

EXHIBITIONS



Installation shot of Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA)'s first solo exhibition in Hong Kong: Dreaming Rich at Pearl Lam Galleries. Copyright of artist and Pearl Lam Galleries

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YINKA SHONIBARE MBE: DREAMING RICH

Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Pearl Lam Galleries features the first solo exhibition in Hong Kong by renowned British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA), *Dreaming Rich*. The exhibition continues Shonibare's exploration of colonialism and post-colonialism with a series of all new works commenting on Hong Kong's modern day relationships with labour, power and wealth.

Dreaming Rich is a characteristically exuberant and colourful critique of wealth, which simultaneously acknowledges society's complicity with it. Shonibare's questioning of cultural and national definitions is a pertinent one for Hong Kong, whose identity has been affected by the conflicting influences of Chinese and British colonialism. The exhibition offers a social commentary on Hong Kong's fascination with luxury commodities, and how those have come in part a medium for social identity.

Cake Man, the centerpiece of the exhibition, is a life-sized sculpture of an aristocrat dressed in elaborate Victorian dress made out of Shonibare's trademark Dutch wax African batik fabric, which through its Indonesian design references Asia and the continents' colonial practices. The material references European colonial practices in Africa and, in the context of *Dreaming Rich*, draws a comparison between the perspectives of colonial wealth and power in Africa and China. *Cake Man* subverts an act of heavy labour into an image of decadence by depicting a man bent double carrying a precariously balanced tower of colourful cakes on his back. In this figure Shonibare re-imagines a reconstruction of the trappings of power, bringing into sharp focus the contradiction faced by all societies which aspire to do well and "get rich"; where the process of creating vast amounts of wealth relies on the hardships of a labour class.

The artist is interested in the point at which survival turns into greed and excess. The individual *Champagne Kid* sculptures that can be seen cavorting, or swinging from chairs attached to the walls of the gallery, develop Shonibare's recent line of enquiry into the corruption, excess and debauchery that have in part lead to the current economic crisis.

These life-sized drunken aristocratic youths seen alongside *Cake Man* construct an image of wealth and the sense of an over-indulgent party into which the gallery visitor is immediately immersed. Following a recurring theme in his work Shonibare has removed the figure's heads, calling to mind the guillotined fate that awaited the excessive and corrupt French aristocracy in the 18th Century. Here globes displaying monetary data take the place of faces, which combined with the exuberant poses of the champagne-swilling youths, build a powerful commentary on the excess of anonymous financiers across the globe that contributed to the 2008 financial crisis.

The exhibition's exploration of the contemporary worship of commodities

is further elaborated in a newly created *Hong Kong Toy Painting* wall installation measuring six meters wide and containing 27 round paintings. Each of the circular canvases painted black and gold with toys collected from Hong Kong attached by black and gold wires. Shown alongside five new large-scale collage works on paper that use gold leaf, cuttings from the Financial Times, batik fabric flowers and luxury magazine covers, Shonibare's reflection on the Hong Kong economy and its desire for luxury goods is a poignant reminder of the cycle of contradictions surrounding wealth and power, poverty and danger; dare to dream rich and you may lose your head, fail to dream rich and risk dying of poverty.

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