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Artist's works speak of Hong Kong society's dysfunctions

British-Nigerian man addresses city's greed and obsession with luxury goods through his art

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Yinka Shonibare with his art installation entitled Hong Kong Toy Painting. Photo: Edward Wong

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While Hong Kong is one of the world's wealthiest cities, a fifth of its population is classed as poor, and more than 1.3 million of its people live in poverty.

This is just one of the startling contradictions that Yinka Shonibare attempts to address as he unveils his first exhibition here.

"It's one aspect of human nature we are all familiar with, and that's greed," says the British-Nigerian contemporary artist known for his works on cultural identity. "We are all greedy, and we all like cake."

Shonibare, 51, was referring to one of his works, *Cake Man*, a life-size figure balancing a dozen cakes on its back.

For him, it represents a damning indictment of the banking industry

- anonymous people contributing to the 2008 financial crisis - an inspiration for his work as a "pure expression of greed".

Shonibare's exhibition, *Dreaming Rich*, unveils a thought-provoking critique on the modern day excesses, greed and inequalities infecting the city as the poor get poorer.

"My work is always about ... what's going on at the moment and the current thinking," says the wheelchair-bound artist who suffers from transverse myelitis, an inflammation of the spinal cord.

"As an artist, I want to comment about the world. But I never want to tell people what to do."

Another of Shonibare's work depicts three life-size figures of what appears to be children swigging bottles of champagne. The work sends the message that whatever adults do, children will mimic.

He also depicts other elements of Hong Kong life, including locals' obsession with luxury goods as well as the city's culture of wealth in the form of a panel installation of toys.

Shonibare's exhibition opens today at Pearl Lam Galleries, 6/F, Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central. It will run until January 9.

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