

Yinka Shonibare (British, b. 1962)
The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters
 (Asia), 2008

Chromogenic print mounted on aluminum
 72 x 49½ in.
 Museum Purchase with the Austin Fund in Honor of
 Wright S. Ludington (2009.14)



EVER SINCE Yinka Shonibare's tutor in art school asked him why, as an artist of Nigerian ancestry, he wasn't making "authentic" African art, the artist has sought to subvert and parody the very notions of "Africanness" and cultural authenticity. Toward this end, he has employed the use of colorfully patterned fabrics that are ubiquitous throughout West Africa, but whose origins actually point to European colonialism in Southeast Asia. Originally manufactured in Holland as imitations of traditional Indonesian batik, the cloths were later marketed in West and Central Africa, where they have been appropriated and transformed by their new context. Shonibare dressed mannequins and actors in these fabrics, often tailoring each costume to resemble Victorian-era fashions and assimilating them into masterpieces of Western art. His sculpture *The Swing* (After Fragonard) (2001) re-staged the eponymous artist's best-known Rococo canvas, featuring a mannequin donned in Dutch wax gown and petticoat, kicking her orange-hued slipper into the air. The piece addresses questions of leisure and frivolity while reminding us that much of Europe's

18th-century wealth derived from colonial exploits.

The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Asia) is one of five large-scale photographs that borrow title and composition from Francisco Goya's 1797 etching of the same name; part of a series entitled *Los Caprichos*, the print depicts the artist asleep at his desk, haunted by creatures of the night. Goya's work has been interpreted as a political critique as well as a warning against the obsession with rationalism over imagination that characterized the Age of Enlightenment. In Shonibare's print, a figure clad in "African" cloth is similarly hunched over his table and visited by Goya's frightening owls, bats and lynx. Each photograph allegorizes a different continent, yet like the fabrics, the figures do not conform to the assumed racial identities for each location, perhaps embodying the post-colonial dispersal of peoples across the world. That sense of contradiction or irony is well suited to Shonibare, an artist of African heritage who has proudly accepted his induction as a "Member of the British Empire," even as his work is rebelliously anti-imperialist.

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Fig. 1. Francisco Jose de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828), *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* (*The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*), Plate 43 from *Los Caprichos*, 1797–1798. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, MN, USA / The William Hood Dunwoody Fund by exchange, and Gift of funds from Mr. and Mrs. John T. Adams, Dr. and Mrs. David Bradford, Mr. and Mrs. Benton J. Case, Mr. and Mrs. W. John Driscoll, Mr. and Mrs. Reuel Harmon

Fig. 2. Yinka Shonibare, *The Swing* (After Fragonard) (2001). Mannequin, cotton costume, 2 slippers, swing seat, 2 ropes, oak twig and artificial foliage. Dimensions variable. Collection of the Tate, London

