

Press release

**Whitechapel Gallery Art Icon 2021:
Yinka Shonibare CBE RA to be honoured on 22 March 2021**

Whitechapel Gallery is pleased to announce that **Yinka Shonibare** CBE RA (b. 1962, UK) is the eighth artist to receive the prestigious annual Art Icon award, generously supported by the Swarovski Foundation. On Monday 22 March 2021, the award will be presented during a virtual gala celebration hosted by **Iwona Blazwick OBE** (Director, Whitechapel Gallery), and feature an exclusive musical performance from four-time Grammy Award winner **Angélique Kidjo**. To protect the safety and welfare of all attendees, the event will be hosted on a digital platform and will celebrate the Gallery's continued commitment to youth programmes and educational activities through an evening of live presentations.

An online auction of artworks donated by leading contemporary artists will also take place, hosted by Phillips Auction on www.phillips.com. All funds raised will help support Whitechapel Gallery's programme, in particular its work with thousands of children and young people each year

Iwona Blazwick said: "Yinka Shonibare is a truly exceptional artist and is an exemplary Art Icon. His vividly clothed figurative sculptures, the Hogarthian scenarios he creates as installations and photographs, and his beautiful films celebrate African culture while exposing the legacies of race and empire. Globally celebrated Shonibare also supports younger generations of artists in Britain and Africa; both his artistic legacy and his charitable initiatives will resonate for years to come."

Nadja Swarovski commented: "The Swarovski Foundation is delighted to continue its support of the Whitechapel Gallery and the Art Icon award, which this year honours an artist who has made an outstanding contribution to our cultural life. Yinka Shonibare's work is strikingly beautiful and exerts a profound emotional power whilst exploring issues such as race, power and identity. Through his charitable programmes, Shonibare's support of the next generation of artists and to cultural exchange have been equally impactful."

The event committee includes Aki Abiola, Sir David Adjaye OBE, Dorota Audemars, Erin Bell, Terhas Berhe, David Cleaton-Roberts (Cristea Roberts Gallery), James and Jane Cohen, Robert Devereux, Karon Hepburn (Stephen Friedman Gallery), Luigi Maramotti, Bimpe Nkontchou, Oba Nsugbe, Irene Panagopoulos, Catherine Petitgas, Maria Sukkar, Nadja Swarovski, Andreas Teoh, Helen Waters (Cristea Roberts Gallery), and Cheyenne Westphal.

Shonibare is internationally renowned for his multi-layered work that explores issues of race, class and colonialism through his multi-disciplinary practice. Often incorporating references from Western art history and literature, his work questions the validity of contemporary cultural and national identities within the context of globalisation. His signature material is the vibrantly coloured 'Dutch wax' batik fabric. Batik was inspired by Indonesian designs, manufactured in Holland and then sold to colonies in West Africa before becoming a signifier for African identity in the 1960s.

Shonibare was born in Lagos, Nigeria and lives and works in East London. He was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2004. His sculpture, *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, was the 2010 Fourth Plinth Commission in Trafalgar

Square and is now on permanent display at The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. His monumental installation, *The British Library* (2014), which celebrates the contribution made by immigrants to Britain, has been on permanent display at Tate Modern since 2019. Recently, he has had solo exhibitions in Beijing, Singapore and London, and will have a major survey exhibition at the Museum der Moderne Salzburg in May 2021. He is represented by Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; James Cohan Gallery, New York; and Goodman Gallery, South Africa.

Over the past 10 years, Shonibare has supported a younger generation of artists through his pioneering 'Guest Projects', an initiative that gives free studio space to practitioners of any discipline for a month. He is the founder of the Yinka Shonibare Foundation, which aims to promote artistic and cultural exchange between Africa and the rest of the world through an ambitious programme of artist residencies in Nigeria from 2021.

The Swarovski Foundation has supported the Whitechapel Gallery Youth Programme since 2015 as part of its commitment to championing creativity, enabling art education and celebrating the power of art to transform lives. The Youth Programme has empowered over 4,000 young people by giving them opportunities to explore contemporary art, meet creative professionals and gain new skills and practical experience to open up career paths into the creative sector.

Notes for Editors

- For over a century the Whitechapel Gallery has premiered world-class artists from modern masters such as Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Frida Kahlo and Hannah Höch to contemporaries such as Zarina Bhimji, Sophie Calle, William Kentridge and Michael Rakowitz. Its historic campus houses exhibitions, artist commissions, collection displays, historic archives, education resources, inspiring art courses, talks and film screenings, the Townsend dining room and the Koenig Bookshop. It is a touchstone for contemporary art internationally, plays a central role in London's cultural landscape and is pivotal to the continued growth of the world's most vibrant contemporary art quarter. The Gallery believes that art has the power to transform the lives of children and young people, and pioneered gallery education and community outreach. Working with thousands of children and young people annually, leading artists collaborate with those who have the greatest need for opportunity, and their art is celebrated through exhibitions in galleries 5&6, which are dedicated to education projects. www.whitechapelgallery.org/learn

- Previous recipients of the Whitechapel Gallery Art Icon are: **Sir Howard Hodgkin** (2014), **Richard Long** (2015) **Joan Jonas** (2016), **Peter Doig** (2017) and **Mona Hatoum** (2018), **Rachel Whiteread** (2019) and **Francis Alÿs** (2020).

- [The Swarovski Foundation](http://www.swarovskifoundation.com) was set up in 2013 by Nadja Swarovski to honor the philanthropic spirit of Daniel Swarovski, who founded the crystal business 125 years ago in the Tyrolean Alps. Since then, five generations of the Swarovski family have reinforced the company's commitment to philanthropy and charitable giving. The Swarovski Foundation's mission is to build on this heritage by supporting charitable initiatives and organizations working in three areas: fostering culture and creativity, promoting human empowerment and preserving the environment. The Foundation preserves cultural heritage and foster emerging creative talent by funding educational charities and institutions working across fashion, jewelry and design. The Foundation seeks to promote human empowerment, gender equality and education, working with organizations that educate young people and address the challenges facing women around the world. In line with the environmental awareness that has characterized Swarovski since it first began making crystals in 1895, the Foundation supports organizations that promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the natural world. As

well as funding, the Foundation seeks to bring to philanthropic projects structure and good governance to ensure positive and long-lasting social impact.

Ticket Enquiries

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