



* musée du quai Branly

“Garden of Love” installation by Yinka Shonibare, MBE

Garden Gallery
3 April – 8 July



Exhibition Curator: **Germain Viatte**
Assistant Curator: **Bernard Müller**

CONTENTS

- * EDITORIAL BY GERMAIN VIATTE** **p.3**
- * PRESENTATION OF THE INSTALLATION** **p.4**
- * INTERVIEW WITH YINKA SHONIBARE, MBE** **p.6**
- * THE ARTIST** **p.11**
- * PRACTICAL INFORMATION** **p.13**

* EDITORIAL

by Germain Viatte – extract from catalogue

Louis Antoine de Bougainville's *Voyage around the world* was published in 1771; Diderot's *Supplement to Bougainville's voyage* was written in 1772 and although some copies were in circulation it was not published until 1795. At the same time, Fragonard was painting *The Progress of Love* for the Pavillion of Madame du Barry in Louveciennes and was able to philosophise in the mist, just like A and B, the two protagonists of the *Supplement to Bougainville's voyage*, on "our old residence and its inhabitants". As tastes changed, he was forced to pack up his frivolous canvasses while his patron turned to Joseph-Marie Vien, a painter whose wise old-style compositions had become the fashion...

Yinka Shonibare, MBE, slipped into the history and ideas of this art; with his British humour, he enjoys being subversive. The initial impression on encountering these *conversation pieces* (made twice as ambiguous here by both Fragonard and Yinka Shonibare, MBE), is that of being fooled: the amateur recognises famous paintings and the general public a likable, charming, passionate and decadent 18 century, which fades into the caresses of a soft and civilised dappling of shadows. But ambiguities leap out at you in spite of the admirable precision with which it is done: the fabrics used were commercialised globally before being identified with African fancy and it is easy to see how this game of ambiguity really can drive you mad.

A paradox of "otherness", as reiterated by the old man in *Supplement to Bougainville's voyage*: "Cry, unfortunate Tahitians! But be it when these ambitious and bad men arrive and not when they leave: one day you will know them better. One day, they will be back (...) to put you in chains, slit your throats and subject you to their extravagances and their vices; one day you will serve under them, just as corrupt, just as vile and just as unfortunate as they".

The anachronism is just as troubling as it is immutable. Yinka Shonibare, MBE, mindfully manipulates it, but without aggression. Yet his work insidiously has the violence of a cold accusation. Yinka Shonibare, MBE, is, whether he likes it or not, both here and there; he has felt at ease with Yoruba high society, has known physical suffering as well as the hardship of proving himself as a British and international artist, especially a black one which, for whites, is irremediably a form of "otherness". Hence, paradoxically but effectively an MBE!

But can we really say "irremediably"? The world changes and everything blends into uniformity as we seek out its living sources. The basket of intellectual and financial wealth is no longer one-sided.

By asking more questions, the Musée du quai Branly wants to break down the ideas it receives, whether academic, historical or national, etc. The artist's perception and ability to subvert false evidence is fundamental in this task of deciphering. A few months ago, Romuald Hazoume raised the alarm from Porto Novo, with *La Bouche du Roi*; Michael Parekowhai and Fiona Pardington placed their riddles on the fate of the Maoris on the walls of the museum, while aboriginal Australian artists challenged us to penetrate "the surface of things". Perhaps we might, as A muses in the *Supplement to Bougainville's voyage*, "don the attire of the country we are going to and put away that of the country we are in"?

Germain Viatte

* PRESENTATION OF THE INSTALLATION

For its second contemporary art exhibition, the Musée du quai Branly welcomes Yinka Shonibare, MBE, a London artist of Nigerian origin, with his amazing “Garden of Love” created especially for the occasion. Inspired by French-style gardens, the exhibition invites the public to embark upon a journey filled with surprises. Positioned in different places around the garden are couples of lovers, taken from the works in the “Progress of Love” painted from 1770 - 1771 by Jean Honoré Fragonard for the Pavillion of Madame du Barry in Louveciennes (today part of the Frick Collection in New York). And yet, upon discovering these characters dressed in aristocratic period costumes, visitors soon realise that the fabrics are actually African wax-printed textiles. This suddenly puts them strangely ill at ease. In this creation, Yinka Shonibare, MBE, delves further into his reflection on identity and history and the inseparable meeting of the two cultures to which he belongs.

Figures inspired by the paintings of Fragonard



Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732 - 1806) :
The Pursuit
1771-1773, oil on canvas
317.82 cm x 215.58 cm
Henry Clay Frick bequest
Inv: 1915.1.45
Frick Collection, New York



Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732 - 1806) :
The Love Letter 1771-1773, oil on canvas,
317.18 cm x 216.85 cm
Henry Clay Frick bequest
Inv: 1915.1.47
Frick Collection, New York

The exhibition features three groups of characters and the composition of the paintings in this series are “The Pursuit”, “The Lover Crowned” and “The Love Letter”. These life-size characters, which are headless, are semi-visible through the foliage of a labyrinth before visitors actually reach them.



Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732 - 1806) :
The Lover Crowned, 1771-1773
oil on canvas, 317.82 cm x 243.21 cm
Henry Clay Frick bequest
Inv: 1915.1.48
Frick Collection, New York

A French-style garden

The artist wanted these couples to be presented amid a decor that evokes French landscape gardens (realised by Régis Guignard). Using the idea of a labyrinth bathed in the joyful light of the evening, he seeks to contrast the sensual nonchalance of lovers with the confines of a nature which protects and encloses it.

The essence of the work

Here, Yinka Shonibare, MBE, continues something he began with his first work, which took its inspiration from *The Swing*, after Fragonard, acquired by the Tate Modern in London in 2001. The artist sees his exhibition as a form of entertainment acted out on the backdrop of a play. And surely such *joie de vivre* could only be made possible with the revenues generated in far-away lands, especially with slavery, and is it not all soon to come to an end with the Revolution and its beheadings? With a touch of humour and from a distance, the artist manages to draw out the tragic relationship between two cultures, the culture of “slaves” and the culture of “nobility”, of Africans and Europeans - poles apart yet dependent on one another. This work establishes a link between opulence and the search for pleasure, on the one hand (and the free spirit of the French aristocracy of the time), and the treatment of slaves who supplied the means for such grandeur, on the other hand. This exhibition therefore addresses colonialism and its impact today. It establishes an underlying relationship between the desire to control nature in 18th century garden art, and the pretentious desire to civilise the untamed via their exploitation, a useful alibi to the colonial plan of things and one which is still used in post-modern globalisation.

*** INTERVIEW WITH YINKA SHONIBARE, MBE, BY BERNARD MÜLLER**

Bernard Müller: What is “Garden of Love” all about?

Yinka Shonibare, MBE: In “Garden of Love” I focus on the period that precedes the French Revolution. It was an era when nobility still lived luxuriously, shortly before their world was turned upside down by the masses. This life is portrayed perfectly in Fragonard’s paintings. For me, the period serves as a metaphor for a contemporary situation because, as we speak, people in the South, people from the Third World, from North Africa and Asia, etc., see Europe as an overflowing basket of fruit or – if you prefer – the “garden of plenty”. For them, Europe is the Garden of Eden. I portray Europeans wearing extravagant raiments but, by replacing these with clothes in African wax-printed fabrics, I am suggesting that the luxury they enjoy – their work lying at the origin of the clothes they wear – is the product of others much less fortunate than themselves. This exhibition helps us bring these two worlds together, using – as mentioned – the 18th century as a metaphor, even if we find the objects here today.

BM: Could the “Garden of Love” be called a political work?

YS: I am no polemic intellectual. I am an aesthete, an artist. Poetry is really central to my work. To me, beauty is just as important as what lies within. I like this paradox or contradiction that came out of the exhibition: on the one hand, here I evoke a garden of love, a garden filled with good things, and I believe love is a good thing! On the other hand, I suggest that beneath this bountiful garden of “good things” lies a real problem. When the public comes to see the exhibition it would normally expect to experience something of beauty, since it is a “garden of love” and not a “garden of hate” they have come to visit! When you prepare to enter a garden of love, you expect to find lovers and will feel more empathy with what you are looking at because it is easy to identify with the concept of love. You also expect to see a dreamlike world, taking us back to an imaginary world of luxury, perhaps giving us the freedom to imagine ourselves in the 18th century. But “Garden of Love” is also more subtle because of what befalls the nobility during the Revolution: their heads will roll... and in my exhibition their heads have already been lopped, which makes the scene even more unreal! My work in this sense is a way of sounding an alarm on something that runs the risk of actually happening. I do however insist that the aim of this work is not to preach but to take a poetic approach. My project aims to try and bring different worlds together in the same space. The history of fabrics is in this way important. Originally “Indonesian” fabrics, it was in fact the Dutch who began producing these textiles at the end of the 19th century. Indonesia then started producing its own versions. Africans subsequently adopted the fabrics, thinking that wearing them would enable them to distinguish themselves from Europeans and emphasise the power of their culture, thus celebrating an African identity! Yet today we have now accepted the idea that these fabrics are actually “African”! The way I see it, this is a very good illustration of how the different cultures around the world are dependent upon one another.

BM: What parallels do you draw between pre-revolutionary France and the contemporary world?

YS: Indigent social classes and their ever-swelling ranks are becoming more and more discontented. The situation in the Middle East and the rise of terrorism worldwide, etc. are also a form of “revolution”: terrorism threatens the balance of power and is encouraged by people who are reduced to a feeling of impotence. I am totally against terrorism but would like to suggest that these people are behaving in such a way because they feel totally powerless. Here we see the behaviour of people who feel their rights being flouted. Only powerless people can behave in such a way. Unfortunately, from a global perspective, this is what we have come to today. We have reached a point where the subordinate classes from one part of the world are rebelling against the privileged classes, the Westerners. It is a terrible situation which virtually mirrors a pre-revolutionary scene. I do not know how we will avoid this conflict. I personally am trying, through my work, to bring these two rival worlds closer together. And all the same, the warning, the discreet alarm signal I am sounding implies that all this luxury we are enjoying could well have a price, and that we in the West might also lose our heads. The danger exists. The risk is there. This can already be seen by what is happening globally and something serious is going to happen if we do not stop our decadent pace of life. It is therefore crucial to embark upon an approach that favours those without power. Closing the door on immigration, saying that “people from the Third World can no longer come to Europe” will solve nothing. We will never get to the root of the problem in this way because it is impossible to close all the doors. It is now urgent that we revise the terms of exchange, preferably by trying to understand why these people are fleeing their countries.

BM: How did the idea for your exhibition actually come about?

YS: The idea for my exhibition came to me after consulting the museum plans. I was interested in the complexity of the building. I noticed that there was a lot of glass and saw that it had gardens that played an important role. I saw that the external and internal gardens were connected and wanted to establish a link between the two. Looking at the ethnographic museum, I thought “good, this work will be exhibited in France. What do I know about French gardens from a historical perspective?” Then, I thought: “French-style gardens were carefully manicured”. And of course Versailles came to mind! This put me on the idea of love, because lovers are easily associated with gardens. I then thought of the works of Fragonard (having already studied this artist) who often portrayed lovers. In the end, it all just seemed logical!

BM: Does the fact of showing this exhibition in an arts and civilisations museum where it will be surrounded by “traditional” and “primitive” objects have any particular significance?

YS: The Musée du quai Branly’s ethnographic collections make it the ideal place for my work. As an artist of African origin, I know that people always expect my work to be associated with traditional African art, even though I live in the 21st century! It would be rather strange to expect a French or English artist to be systematically interested in medieval art. An African artist is not expected to have experienced modernity - why I do not know! This is of course completely wrong! Having said this, I place traditional art from Asia and Africa, Oceania and Europe on an equal footing. But one has every right to wonder if the objects are indeed being kept where they should be kept. We know that most of these objects were used in religious contexts and during rituals. And yes, of course we

are talking about art. These objects had aesthetic value but it was not art for art's sake as in galleries today. While modern art is quite different from this point of view, these objects were associated with a diverse range of rituals.

Of course I also take their history into account. It's a very complex issue. I, as an artist, do not maintain the view that all ethnographic museums in Europe should be closed. I am somewhat ambivalent about these matters. While I do not appreciate the way in which these objects were acquired (from a political perspective), and I know that many objects in collections were plundered and thereby represent symbols of conquest [i.e. of colonial conquest, NdT] but, from a cultural point of view, I am pleased that these objects are where they are for me to see. This is a dilemma and I do not know if all these objects should be returned. And, if they are returned, who would look after them appropriately? I just don't know! Is it essential that these objects be cared for? In some cultures they were supposed to be discarded after the ceremony and it is highly probable that the idea of preserving such objects is a purely Western one....

BM: In your own way, you are adding a new type of fetish to the museum! You are including Europe in the collections of a museum which defines itself precisely as the museum for "Otherness" or "Alternative" art...

YS: The characters you see in my exhibition are people who had power. They were wealthy enough to allow themselves the luxury of embarking on a journey to Africa. They were the conquerors! I act in exactly the same way as they did when they brought back these objects. I too consider them objects of curiosity... From the modern African's point of view, which mine is, these members of the aristocracy are objects of curiosity, but in a reverse way. In my eyes and, therefore, in an African's eyes, Europe's culture in the 18th century is my fetish while theirs is the African mask! The modern African artist that I am has found aristocratic culture through paintings and historical dramas, for example, of the type seen in Stephen Frears' "Dangerous Liaisons". This film genre is popular and is often aired on television. They are in some way remakes of 18th century dramas. So, while Picasso went to the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, I go to the cinema! For a modern African artist, all of this seems so exotic, I want to understand its meaning. I asked myself why these people were so rich, how could they have all these beautiful fabrics? And then I understood that there was a link here with the history of colonisation and all its excesses...

BM: Do you feel you belong to an aristocracy or some sort of artistic world elite?

YS: I've changed how I write my name, now putting Yinka Shonibare, MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire), because I'm a member of the British Empire! A few years ago, in 2004, I went to Buckingham Palace and was decorated by Prince Charles. This event is of course very important to me from a political point of view and because it's the main purpose of my work... and now I find myself a true member of the British Empire! This is very important because my name appears like a performance on a page. That's the beauty of England where these types of things are possible and there's no problem with it! When it was announced, my peers asked me if I was going to accept the award. A few years earlier, Benjamin Zephaniah, the Jamaican Rasta poet, categorically refused because, as he saw it, the empire held a stake in the slave trade and for this reason he could not entertain accepting it. There was a lot of controversy about the matter at the time, but my response was "yes, of course, why not? I'm going to accept it and use it as a platform for my name!".

BM: During your childhood in Nigeria, were you already aware that you were a member of an elite group?

YS: Absolutely! I come from a wealthy African family and that probably explains my ease in identifying with European aristocracy! My father was a judge and you could say that my family is a typical upper middle-class one from Lagos in Nigeria. My family also descends from a king called Kosoko; he kept slaves and lived in the Itafaji area of Lagos Island. All I know is that the Shonibares are descendants of a Lagos king. I myself have never attended any family ceremonies but I do know that my grandfather did.

In Nigeria, the social differences are quite apparent. The wealthy live in the best areas in plush houses with lots of servants and chauffeurs. They have a guard to watch over the house. You have your own cook. You enjoy privileges... I lived in a part of the city called Ilugbeju (towards Ikeja, Lagos mainland). We had beautiful things and everything was state-of-the-art. I think we bought our first colour TV in 1977. We were always well ahead of the rest. There was even a drinks bar in the sitting room of our house. We had a magnificent garden and I still remember how the hedges were meticulously tended by the gardener. And we had a superb lawn which needed a lot of care, something which few people could permit themselves because of the enormous amount of water a garden in a climate as hot as Lagos in Nigeria required. There was a European mentality in our household and of course we had a Mercedes. At the time, image was very important to successful Nigerians. I think we had about six cars and only used the Mercedes at the weekends. My father worked in the Ebute-Metta part of the city. That's where his driver would take him to his office. He wore a suit and tie to work and donned his African clothes when he came home. We generally spoke Yoruba at home and English at school. We sometimes mixed up the two languages but members of the elite, which we were, tended to speak more English. Again, another expression of this dual cultural link!

BM: How do you perceive the role of an artist and, more specifically, that of a multicultural artist?

YS: I can only talk about the way I work: first, I try to involve people. From the very outset, when you discover my work, you will probably be amused at first; this is always very stimulating and exciting, engaging and seductive. It's a way of prodding you to make you feel something. It forces you to confront what you see and react. The principle of entertainment is important in understanding my work: I amuse the public, I seduce it and then I make it reflect on the work. This desire to amuse is entirely sincere because the process of creating any work is great fun for me as an artist. Amusement is central to my process of creating the works and is very important. It is an essential source of motivation because if I want to accomplish these works, I have to believe they are beautiful. In some way, it's my revenge. But simultaneously and implicitly, something appears which is much more disturbing. As an artist, it is important to me that the public can appreciate my works both intellectually and aesthetically, so that pleasure and poetry always remain an important dimension. In this way, the overlapping of different worlds is central to my approach. The idea behind the "Garden of Love" is to make people think and to make them understand that there is always a price to pay for pleasure. This is not a moralistic comment but relates to an issue which basically involves the distribution of wealth. There is always a price to pay for enjoying the benefits others do not have. I want to make the public recognise this and encourage them to stop "fiddling while Rome burns".



Yinka Shonibare, MBE
"The Swing" (after Fragonard)' 2001
Dutch wax-printed cotton textile, life-size
mannequin, swing, artificial foliage
Approx. 330 x 350 x 220cm, SHO 126

* THE ARTIST

Yinka Shonibare MBE was born in London and moved to Lagos, Nigeria at the age of three. He returned to London to study Fine Art first at Central Saint Martins College and then at Goldsmiths College, where he received his MFA. In 1997 Shonibare featured in the Young British Art show “Sensation”.



Portrait of Yinka Shonibare, MBE, Courtesy of the Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, and the James Cohan Gallery, New York © Sal Idriss

Shonibare’s work explores issues of race and class through the media of painting, sculpture, photography and, most recently, film. Having described himself as a ‘post-colonial’ hybrid, Shonibare questions the meaning of cultural and national definitions. His trademark material is the brightly coloured “African fabric” he buys at Brixton market. The fabric was inspired by Indonesian design, mass-produced by the Dutch and eventually sold to colonies in West Africa. In the 1960’s the material became a new sign of African identity and independence. Shonibare has used these fabrics to create both paintings and period costumes. With these costumes Shonibare dresses headless mannequins that he arranges to re-create famous paintings or settings from Victorian times.

The artist also uses the costumes in his carefully constructed photographs and films based on famous novels or historical incidents, often placing himself as the protagonist. Shonibare has featured in many exhibitions and was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2004. Yinka Shonibare MBE is represented by Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and James Cohan Gallery, New York.

Recently honoured with an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire), he decided in future to systematically add the letters MBE to his name, to underline the paradoxes of History.

Main individual exhibitions

- 2006** *Flower Time*, Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, United Kingdom;
2005 *Mobility*, James Cohan Gallery, New York, United States;
2004 *Yinka Shonibare*, Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam, Netherlands;
2003 *Play with Me*, Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, United Kingdom;
2002 *Yinka Shonibare*, Studio Museum, New York, United States.



Victorian Couple, 1999,
Yinka Shonibare, MBE

Main group exhibitions

- 2006** *Alien Nation*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, United Kingdom
2006 *Around The World in Eighty Days*, South London Gallery et Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, United Kingdom
2005 *Africa Remix*, *Contemporary Art of a Continent*, Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf, Germany; Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
2004 *African Art*, *African Voices: Long Steps Never Broke a Back*, Philadelphia Museum, United States
2003 *Looking Both Ways*, Museum of African Art, New York, United States; *Partage d'exotismes*, 5e Biennale de Lyon, Lyon, France
2001 *Documenta XI*, Kassel, Germany
2000 *Continental Shift*, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, Netherlands.

* PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Exhibition Curator: Germain Viatte, Curator General of Cultural Heritage, former director of the museological project of the Musée du quai Branly

Associate Curator: Bernard Müller, contemporary art historian, scientific advisor for the exhibition

Exhibition catalogue:

Garden of Love, directed by Germain Viatte and assisted by Bernard Müller, *Les Contemporains* collection, published jointly by the Musée du quai Branly and Flammarion, 15 X 18,5 cm, 15 € (to be confirmed)

About the exhibition

“Garden of Love, Installation by Yinka Shonibare”

Exhibition visit

Duration: 1 hour / Adults (16 years and up)

Admission: 8 € / Concessions: 6 €

Yinka Shonibare

Performance workshop

Duration: 2 hrs. On Thursday from 7pm to 9pm / Adults (16

years and over). Admission: 10 € / Concessions: 7 €

The museum

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday, 10am to 6.30pm

Reservations, from 9am, for groups

Late night opening on Thursday, until 9.30pm

Closed on Mondays

Information

Telephone: +33 (0)1 56 61 70 00

E-mail: contact@quaibranly.fr

Internet: www.quaibranly.fr

Reservations

Fnac: www.fnac.com / +33 (0)8 92 68 46 94 (0.34 € / min. from France)

Ticketnet: www.tickenet.fr / +33 (0)8 92 39 01 00 (0.34 € / min. from France)

Admission charges

Temporary exhibition – Garden Gallery

Adults: 8.50 €

Concessions: 6 € (under 25 year olds, students)

Musée du quai Branly (Main collections, “Anthropology” and “Special Theme” exhibitions):

Adults: 8.50 €

Concessions: 6 € (under 25 year olds, students)

“A day at the Museum” tickets (museum + Garden Gallery)

Adults: 13 €

Concessions: 9.50 € (under 25 year olds, students)

Membership

The Musée du quai Branly Pass gives unlimited access to all museum spaces, gets you to the front of the queue and offers reduced theatre show tickets.

The Pass is available to young people (15 euros), single adults (45 euros), for two (70 euros) or for groups (35 euros).

On foot

Museum entrances are located at 206 and 218 rue de l’Université or at 27, 37 or 51 quai Branly, Paris 7th arrondissement.

Public transport

Metro: Pont de l’Alma (RER C), Bir Hakeim (line 6), Alma-Marceau (line 9), Iéna (line 9).

Bus: line 42: La Bourdonnais or Bosquet-Rapp bus stops; routes 63, 80, 92: Bosquet- Rapp bus stop; route 72: Musée d’art moderne bus stop – Palais de Tokyo

Shuttle boat: Tour Eiffel stop (Batobus, Bateaux parisiens and Vedettes de Paris).

Car park

Paying car park, entrance at 25 quai Branly, 520 spaces

Press contact

Pierre LAPORTE Communications

Tel: +33 (0)1 45 23 14 14 / info@pierre-laporte.com

Contacts at the Musée du quai Branly

Nathalie MERCIER,
Communications Advisor

Tel: +33 (0)1 56 61 70 20 / nathalie.mercier@quaibranly.fr

Muriel SASSEN,
Press Relations Officer

Tel: +33 (0)1 56 61 52 87 / muriel.sassen@quaibranly.fr

Exhibition sponsors

