shonibare explained that as an artist one works from one's own personal experience, which for him included being "an African living in Britain," but that he struggled against "any preconceived notions of what I might do as a black painter."[8] Early in his career, he accepted such terms as African, Nigerian, or Black British "as long as they are not used as a means of fixing me....I don't feel that I am location-less or colourless because, if I do, I am immediately denying myself very fundamental aspects of my on visibility....I don't subscribe to the notion of anonymity" (interview with Clementine Déliss, March 6, 1992). Often in his work he uses his knowledge of these various categories of "identity"—African, European, British, Nigerian, black, modern, primitive—to play them off each other and, ultimately, undermine any notion of a fixed, essential identity.[9]

The hundred fragments in *100 Years* are composed of textiles stretched into multiple minirectangles arranged on a grid and hung within a large rectangle painted directly onto the gallery wall. The panels are painted on the front, on the sides, or not at all, giving them an improvised, personal feel incongruous to the modernist grid. The effect is visually stunning—the eye plays with planes, moving inside and out in a shimmering shift reminiscent of Bridget Riley but with more depth, both visually (the pieces stand out from the wall) and metaphorically. Shonibare's ability to suggest pattern and affinity—in the arrangement of the panels, in the choice of textiles, and in the painted motifs—where none formally exists is remarkable. They are a deliberately random mix, yet the overall effect is coherent and intensely beautiful. Perhaps this is the "identity" we should be aiming for in the twenty-first century—an eclectic, self-mocking, part handmade, part industrial, fantastical thing; a formally ordered yet very personal improvisation, with some elements that are self-chosen and others imposed by stereotypes or the whim of history. □

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4. *Hound,* 2000. Four fiberglass dogs and fox, Dutch Wax cotton textile, three life-size mannequins; 960cm x 397cm x 170cm (378" x 156" x 67"). Collection of Eileen and Peter Norton. In "Yinka Shonibare" at Camden Arts Centre, London, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.

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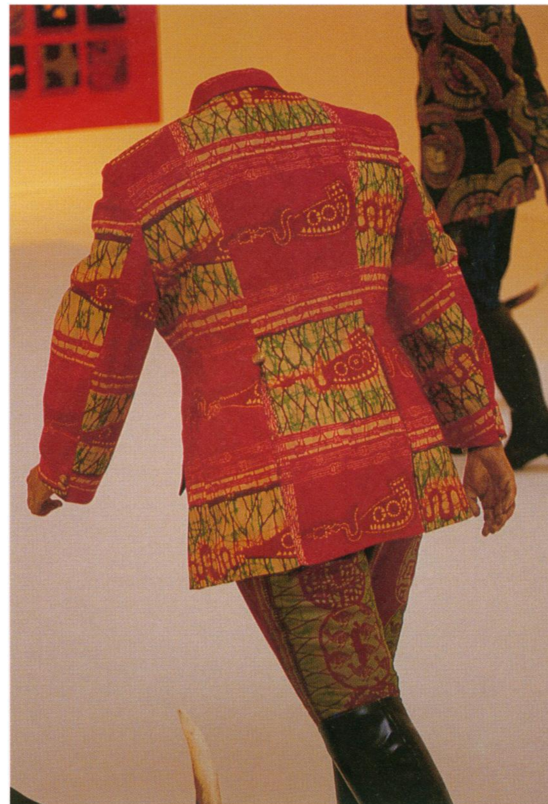
Left: 5. Detail of *Hound* showing a figure wearing the Dutch Wax textile "High Life" designed by Vlisco.

Right: 6. Detail of *Hound* showing a figure wearing the Dutch Wax textile "Staff of Kingship" designed by Vlisco and based on an Asante sword in the British Museum (Ethno 1896.5-19.4).



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Undressing Ethnicity

JOHN PICTON

The comfort of knowing which side of the fence you are is being constantly thrown.

(Shonibare 1992)

....his work tricks the mind, by first making it comfortable with its own contradiction, innocence, and ignorance, and then by quickly deflating those sentiments.

(Enwezor 1999:8)

Shonibare's work registers the invalidity of borders....He subverts notions of traditionality through parody...

(Oguibe in Enwezor 1999:11)

Over the past ten years Yinka Shonibare, an artist of Nigerian origin working in Britain, has achieved a very considerable measure of international success.[1] I am interested in examining some aspects of his work and in showing how that work can be seen to address the taken-for-granted status of ethnic categorization in the literature on African art. My title is an obvious play on "Dressing Down," the name of Shonibare's 1999 retrospective exhibition at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, England (see Ikon Gallery 1999). I first met the artist at a talk he gave at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, early in 1992.[2] Later that same year we saw his installation at the Serpentine Gallery (see Shonibare 1992; Court 1993); but the story as presented here begins in Chicago in February 2000.

Kathleen Bickford Berzock had invited me to the Art Institute of Chicago to participate in "In Context, In Depth: A Symposium about Yoruba Art and the William B. Fagg Photographic Archive." She organized this event to celebrate the Institute's acquisition of two sculptures by Areogun of Osi-Ilorin (see Picton 1984a, b) and a set of William Fagg's field photographs. I arrived in Chicago with a day or so to spare, and after visiting the Yoruba display, a first-rate installation of sculpture and masquerade, with Fagg's photography, I was taken to see the set of photographs by Yinka Shonibare entitled *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*. They were not on show in the Yoruba or Africa galleries but in rooms devoted to contemporary art; not "contemporary African art" (with all due respect, only the National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C., has been that daring) but "contemporary" as understood in an international sense. That usage in reality means Europe and America, though Latin America just about makes it in these days, and there is the occasional visitor from Japan, India, and South Africa.[3] The Shonibare photographs were on loan on the recommendation of Okwui Enwezor, who is, among many other things, an adjunct curator of contemporary art at the Institute.

In the other gallery I had just seen photographs of Yoruba people and things, taken by an Englishman, that provided a necessary element of the documentary requirements of the sculpture and masquerade on display in the context of museum ethnography. In this gallery I saw photographs of an English household, a fiction authored by a Yoruba man, that provided for the exposure of one of the secrets of nineteenth-century English prosperity and leisure: their dependence upon the hidden presence and work of black and African people. This exposure was achieved, of course, by Shonibare himself, placed within the picture as the dandy.

What was I to make of all this? Was it yet one more example of the wholly unsatisfactory split between "traditional" and "contemporary" (see Picton 1992)? Or was it rather that "Africa" and "Yoruba" (Yinka Shonibare is, after all, a Yoruba name) have the power to transcend the limitations of categories? Or had west Africa now been admitted to the Citadel of Modernism (Araeen 1989:16)?[4] Local modernisms and modernities[5] had been put in place in west Africa since the 1850s and throughout the twentieth century, pioneered in Freetown by the African American photographer Augustus Washington (1820–1875) (Viditz-Ward 1999; Willis 2000) and in Lagos by the painter Aina Onabolu (1882–1963) (Fosu 1986). The problem for me was that I knew enough to bring Shonibare and Areogun together as both (what we now call) Yoruba, and yet the connection I perceived was not obvious within the works themselves. Perhaps the confusion was wholly mine. Is there, indeed, any necessary connection between the art and life of a late-twentieth-century modern city such as Lagos (where Shonibare spent his childhood) and of a village a generation or two earlier and close to the northeast margin of what we now call the Yoruba-speaking region? There are no simple answers to any of these questions.

Photographs from *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, curated and produced by the Institute of International Visual Arts, had been seen on station walls throughout the London "tube" during October 1998. At the same time (see Atha 1998) the Tabernacle Gallery in west London exhibited an installation by Shonibare entitled *Alien Obsessives: Mum, Dad and the Kids* (Fig. 16), which interrogated assumptions about the normative status of the nuclear family.[7] The figures, derived from science-fiction movies, were made up of the African-print fabric the artist first used in his 1992 Serpentine installation.[8] Following a talk that he gave during the *Alien Obsessives* show, he was asked by a heavily dreadlocked man: "Where is Africa in your work?" Shonibare's response was bold, indeed shockingly so: "I don't give a toss about Africa!" He immediately qualified this by insisting that his work was not about Africa, that it could not be seen in Africa as it was in Europe and America. When Shonibare used African-print fabric during his participation in the 1995 Tenq workshop in Dakar, Senegal, his studio assistant protested that people could have been wearing the cloth. Shonibare's response was to return to the market and purchase some more, which he then gave to his assistant to distribute as he thought fit. In other words, his work was about being in London; and as such, it was concerned (among other things) with the deconstruction of stereotypes, most especially of black and African people in the so-called West with its insidious liking for the essentialized identities, ethnic as well as continental, that still hang about within the threefold legacy of racism, slavery, and colonialism.[9]

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Yinka Shonibare is Yoruba, but it does not follow that he is to be classified as a Yoruba artist; conversely, the fact that he is Yoruba and Nigerian does not make him any the less British. Indeed, being Nigerian and Yoruba is how he is British. My argument here is, of course, that the attribution of ethnicity to works of art is inherently problematic. The artist said as much (Shonibare 1992) when asked by Clémentine Deliss about the categorical terms that might be used of him and his work:

> I spoke of wanting my work to be local, to contain specificity, enabling someone to locate something in the work....At the same time, I create a space in which one can manoeuvre....I accept all those terms if they are simply shortcuts to describing my origin and as

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Top: 7. *100 Years,* 2000. 100 panels, emulsion, acrylic on Dutch Wax cotton textile, painted wall; each panel 30cm x 30cm (12" x 12"). Collection of Michael Lynne, U.S.A. In "Yinka Shonibare" at Camden Arts Centre, London, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery.

Bottom: 8. Detail of *100 Years* showing Dutch Wax fabrics designed by Vlisco.

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Top: 9. *How Does a Girl Like You, Get to Be a Girl Like You?*, 1995. Wax-print and fancy-print cotton cloth, some possibly of Japanese manufacture, tailored by Sian Lewis; height approx. 168cm (66"). In "The Art of African Textiles" at the Barbican Art Gallery, London, 1995. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery.

Bottom: 10. Detail of *How Does a Girl Like You, Get to Be a Girl Like You?* showing the "Staff of Kingship" pattern on the overskirt.

Opposite page:

11. *Disfunctional Family*, 1999. Wax-printed cotton textile, glass, armature; tallest figure approx. 150cm (59"). Collection of Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis. In "Yinka Shonibare" at Camden Arts Centre, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery.

> long as they are not used as a means of fixing me. I believe that visibility is extremely important. I don't feel that I am location-less or colour-less because if I do, I am immediately denying myself very fundamental aspects of my own visibility. I don't subscribe to the notion of anonymity.[10]

Shonibare's life history to date has described a pattern of transhumance taking in both Lagos, where he lived and went to school as a child; and London, where he was born, where he pursued his undergraduate and graduate studies, and where he now lives and works. Shonibare is Yoruba, but to look for evidence of some quintessential Yoruba (and African) signifying practice in his work is to misunderstand and oversimplify the complexity and sophistication manifest in the working through of questions of identity-and-difference in his personal trajectory and current circumstances. It would also misunderstand and oversimplify the intentions and presuppositions entailed in art making in general.[11]

Shonibare is currently one of the more successful British artists of his generation internationally. It would be absurd to suppose that the latter is not in some sense predicated upon the former, even as his work resists inscription within the rubrics of a Yoruba ethnicity, and even though that ethnicity was forged in the contestation of colonial rule in the period since 1850. I shall return to this below, for Yoruba ethnicity is among the markers of a local modernity, in common with photography, easel painting, and the Brazilian-style architecture that provided Yoruba people with built form that was modern yet not colonial (Picton 1995c:78). One could also make the point that the need for an identification with Africa was forged in the diasporic contestations of the practices and legacies of slavery. Shonibare's work, however,

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resists inscription within both an essentialized "Africa" and an essentialized "Yoruba," even as Lagos and London are among the elements of a trajectory brought to bear upon the processes of his art making.

Colonial rule had made possible the continuity of access to the cheap labor and raw materials that were once the context and justification for transatlantic slavery, and it also worked to encourage a demand within the local markets of west Africa for artifacts industrially produced in Europe. All this contributed to the foundations of European imperial prosperity that some people could waste through dressing up, gambling, carousing, and so forth. Whether directly, as domestic servants, manual laborers and tradesmen (usually of slave descent), or indirectly within the colonial territories, black and African peoples were there, hidden from sight by the circumstances of their place. Shonibare's exposure of that hidden presence in *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* continues in photography a thematic development that followed on from the success of his use of African-print fabrics:

As he said at that time (Shonibare 1992), his use of these textiles

> refers to the experience of the urban African artist...and these fabrics are industrially manufactured. They contain motifs on them from alphabets to footballs and are reproduced over and over again. I want to incorporate this symptom of commodification into my work...there is a deliberate denial of the authentic in this installation. The fabrics are bought from shops and they do not correspond to the primitivist expressionism epitomized by the Nigerian Oshogbo school of the 1960s....I would like to do more with African fabrics because I find them very engaging.

African-print fabric is perhaps the classic example of an industrial product developed in Europe for which an African demand had to be generated. In 1992 Shonibare stretched several short lengths on frames and then painted out either the edges or the front, thereby partially obliterating, denying, the identity of the cloths themselves. He explained (Shonibare 1992):

> The problem is that of trying to introduce, in a conscious way, other areas of knowledge into what one is doing, so that the work doesn't become hermetic, purely referencing itself, about itself, about the object....At the same time, there is a very obvious reference to the cultural significance of pattern and the area of popular culture....You can identify relationships but there is no attempt to be didactic....Presenting different points of negotiation interests me a lot, for although the image may be localized and mean certain recognizable things, the viewer is given the possibility of several narratives....That also helps to avoid fixing meaning in a binary or oppositional way. I create two sides of the coin which you can constantly negotiate....In fact there are many more, three, five, six, seven points through which you can negotiate the content of a piece. The comfort of knowing which side of the fence you are is being constantly thrown...

STEVEN WHITE

Yet the history of these textiles identifies a west African capacity for the subversion of European intention; and this realization has made these cloths so apt a continuing medium for Shonibare's work. It is also fair to suggest that as our knowledge of their history and patterning has developed, so too his use of these fabrics has become more knowing, and more pointed, but only occasionally and never as if they were no more than an overworked cliché. In 1992 his coincidental use of a given pattern allowed some of us to "read" the work in a manner that enhanced our curiosity while misleading us in our perceptions of his intentions. The artist set us straight (Shonibare 1992):

> The South African artist Pitika Ntuli came to see the installation at the Serpentine Gallery and he picked out some Ghanaian Adinkra symbols. He knew what they meant and could talk about their meanings. Yet that is not the focus of the work....My work is not exclusively about the relations between cultural signs and their reception but much more to do with the art-ness of the objects in relationship to the art context.[12]

Shonibare's interest in using African-print fabric remains primarily with their generic formal attributes as a hybrid and subversive outcome of a fortuitous late-nineteenth-century engagement between Indonesia, west Africa, and a Europe intent upon colonial rule; and as his work has come to address an ever-widening set of stereotypes (as in *Alien Obsessives*) the fabric remains an effective medium because of its generic status. Moreover, this effectiveness is enhanced by the fact that whereas at first Shonibare used both wax-print and the cheaper fancy-print cloths (see below), and without distinguishing between cloths produced in European, African, and Asian factories, in more recent work he has tended to restrict his use to the Dutch Wax cloths which are both the most richly textured and the most costly.

African-print fabrics emerged in the nineteenth-century Dutch attempt to undercut Indonesian batik production

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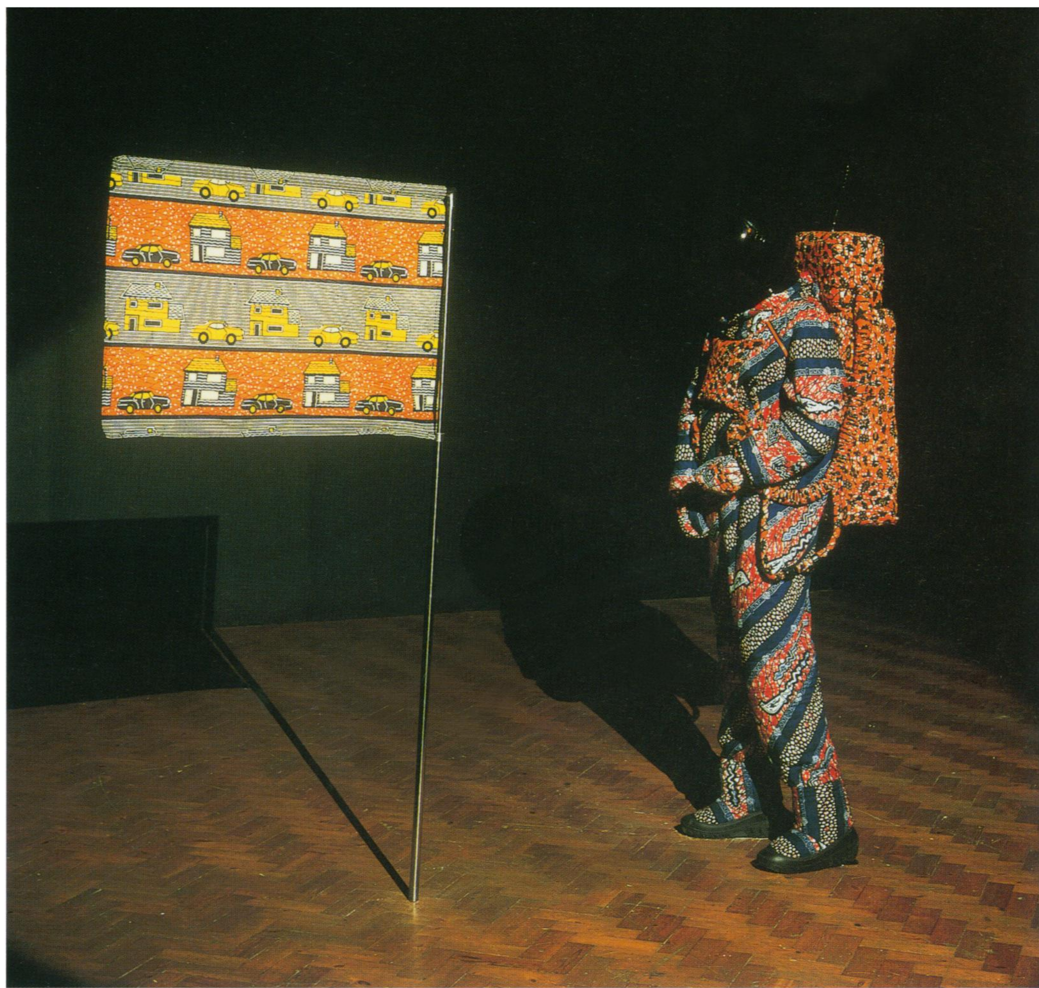
through the mechanization of the wax-resist process (see Picton 1995a, 2001). This is why they were called Dutch Wax or Wax Print. No wax has in fact been anywhere near them: they are resist-dyed fabrics, but the resist agent is resin, printed at high temperature on each face of the cloth.[13] The Indonesians rejected these fabrics because of the unacceptable quality of their veining and spotting, but these very imperfections found favor on the colonial Gold Coast. In any case, here was a textile that was both exotic and modern without being European. Though produced in Europe, it manifested an aesthetic which was clearly of no appeal there. Moreover, almost as soon as the Gold Coast became the most profitable market for these cloths, local sensibilities began to creep in, most obviously in the visualization of proverbs that is so well known a feature of the aesthetic of Twi-speaking peoples. The earliest dated cloth is the still-popular "Hands and Fingers" pattern, which was in production by 1895. In Ghana it is called "The Palm of the Hand Is Sweeter Than the Back of the Hand," for the palm is where we hold on to good fortune as represented by the twelve pennies of the old English shilling (Picton 1995a:27).[14]

"Staff of Kingship" is another still-popular pattern, its design based upon a



FIGS. 12, 13: AHLBURG KEATE PHOTOGRAPHY

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Opposite page:

Top: 12. *Cloud 9*, 1999–2000. Dutch Wax cotton textile, fiberglass figure, helmet, flagpole, flag; astronaut 212cm (83.5"). Neuberger Berman Collection, New York. In "Yinka Shonibare" at Camden Arts Centre, London, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery.

Bottom: 13. *Vacation*, 2000. Wax-printed cotton textile, fiberglass; tallest figure approx. 152.5cm (60"). Hans Bogatzke Collection. In "Intelligence: New British Art 2000" at Tate Britain, London, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery.

This page:

14. *Victorian Couple*, 1999. Wax-printed cotton textile; taller figure approx. 153cm (60"). Collection of Susan and Lewis Manilow, Chicago. In "Yinka Shonibare" at Camden Arts Centre, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery.

AHLBURG KEATE PHOTOGRAPHY

wrought-iron sword captured from the Asante (see Phillips 1995:434) and acquired by the British Museum in 1896, the year Prempeh I was sent into exile. We have documentary evidence that this pattern was in production by 1904 (Picton 1995a:25). I suggest that the early establishment of its popularity through almost a hundred years can be attributed to its once subversive implications, surely an unwitting and unintended consequence of its selection by those who did not realize the implications of its very specificity. By incorporating a captured sword, a well-publicized image in its day, the designers of the Haarlem Cotton Company had made a cloth that would remind Gold Coast people of the wars fought over access to Asante gold, resulting in the British defeat of the Asante nation and the profits to be had in Britain thereby. Perhaps the very wearing of this cloth gave Gold Coast people an opportunity to register their opposition to the colonial pretense to authority. They could quietly flaunt their regard for a local authority even if, for a while, its preeminent figure was languishing in exile. Now colonial rule is long gone, but the cloths remain popular.[15]

Thus, *How Does a Girl Like You, Get to Be a Girl Like You?* (Fig. 9) was produced by Shonibare in response to a commission from the Barbican Art Gallery for its 1995 textile show.[16] Three late-Victorian women, headless as if to throw back to Europe the anonymity foisted upon Africans within colonial rule (and remember the painted-out designs of 1992), are dressed in African-print fabrics. Shonibare used both Wax and Fancy Prints, some probably of Japanese manufacture, including the "Staff of Kingship" (Fig. 10). Its appearance (Picton 1995b:141) together with hitherto unpublished evidence of its source (Picton 1995a:25) was happily fortuitous, as if to underscore the answer to Shonibare's question, *How Does a Girl Like You, Get to Be a Girl Like You?* This work was subsequently acquired by the Saatchi Collection, whence it appeared in "Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection" (Royal Academy 1997:164–65).

Shonibare later addressed another well-known if bizarre pursuit of the leisured elite: the use of dogs in chasing and killing wild animals. In *Hound*, first shown during the summer of 2000, at the Camden Arts Centre in north London (Figs. 4–6), three headless men in nineteenth-century dress made of the most costly Dutch Wax African-print cotton cloth, are following their dogs in pursuit of a fox. One of the hunters is dressed in "Staff of Kingship," and the cloth is mostly deep pink in color, a reference to Hunting Pink, the red cloth worn by English huntsmen. Another of the three figures wears a cloth patterned with the words "High Life," and immediately one thinks of the popular west African music of the 1950s and '60s initiated in Ghana, and of the leisure and luxury predicated upon the threefold inheritance of racism, slavery, and colonialism.[17]

Neither *Hound* nor *How Does a Girl Like You* is based upon a European art-historical prototype, unlike *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews Without Their Heads*, 1998 (though it includes fabric with the "Staircase to Heaven" pattern; see Ikon Gallery 1999:42–43), and one of his two most recent works, *The Swing* (Cover), based upon a Fragonard painting, and shown at the Stephen Friedman Gallery in April–May 2001.[18] In the longer run, of course, just as colonial rule was brought to an end, so too the leisure

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that it made possible for an elite class might be in the grasp of us all; but we should never forget those upon whose labor these possibilities were forged. Moreover, the headless figures in *Hound, Mr. and Mrs. Andrews,* and *The Swing* are distinctly swarthy (a term based upon the Anglo-Saxon for "black"), suggesting, further, the hidden facts of miscegenation, more covert than overt and more widespread than we recognize.[19]

Yinka Shonibare exposes hidden realities and challenges commonplace stereotypes with irony and gentle humor. Yet he does so as firmly and as thoroughly as Samuel Johnson, who, a century before, challenged imperial and colonial history with his *History of the Yorubas.* (Johnson was himself Yoruba, the child of Sierra Leone repatriates, and his research, though unpublished until 1921, was completed in the late nineteenth century.) Johnson used "Yoruba" to contest colonial history, thereby participating in the invention of that modern ethnicity, while Shonibare uses African-print fabric and photography to contest ethnic, racist, and other stereotypes. Whatever ethnicity might be, the problem lies with its essentialized all-embracing interpretation, and this must be put aside. Shonibare does not reject "Yoruba" as a badge of identity. It is rather that only he can identify the circumstances in which "Yoruba" is the relevant identity to be chosen. As I have previously suggested (Picton 1991), each of us, irrespective of labels and geographies, is the locus of several dimensions of identity-and-difference; and the manner in which we interpret the world by our placing of things in it to these (and other) ends is inevitably complex and negotiable, and never all of a piece. The categories are inherently labile.

The story now returns to Chicago. William Fagg had included Areogun of Osi-Ilorin among the sculptors to be celebrated in a never-to-be-written book entitled *Seven Yoruba Masters.* Yet the evidence suggests that until well toward the mid-twentieth century, in Ekiti and Opin (whence Areogun came) people used the word "Yoruba" not of themselves but of the Oyo kingdom and people. This is also the usage found in district officers' reports from Ekiti in the colonial period. Areogun would probably have denied he was Yoruba (if anyone had asked him). In any case, his work cannot be configured

This page:

15. Photograph no. 2 from the *Dorian Gray* series, 2001. 11 black-and-white resin prints, 1 digital lambda print; 122cm x 152.5cm (48" x 60") each. Edition of 5. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery.

Opposite page:

16. Detail of *Alien Obsessives: Mum, Dad and the Kids* showing one pair of the adult figures (taller approx. 160cm [63"]). The complete installation included two pairs of parents and two pairs of kids. Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. In "Alien Obsessives: Mum, Dad and the Kids" at the Tabernacle Gallery, London, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery.

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within the events that comprise the evolution of the modern sense of Yoruba ethnicity; and an identity as "Yoruba" is indeed precisely that: modern. It developed, in the manner in which we now know it, roughly between 1850 and 1950 through debates about language and literature, and about dress; through writing history; through an intellectual interest in mythic and ritual tradition, an interest that did not hamper widespread conversion to Islam and Christianity; and through education, journalism, and political action. The context was, most significantly, the tightening grip of colonial government, and the key players initiating many of these developments were repatriated freed slaves from Sierra Leone, and their descendants (see Picton 1994a etc., and the references given therein, especially Peel 1989). "Yoruba" is part of that world that comes into being with the replacement of transatlantic slavery by a colonial rule that was immediately contested and eventually defeated.

Shonibare asks us to consider the seeming paradox of a personal trajectory that includes elements appropriately identified within ethnicity, as well as elements identified with resistance to the stereotype of ethnicity. Yet the more one thinks about it the more one realizes a wider generality, for the paradox is exclusive neither to Shonibare nor to Black British art. It is more characteristic of local and international modernisms and modernities than is yet acknowledged. Admittedly there are exceptions, such as Taiwo Jegede (sculptor, printmaker, poet, who comes from Ekiti but lives and works in London) and Twins Seven Seven from Oshogbo, Yoruba men who choose to play upon an essentialized identity as "Yoruba." Osi Audu, on the other hand, who is not Yoruba by parentage though he was brought up Yoruba-speaking in Lagos, encountered the ideas about aesthetics and metaphysics that now dominate his interpretations of his painting and drawing in lectures given by Professor Rowland Abiodun at Ife University. "Yoruba" is, in other words, Audu's chosen aesthetic identity. There are many others, however, for whom ethnicity has been left behind in the development of their art, even as it is among the constituent elements of a personal trajectory, artists such as Aina Onabolu, Justus Akeredolu, Akinola Lasekan, Yusuf Grillo, Agbo Folarin, and Gani Odutokun (see Fosu 1986; Picton 1994a; Jari 2000; and here I only list artists who are Yoruba).

The politics and culture entailed in the articulation of identity-and-difference are a shifting kaleidoscope of likenesses and contrasts, within and between ideas and principles, practices and people, things that are local and others that are longer distance, even international, and all of this evolving through time perhaps within an ever developing sense of tradition; and "modern" is about where it is at now. Shonibare gently insists, as Vansina did in 1984, that we recognize, question, critically distance ourselves from, take apart, and even forsake the taken-for-granted status of the ethnic paradigm with which we interpret our material, a paradigm that pervades the literature of African art with a mere delusion of certainty.[20]

I am drawn to three or four possible conclusions. Maybe ethnicity matters sometimes (no matter how problematized); maybe modernity transcends ethnicity (but we have seen Yoruba ethnicity among the elements of a local modernity); maybe ethnicity never was the all-purpose defining social parameter that we have taken it to be; and maybe each of these propositions might apply to particular aspects of any given social and material environment.[21] The best one can say of ethnicity is that it cannot be taken to provide a categorical boundedness: it is about a loosely packaged set of resources and practices that makes it possible for individuals and communities to draw upon (variously, according to the circumstances at hand) languages, political and ritual loyalties, artworks, and so on, for all kinds of reasons, including the provision of badges of being-the-same-as-and/or-different-from. But that is not for the most part why these practices exist. It is merely a use that can be made of them; and whether in ignorance or in retrospect, or even as a deliberate strategy, these resources have become identified with a form of bounded specificity. Yet the relevance of ethnicity cannot be taken for granted of art; rather, it must be demonstrated. In the meantime, Yinka Shonibare's work is also always good fun.[22] □

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notes

***SPRING, BARLEY, & HUDSON:** Notes, from page 37*

[This article was accepted for publication in June 2001.]

1. A book accompanies the gallery display: *Africa: Arts and Cultures* (ed. John Mack, British Museum Press, London, 2000).
A major African conference is being planned to take place in the new Clore Education Centre at the British Museum, probably during Easter 2004. At the time of writing we are still seeking funding for the conference, but if you wish to be kept informed of developments, please let us know by e-mail: cspring@british-museum.ac.uk.
2. "Spirits in Steel: The Art of the Kalabari Masquerade," American Museum of Natural History, New York, April 1998–January 1999.
3. Many of these exhibitions were mounted at the Museum of Mankind for *africa 95*, a celebration of African arts held throughout Britain in August–December 1995.

***NELSON:** Notes, from page 49*

[This article was accepted for publication in June 2001.]

1. The Mousgoum speak Munjuk, but the most common designation for the *tòlék* is the French term *case-obus*, which is used by French-speaking Mousgoum.
2. The French government issued a postage stamp depicting the *tòlék* in 1938. See Figure 6 for another example of a stamp bearing the image of this structure.
3. Shelley does not tell his reader to which "Kirdi" culture he belongs. I have translated the quotations from his book that appear here.
4. I interviewed those Mousgoum quoted in this article between October 1995 and May 1996.
5. *Uli* are the impermanent markings that some Igbo women of Nigeria paint onto their bodies.
6. In a response to Ntsobe, Joseph-Marie Essomba added, "In books there are other aspects—pictorial, iconographical—that can bear witness to our culture." See *The Cultural Identity of Cameroon (*1985:289).
7. Nasr points out that the turban signifies that one's head is straight and makes the male wearer remember his function as Allah's servant on earth (Nasr 1993:112–13).
8. For discussions surrounding various aspects in the construction of a "Cameroonian identity," see the essays in *The Cultural Identity of Cameroon (*1985).
9. Amnesty International, Network Africa, and other local and international organizations have sharply criticized this policy, claiming that it has led to the abuse of power by local rulers. This abuse is allegedly being ignored by the president of Cameroon, Paul Biya, who is said to rely heavily on the influence and cooperation of traditional rulers in manipulating the electorate.

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***LIONNET:** Notes, from page 59*

[This article was accepted for publication in February 2001.]

1. The terms *heterodiegetic* and *homodiegetic* are used in narrative theory to classify stories. A heterodiegetic narrative is one told by a narrator who is not a character in the story; a homodiegetic narrative, on the other hand, features a narrator who also participates in the events she or he recounts. To the extent that museum exhibits and other forms of installations and performances tell "stories" about peoples and cultures, I feel that it is appropriate to borrow these two narratological terms to distinguish between exhibits mounted by peoples who are representing themselves and exhibits prepared by experts who are external to the story they tell.

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***HYNES:** Notes, from page 65*

[This article was accepted for publication in June 2001.]

1. From a talk by Yinka Shonibare at "Yoruba: Diaspora and Identities." Conference held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, November 1997.
2. For a further discussion of this, see Mercer 1995.
3. *Feather Pink, Deep Blue*, and *Baby Blue* are illustrated in Ikon Gallery 1999: 16, 50–53.
4. Chris Ofili is one of the few YBAs who did not study at the theoretical hothouse of Goldsmiths; he trained at the Royal Academy of Arts in London.
5. For a discussion of land, heads, and identity in Gainsborough and Shonibare, see Gould 2001.
6. *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, funded by the Institute of International Visual Arts, was shortlisted for the Citibank 1999 Photography Prize.
7. The women agreed to allow images of their unborn children to be used for the piece. It explores one of the moral dilemmas introduced with advances in medical technology—whether or not to carry to full term a child who is developing medical problems or "defects" while in the womb.
8. Gallery talk given by Yinka Shonibare during the exhibition "Rhapsodies in Black: Art in the Harlem Renaissance," Hayward Gallery, London, 1997.
9. His "Portable Personal Histories" (1997) project emphasizes the malleable, fictional aspects of identity. It involved eight people from Birmingham, each of whom made his or her own museum display case, selecting their own materials. At first the displays seem quite straightforward, a cross between an American-style "memory box" and something from a local history museum. But then doubt creeps in. Are they describing themselves? Or a fictional someone else, whose life is portrayed in the box? Shonibare himself created the box of "Mary Beth Regan," an imaginary African American cowgirl.

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***PICTON:** Notes, from page 73*

[This article was accepted for publication in June 2001.]

1. Stephen Friedman has been representing Yinka Shonibare since 1996. A complete list of exhibitions and publications of his work is available from the Stephen Friedman Gallery, 25-28 Old Burlington Street, London W1S 3AN. Tel: 44-20-7494-1434, fax: 44-020-7494-1431; e-mail: info@stephenfriedman.com; website: www.stephenfriedman.com.
2. I was first introduced to Yinka Shonibare by Dr. Clémentine Deliss, who at my suggestion organized a series of artists' talks and seminars at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) during the autumn and winter of 1991–92. This project was funded by the Research Committee of the School, to which we were most grateful. It had been the intention to publish their proceedings, but completion of the editorial work was displaced by the research that led to *africa 95* (the celebration of African art held throughout the UK in fall 1995) and *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* (Deliss et al. 1995), which, in any case, could be said to have provided the culmination of our project. The March 6, 1992, interview with Yinka Shonibare, referred to in this paper, was to have been published with the proceedings. Publication might yet happen, but in the meantime a copy of the complete interview is available on request from jp17@soas.ac.uk.
3. You will find William Kentridge, an African within South Africa's definition of the term, in London's Tate Modern, for example.
4. The successes of Chris Ofili and Steve McQueen in winning the Turner Prize in 1998 and 1999 respectively (see Picton 2000) have been widely reported; and in 2001 Isaac Julien was among those selected. Yinka Shonibare, though taking another path, is equally among those artists of African descent who represent a breach in the walls of that Citadel. In contrast, very few artists living and working primarily in west Africa can yet claim to be part of an international art world. There are exceptions, of course, a dozen at the most: artists such as Bruce Onobrakpeya, El Anatsui (see Picton 1997, 1998), and Atta Kwami (on show at the Kunsthalle, Basel, August and September 2001).
5. There is, I presume, a difference, for modernism can be taken to refer to more-or-less overt art movements, as in Europe where in retrospect we attribute a coherence by capitalizing its initial consonant. On the other hand, modernity refers to the developments that bring social practice to the period of "just now" (the root meaning of modern; see Williams 1976:174–75), whenever that "just now" is. We must, however, put away the idea that modernism/modernity comes to Africa from Europe. There are, of course, a series of engagements between these continents, as also with the Islamic nations of the world, to engender a series of local modernities that are quite specific to their particular locations in Africa, given the manner of the domestication of alien forms and practices within local frameworks of reference; and in that context there have of course also been local visual modernisms, such as Natural Synthesis in Nigeria and Negritude in Senegal.
6. Onabolu was, of course, a contemporary of Areogun (ca. 1880–1954), although they would never have met: Areogun had no reason to travel to Lagos, and Onabolu had no reason, as far as we know, to visit the Opin village of Osi-Ilorin.
7. This installation comprised two groups of figures, each including two adults and two children. One set is dressed in a predominantly yellow fabric, a Vlisco/Dutch Wax in a largely geometric pattern that Kathleen Bickford Berzock tells me is known in Côte d'Ivoire as "Men Are Not Grateful" (but I, at least, am grateful to her for this information). The other set is dressed in a blue-green fabric decorated with red eyes. I understand (from an anonymous reviewer of this paper) that they have been acquired by the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art. The complete set of eight figures was, as far as I know, published for the first time in Hassan & Oguibe 2001:220–22. The original *Alien Obsessives* show was accompanied by a limited-edition artist's book (Shonibare 1998) and the screening of science fiction movies.

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8. Shonibare says his use of African-print textiles, which predates his photographic art, was a response to a tutor's comment about his work as a student: "It's not really you, is it?!" "So I thought 'OK you want ethnic, I'll give you ethnic' " (Shonibare 1997). His pieces published examples at the point of this transition, in which he uses oil paint and collage, are hard to find. The one example I have to hand is in *Interrogating Identity* (New York University 1991). Three works were included in this exhibition at the Grey Art Gallery, NYU: *Caryatid Figures Rafia Color Motif with Viscount from British Telecom* (1989), *Schnapps* (1989), and *Beetle Painting* (1989–90), which is the only one illustrated in the catalogue. In their catalogue introduction the curators, Kellie Jones and Thomas W. Sokolowski, write: "In the U.S., 'Black' refers to people of African Heritage. In the United Kingdom, however, the term 'Black' is more heterogenous and can refer to people of African, Caribbean, South Asian and Middle Eastern heritage..." (New York University 1991:9–10). If only it were that simple.

9. I am not aware of any direct comment about Shonibare's work when it was shown in "South Meets West" in Accra 1999. This exhibition was important for at least two reasons: it brought together artists from west and southern Africa; and although curated from Switzerland it was funded in order to permit a first showing in Africa, in this case at the National Museum, Accra. The catalogue was published in Switzerland and includes Accra visitors' comments (Kunsthalle, Bern, 2000).

10. The complete text of this part of the interview is worth reading in full. One should note that while accepting "African" in 1992, he already hints below at its problematic status, and that by 1998 the quest for an essential Africanness in his work is firmly rejected.

CLÉMENTINE DELISS: In a review of this installation you were named a "black artist" and this label immediately raises the question of how you locate yourself and your work in relationship to the art of black artists here and the issues of the black arts, identifications which are problematic and contain many readings?

YINKA SHONIBARE: Earlier on I spoke of wanting my work to be local, to contain specificity, enabling someone to locate something in the work and for it not to be just post-modern and floating. At the same time, I create a space in which one can manoeuvre. In terms of being visible, or of being described as a black artist, in this context—and words are slightly unfortunate—I would prefer the term African artist.

CD: You accept the term African artist rather than Nigerian or Yoruba or even Black British?

YS: I accept all those terms if they are simply short cuts to describing my origin and as long as they are not used as a means of fixing me. I believe that visibility is extremely important. I don't feel that I am location-less or colour-less because if I do, I am immediately denying myself very fundamental aspects of my own visibility. I don't subscribe to the notion of anonymity.

CD: There seems to be a formula that fits the histories of different peoples of African descent, and can be used as a quick way of problematising their marginalization. This formula contains references to vernacular culture and within the vernacular to notions of irony, to double meanings, and to an insistence upon narrative whereby narrative becomes more than merely a case of making a naive statement about the world, and includes an element of social history and self-politicization. You are a special case, however. You have not spent your formative years in art schools in Nigeria so you don't qualify as an "exile" in the artistic as well as existential sense adopted by many African artists who have come over to Britain and Europe. Nor are you of the second-generation of Black British whose parents came here in the 1950s. You have a different recourse to narrative and to locating yourself within a narrative.

YS: We have reached the question of hybridization and of living in 1992. My experiences in Britain are multi-layered. I am bi-lingual. I have to constantly negotiate between two cultures speaking Yoruba to my family and English when at college or when I am involved in official practices. It is true that there are all those different levels and formulas, but what I want to achieve is to make objects which can be talked about without necessarily having to use those words you mentioned.

11. Appiah's comment (1992:29) " 'African' can surely be a vital and enabling badge; but...there are times when it is not the label we need" is apposite, and it can be rewritten for any identifying label, including "Yoruba."

12. His choice of this pattern was, in other words, as much for its (almost blatant) quality as a design as for its precise historical references. In any case, until the research for the Barbican show we had not realized the often very specific reference entailed in the particular designs.

13. Dutch production was clearly established by the 1890s, and British textile factories followed within the next decade, hence the term English Wax. However, the technique was complex, and soon the Dutch and British factories each began printing imitation resin-resist patterns on just one face of the cloth, and without the subtle random qualities of resin-resist fabrics. Called Fancy Prints, these were marketed in west Africa alongside the more costly Wax Prints. Much later, at Independence, the Dutch and the British established textile factories in most of the countries of west Africa, transferring the wax- and fancy-print technology thereto. With the international expansion of their production in Africa, and in Pakistan, Indonesia, China, and for a time Japan, there are now just two factories in Europe producing African-print fabric: Vlisco, in Helmond, the Netherlands, which produces the most costly cloth and leads the design process; and ABC, Hyde via Manchester, UK.

14. At the very last minute, when it was too late to make any changes to the catalogue, we found a "Hands and Fingers" cloth in the ABC archives which carried a label dating it to 1895. I also then realized that my identification of a "Probable original printing by Haarlem Cotton Company" (Picton 1995a:27, the upper of the two illustrations) is wrong. The hand is the Manchester version, and in any case the cloth is 48 inches wide, whereas all the earliest example are only one yard in width. The lower illustration on the same page shows the Haarlem hand: the difference in form is very clear.

15. In Nigeria this cloth was, and still is, known as "Corkscrew."

16. In resisting ethnic categorization, Shonibare also resists any placing within museum ethnography, and there were those who at this time thought that his acceptance of a commission for the Barbican textile show was odd. However, apart from the fact that not all museum ethnography is unthinkingly locked into the stereotype of the Ethnographic Present, the intention of the Barbican's "The Art of African Textiles" was to focus upon those areas of change and development in textile design and technology as things worth attending to, and to expose the hollow charade of traditionality for what it really is: a stereotype imposed from "without." (Of course, traditionality can also be imposed from "within"; though different, it is no less stereotypical.) In that context, Carol Brown, the Barbican curator, and I concluded that they should commission Shonibare, and his response with *How Does a Girl Like You* was particularly apt.

17. *Hound* was shown together with *100 Years* (Figs. 7, 8, and Enwezor 2001:132–33) in which there is one panel for each year of the twentieth century. Of these, fifty are painted over to obliterate the cloth pattern. Instead they show bacterial, fungal, and insect infestations, the hidden dangers always lurking behind a taken-for-granted order. Of the fifty unpainted panels, sixteen (32%) show designs whose enduring popularity was established in the first decade of the century. These include a design based upon the Indonesian Garuda bird but known in Ghana as "Bunch of Bananas" (see top row, third from left, and eight further panels); the "Sunburst," also known as "Target" (second row, first left, and two other panels) ; "Staff of Kingship" (top row, nineteenth from left, and bottom row, thirteenth from left); and "Alphabet" (fourth row, fourth and ninth from left). A further five panels (10%) are made from "Men Are Not Grateful" (top row, eighth from left, and four others). Unlike *Hound*, however, it would be a mistake to look for evidence of the kind of presuppositions entailed in "High Life" and the Hunting Pink "Sword of Kingship."

For other illustrations of Shonibare's work using African-print fabric, see Enwezor 1997, 1999, 2000; Ikon Gallery 1999; Kunsthalle, Bern 2000; Museum Villa Stuck 2001.

18. The other most recent work on show at that time was *Dorian Gray*, a set of photographs in which Shonibare pursues his interest in the Dandy.

19. It has been estimated that 20% of the British population has black and African ancestry due to slavery and miscegenation.

20. It could, of course, be said that ethnicity is no longer a live issue, certainly in British Africanist studies, e.g., see Fardon 2001.

Anyone working on sub-Saharan Africa in the last quarter of the century took it for granted that the region had been shaped by Islam and Christianity, by four centuries of the Atlantic slave trade, by a century of colonialism, by the tribulations of postcolonial government and by increasing economic marginalization. Ethnic identities were a hot topic because they were both problematic and politically charged.

In contrast, in the otherwise magnificent *History of Art in Africa* (Visonà et al. 2000) the paradigm of ethnicity is not discussed and is by implication unproblematic; but the dependence on it is such that by leaving out the Urhobo people, Bruce Onobrakpeya, arguably the single most important post-Independence west African artist, is also left out.

21. This argument follows closely upon Richard Fardon's discussion in his introduction to *Counterworks* (1995).

22. The trajectory of Shonibare's work could be said, in its own way, to parallel the manner in which New Orleans musicians a hundred years ago set out to challenge racism while at the same time having fun. Meanwhile, we might also remember that "From the colonial era, the major legacy Europe left to Africa was not democracy...it was authoritarian rule and plunder" (Hochschild 1999:301).

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PETRIDIS: *Notes, from page 76*

1. Except for two catalogues and a CD-ROM published in conjunction with the opening of the Louvre wing, articles about the event have appeared in both the specialized and the general art press. The French magazines *Arts d'Afrique Noire, Beaux Arts, Connaissance des Arts*, and *Télérama* each devoted a special issue to it. Two general books bearing the unhappy term "arts premiers" in their title, were published on the occasion of the opening as well (Degli & Mauzé 2000; Geoffroy-Schneiter 2000a). The debate surrounding the Louvre wing and the future Musée du Quai Branly also led to the publication of thematic issues of the Africanist journals *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* (Dupuis 1999) and *Le Journal des Africanistes* (Coquet 1999).
2. In fact, this particular statuette was already included in the reference book *L'art africain* by Kerchache, Paudrat, and Stéphan (1988).
3. See the interview with Germain Viatte in Meyer (2000:38); but see also Corbey (2000:6).

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