

*Object of the Month-April, Sheila-Marie Untiedt*

*The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*

*The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters(Australia)*

*Yinka Shonibare*

*Photograph, C-printed mounted on aluminum*

*17 1/2" x 49 1/4"*

*2008*

*2008.79*

*Gallery 250*



*The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters: Plate 43 of The Caprices (Los Caprichos), 1799  
Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (Spanish, 1746–1828)*

*The MIA photograph is based on Francisco Goya's famous 1799 etching, The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters, a coded expression of the Spanish artist's critique of his*

period's political and social vices. In the etching that might have served as the frontispiece to his suite of satires, *Los Caprichos*, Goya imagined himself asleep amid his drawing tools, his reason dulled by sleep and bedeviled by creatures that prowl in the dark. The artist's nightmare reflected his view of Spanish society, which he portrayed as demented, corrupt, and ripe for ridicule.

*This MIA object is one of a five photograph series which depict animals surrounding a sleeping figure (whose ethnicity changes in each image) in Victorian style costume made from richly colored African textiles - materials that were previously imported by the Dutch to Africa and have become so closely associated with the continent that they are assumed to be indigenous. Shonibare emphasizes the complexity of cultural identity while arguing for a delicate balance between fantasy and reality, a sentiment shared by Goya who warned, "Imagination deserted by reason, begets impossible monsters. United with reason, she is the mother of all arts, and the source of their wonders". The MIA version reads "The dreams of reasons produce monsters in Australia?"*

*Contemporary artist Shonibare, born in Britain to Nigerian parents, reprises this familiar image to explore European history, in particular colonialism. The central figure's clothes are made from fabrics inextricably linked with African identity. Ever since the nineteenth century these brightly colored "Dutch wax prints" are being manufactured in the Netherlands and in England for export to markets of West Africa, where they are still hugely popular. "These costumes are made from fabrics inspired by Indonesian batiks, but manufactured in Europe and sold in west Africa. Today, these vibrantly patterned textiles are closely associated with African identity, and yet they also signal the entangled relations that unite peoples and cultures around the world." Dutch wax fabrics, designed in the former-Dutch colony Indonesia and manufactured in Manchester, England, ended up as an export to Africa, thus inventing an "African" identity through fashion. Having described himself as a 'post-colonial' hybrid, Shonibare questions the meaning of cultural and national definitions.*

*Yinka Shonibare MBE calls himself a "postcolonial hybrid." Born in London in 1962 of Nigerian parents who moved back to Lagos when the artist was three, Shonibare has always straddled different identities, both national and physical. Son of an upper middle-class lawyer, he summered in London and Battersea, attended an exclusive boarding school in England at age sixteen (where much to his amusement he learned that his classmates assumed that all black people are poor), and enrolled in Byam Shaw School of Art, London (now part of Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design) at age nineteen. One month into his art school studies he contracted a virus that rendered him paralyzed. After three years of physical therapy, Shonibare remains partially disabled.*

*These dual identities--African/British; physically able/challenged--are only two of Shonibare's acknowledged hybrid conditions. His recently acquired title Yinka Shonibare MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) conjures up thoughts of exoticism,*

*imperialism, globalization, and cultural confluence, just like his signature medium Dutch batik fabric.*



**SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA**

14 life-size mannequins, 14 chairs, table, Dutch wax printed cotton, 132 x 488 x 280 cm

©2003, Yinka Shonibare, MBE

*“Shonibare is most widely recognized for the elaborate sculptural groupings he creates of richly costumed, headless mannequins.”*

<http://www.yinkashonibaremb.com/>

<http://sci-cultura.com/2007/11/28/dutch-wax-as-a-symbol-of-african-identity/>