YINKA SHONIBARE.

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I. Introduction

Artists who identify with the African Diaspora are a large, diverse group that have been displaced to other parts of the globe because of socio-economic factors. Diaspora artists are often perceived as communicating viewpoints that deal with their dual ethnicity and the historical conflicts that lead to that duality; however, their commentary goes beyond this narrow scope. Nigerian-British artist Yinka Shonibare is an artist from the African Diaspora who explores and expands our understanding of ethnic identity and Western contact. He uses his bicultural upbringing in London and Lagos, as well as contemporary stereotypes about race, ethnicity, gender, and social class as inspiration to create his art. This complex platform provides the artist a basis for both personal exploration of his national identity and his introspective commentary on historical and contemporary global issues. In a quest for self-discovery, he has provoked his viewers to consider their own viewpoints and social generalizations. Shonibare’s work in film, photography, sculpture, and paint medium, sets up an overarching juxtaposition that highlights post-colonial discord versus contemporary social norms provoking important internal reflection within the viewers’ mind thereby commenting on the social fabric of the 2017 global world.

Shonibare’s grandfather was a tailor and his parents were elite figures in Nigeria when the country won independence in the 1960’s. His parents moved to London as expatriate students to gain education and training for taking up important leadership roles in Nigeria. It was during the time of their study that Shonibare was born in London in 1962. When the artist was three his family moved back to Lagos, Nigeria, where he attended private schools. For high school, Shonibare went to a boarding school in London, where his family summered in their
townhome every year.¹ He earned his Masters of Fine Arts from Goldsmith’s College in London and formed the Young British Artists (YBA) Association where he and other fellow classmates at Goldsmith’s found that focusing on branding and showing their artwork together made them more successful in the early stages of their careers.² For Shonibare, life was a constant fluctuation between Yoruba culture and Westernized European life. This claim to two homes—London, England and Lagos, Nigeria—created a sense of liminal belonging in the artist’s life, where he adopted the perspective of the outsider looking in at society. Additionally, his multi-centered identity has been a primary source of inspiration in his art and played an important role in his college experiences at Goldsmith’s college in London, where he was often questioned by his professors about why his art was not more African.³ This question was one that haunted Shonibare as he realized the scope of such criticism:

“When I was at college in London, my work was very political…my tutor upon seeing this work, said to me: ‘You are African, aren't you; why don't you make authentic African art?’ I was quite taken aback by this, but it was through the process of thinking about authenticity that I started to wonder about what the signifiers of such “authentic” Africanness would look like.”⁴

His work reflects an exploration of his own thoughts and ideas about how he himself fits into western society and the world.

The artist operates in a style that I would call social satire, or parody to comment on contemporary social issues. His message is not simply a post-colonial commentary but also incorporates identity issues such as race, class, gender, sexuality and nationality.

There are various ways to explore Shonibare’s post-colonial commentary and contemporary duality. There are also various works of his that fall into the category of social parody that satirize literature, performing arts, and fine art. In order to allow for adequate space to explore the specifics of his social observations, however, I am going to limit myself to three of his tableau-vivant style pieces that pay homage to visual fine art. Therefore, in this thesis, I will work with the following tableau-vivant style pieces: *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe, America)* [fig. 2-6]; *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews Without their Heads* [fig. 11] and *The Last Supper (After Leonardo)* [fig. 15-18]. Each of the original pieces deals with social unrest in the mid eighteenth- to nineteenth-century European society. However, it must be understood that Shonibare’s work extends beyond commenting upon social discord of that era to address issues of our day. This makes Shonibare’s work particularly fitting for his depth exploration of the ramifications of colonization which include, for him, not only the European internment of Africa, but also a social class structure that has been determined by race, nationality, and gender. In these works, the artist visually argues that the ramifications of colonization are still prevalent in the social fabric of our culture today.

This paper will show how Shonibare captivates his viewer’s attention with atypical pairings as well as with visual and conceptual jarring themes. In turn, he addresses socially controversial topics in today’s society, which helps to provide a platform for his post-colonial discord in which he evokes the social and historical background of iconic works in the history of art as a framework, or lens. Moreover, Shonibare’s ability to multi-layer his works draws
parallels from past social history to present social norms in contemporary society, leaving space for the audience’s mind to consider the social injustice and its consequences. His ability to consider past events in history and align them with the current events of today’s society helps to spur a global realization that, coming from an African ethnic background, does not limit artists’ ability to communicate viewpoints that are global in nature, nor should it call for them to be labeled by their ethnic origins. Ultimately, his multi-layered approach is propelling his art from the work of an African Diaspora artist to art that critics and scholars are beginning to look at on a global scale.⁵

II. The Diary of a Victorian Dandy

Shonibare’s first professional job was working for Shape (in London), an organization that helps disabled people in the arts, this part time job allowed him the financial freedom to explore artistic topics such as racism, which lead to one of his first big solo exhibitions in 1998, *The Diary of a Victorian Dandy.*⁶ In his career, Shonibare has been a photographer, filmmaker, painter, sculptor, and installation artist, he feels that changing the media that he works in keeps his art from becoming stagnant for himself and the viewer.⁷

The artist began exploring tableaux-vivant style sculptures by constructing scenes of various literary backgrounds with live actors and then photographing them, the way he did in *The Diary of a Victorian Dandy* [Fig.1] This initial practice was very successful, as he obtained his

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first major buyer and gallery representation from this first solo exhibition. In this early piece, Shonibare begins exploring the various ways in which he can use the tableaux-vivant as a tool to communicate the social satire that he later develops further to address contemporary social issues and post-colonization ideology.

While *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* was largely successful, it and others of Shonibare’s early works failed to push the use of his well-known signature, Dutch Wax Fabric. It is with this thought I consider Shonibare’s work, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monster’s* (2008), as a particularly strong example of the powerful nature of the tableaux-vivant style, combined with Shonibare’s signature artistic trademarks, the use of Dutch Wax Fabric, tableaux-vivant scenes, and social satire, as one of the first pieces that he creates to present the complex messages that Shonibare’s work carries. Additionally, the artist’s visual trademarks allow him to layer social concepts and ideas into his pieces to communicate a social satire that is to be interpreted and mentally processed by the viewer; thus creating dialogue between Shonibare and his viewing audience, to send messages that resonate internally with viewers.

The juxtaposition of African society compared to English society is defined by the artist’s use of Dutch Wax fabric [fig.9-10]. This is a particular type of fabric made with a resist wax dying technique associated with the popular fashion of West Africa, and is the predominant way that the artist addresses the contemporary social issues of race and nationality. Moreover, Shonibare dresses the figures in a traditional mid eighteenth to nineteenth European costume [fig.9] constructed from Dutch Wax fabric. The juxtaposition of the Dutch Wax fabric and the European costuming is a reference to the historical relationship that Europe has with Africa, which is the primary juxtaposition that he uses to create postcolonial discord. In *The Sleep of*

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Reason Produces Monsters, Shonibare uses the title of the pieces juxtaposed with the race and nationality of the figure to explore the relationship between globalization versus nationalism to make statements about nationality, globalism, and racism.

II. The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters

The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe, America) is a series of five photographs [figs. 1-5] that pay homage to Goya’s Los Caprichos no. 43. In each of Shonibare’s photographs, there is a central male figure that lays his head onto his arms, which are folded on a desk. There are slight differences in each photograph in the way the figure sits and has his head positioned. In all of the photographs the figure is dressed in Shonibare’s signature Dutch wax fabric prints. This fabric is a particular type of fabric made with a resist wax dying technique associated with the popular fashion of West Africa today [figure 22]. Its popularity is due to the marketing successes of the Dutch colonial traders in Africa during the nineteenth century.  

Each figure’s costume varies in color and visual pattern and from one photograph to the next; however, the structure of the costume is the same for each figure. The audience cannot see the figure’s face, only the top of his head. On the ground, At the figure’s left there is a Lynx, a medium sized sable and black wildcat, with wisps of black hair at the tip of its brown ears, staring upwardly in the figure’s direction.

The audience sees the side of the desk that is inscribed in French with the phrase; the dreams of reason produce monsters in (name of the country or continent that the print is titled for). Sitting on top of the desk at the figure’s right are two wide-eyed owls, with beaks slightly parted, the way that owls look when catching prey. The owls surround the figure and dissipate into the background of the photograph. The main source of light comes from the upper left hand

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9 Deloitte Ignite, Yinka Shonibare in Conversation with Gus Casely-Hayford, directed by The Royal Opera House (2012; London), you tube.
corner and highlights documents, writing utensils that lay on the top of the desk, the man’s head and the owl that sits directly behind his head.

The owl that sits directly to the man’s right is white and grey. It holds a paintbrush in its right talons to proposition the man to sign the papers. The large talons and direct view of the bottom of the owl’s foot add a menacing effect to the appearance of the owls, likening them to monsters. There is an owl that is directly behind the man, with its wings spread full as if its intention is to attack him. There is a pitch-black cat perched at the base of the owl’s wings, just behind the man’s torso that confronts the audience in a yellow-eyed, direct stare. Shonibare furthers the monster innuendo as he positions a gigantic creature that is bat-like in appearance, at the front of the picture plane, causing the audience to interpret the animals as monsters. The background of the photograph is a simple grey that parallels the aqua tint of the background in Goya’s piece from the *Los Caprichos* [fig. 7]. In terms of subject matter, Shonibare copies what Goya did in his etching by creating a living and sculptural tableaux-vivant that he then photographs. Shonibare’s piece also makes use of the natural colors of the subject matter whereas Goya’s etching is done in black and white. The use of color highlights one of Shonibare’s most important hallmarks: his use of colorful Dutch wax print fabric [fig. 9-10].

The wax resist dying technique, known as Batik, is an art that is attributed to the Hindu culture from Indonesia. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch colonized Indonesia and began trading the cloth into Europe. The cloth was not popular in Europe because it has bold colors and contrasting patterns that were too brilliant for European taste. However, the Dutch saw monetary possibility in manufacturing the cloth by machine (as opposed to hand dying) and began machine production, which is how it has become known as wax print. Looking for other markets to sell the wax print fabric in, the Dutch began targeting Africa as a potential market. This inspired
Dutch traders to be concerned with the preferences that the West African people had in terms of patterns and color.\textsuperscript{10} Moreover, merchants began returning home from trade routes with advice to manufacturers about pattern features that had been requested by people in the West African communities.\textsuperscript{11} As time progressed and the fabrics became more tailored to the preferences of the West African people, they progressively became more popular with West African buyers. Catering to personal preferences fueled continued success for the Dutch in the West African market. In turn, production of the cloth picked up quickly and demand heightened. Today, the fabrics are associated with West Africa because they are so popular with the peoples in the area.\textsuperscript{12} Vlisco is one of the most successful companies to manufacture the double-sided, machine printed textiles, and is located in southern Holland. The company began in 1846 and designs prints around the cultural customs and proverbs of the community that they are marketing to.\textsuperscript{13}

Shonibare’s artistic style is defined by the use of this signature fabric. He is drawn to it because when his audience sees the fabric’s bold patterns and brilliant colors it evokes the assumption that the fabric is from Africa. Ironically, the fabric is actually manufactured by the Dutch and the artist buys his cloth from the Brixton Market in London\textsuperscript{14}. Moreover, the costume that Shonibare dresses the figure in is a traditional mid eighteenth to nineteenth century European costume [fig. 20] constructed from Dutch Wax fabric. The juxtaposition of the Dutch Wax fabric and the European costuming is a reference to the historical relationship that Europe has with Africa. Shonibare uses this comparison to create the foundation of his artistic protest,
which begins with postcolonial discord.\textsuperscript{15} He then furthers his commentary to contemporaneity by introducing additional juxtapositions, in this case the juxtaposition of the title of each piece and the nationality of the main figure; the title of the piece and the race of the main figure; and monsters juxtaposed with man.\textsuperscript{16}

In Rachel Kent’s essay on Shonibare’s satirical work, she states that Shonibare’s \textit{The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters} breaks down grand narratives and the contamination of ideas.\textsuperscript{17} I believe that through \textit{The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters}, Shonibare is presenting the viewer with the representation of racial and national binaries, through visual and conceptual juxtapositions, which addresses the contamination of ideas that Kent says Shonibare’s work does. As for breaking down the grand narrative, scholars could consider that Shonibare is revealing what the grand narratives describe about modern western society today. I will attempt to analyze the purpose of these juxtapositions and consider what Shonibare is communicating to his viewers about contemporary society’s racial and national stereotypes through social satire, which are the types of grand narratives that I believe he is referring to.

As the artist began searching for a definition of his own nationality, Europe’s relationship with Africa became a source for an internal, complex and deep-rooted analysis; Shonibare eventually came to the conclusion that he is neither African nor British but a hybrid of both nationalities.\textsuperscript{18} This binary is addressed by the pairing of the Dutch Wax fabric and the European costuming but also through the comparison of the title of the piece compared with the nationality

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Sleep of Reason Produces Monster (Africa); The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Europe); The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Australia); The sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Asia); The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (America).}
\textsuperscript{17} Kent (2008), 20-21.
\textsuperscript{18} Deloitte Ignite, \textit{Yinka Shonibare in Conversation with Gus Casely-Hayford}, directed by The Royal Opera House (2012; London), you tube.
and race of the main figure. The title of each piece compared to the nationality of the main figure is a definitive label that is followed through with an ambiguous answer on the part of the artist. Kent states that each figure in the work claims a nationality that is not only different from the title of the piece but that is also in turmoil with the nation that the photograph is titled for. 19

The sleeping figure differs in each photograph and is at odds with the continent that he represents: a white man for Africa, an African man for Asia and so forth. 20 For example, in figure 4 the man that plays the central figure is white, only the title of the piece is The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Africa). Stereotypically the viewer would expect to see a black person to represent Africa, yet the artist chooses a white figure to represent the piece that is titled for Africa; this juxtaposition is the artist's way of addressing the racial discord that is present in the social unrest between races in society. Moreover, he is exposing a common stereotype in contemporary society: the tendency to think that nationality is synonymous with race.

In regards to the idea that all of the particular figures are at odds with the nation that they represent, I am not wholly behind Kent’s claim, as I cannot see the face of the main figure. Due to this it is unclear what nationality the person in the photograph is. We can only see the subject’s balding (bald) and hair color. The texture of the hair is ambiguous for the viewer because the audience only the top of the head—a suggestion of the total hair look—from the viewer and the skin is covered almost completely by clothing, the only skin that the viewer can see is the skin of the hands. Hair, skin tone, and facial features are the most immediate ways of what race a person is. If I use this same logic that I applied in the prior example to consult figure 5, the man that plays the character is white and the piece is titled for Europe; in this case, I am assuming the figure is white, but I cannot tell with confident determination because I cannot

19 Kent (2008), 21.
20 Kent (2008), 21.
see the figure’s face. Perhaps Kent is falling into Shonibare’s cunning point; the assumption that by solely looking at a person’s skin tone, facial features, and clothing it is possible to judge race and or nationality of another individual. Or, perhaps Shonibare purposely exposed the assumption of the viewer by choosing a particular person with a skin color that represents the Caucasian or African race, consequently not identifying the race of the other three figures to prove that the stereotype exists. Moreover, by replacing the main figure’s clothing with the Dutch Wax print fabric in the costume of the Enlightenment, he takes away any nationally specific/racially specific iconography, replacing it with his own iconography; African iconography. Is this deception one that alludes to the art historical practice of sleuthing out information from the work of art by looking at the iconography for clues? Did I just commit the same crime by defining the clothing of the individual as African when the history of the fabric is a lot more complex than one national label? Perhaps and perhaps not; it seems as if this is part of Shonibare’s grand narrative. He begins to break down the ideas that are fueled by stereotypes by visually representing the stereotype in his work.

This ambiguity highlights the next concept that all three works that I have chosen carry, the use of ambiguity juxtaposed with finite definition. In *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* series [figs. 2-5], there are two main ideas that are not fully defined: the nationality and the race of the central figure; and the relevance to the geographical location of the title of the print. I have already explored the ambiguity that takes place in terms of racial parameters, but the issue of nationality becomes more complex when the titles of the photographs are analyzed and the geographical areas that the photographs are named for are taken in to account. Moreover, Shonibare presents the idea that racism is a universal issue by cleverly defining an important element in the work of art that creates the tension between ambiguity and definition: he defines
the title with five heavily populated continents or countries. In part of the title he is clearly presenting continents Asia, for example. However, there is ambiguity in the title of the other geographical locations as to whether Shonibare is referring to a country or a continent. For example, America could mean The United States of America, or it could include all of North America, South America, and Central America. By the same token, Australia is a continental country. Here in this presentation lies another stereotype: the idea that Africa as a whole is a country. Africa stereotypically is looked at as one large country, but in actuality Africa is the size of two North American continents and houses fifty-seven countries.

In actuality, I have no idea what nationality the main figure is, let alone what race he identifies with. In turn, the artist poses the question to his audience, how do you judge what nationality or race a person belongs to? Furthermore, when individuals in society make determinations about race, observers tend to consider the question, “Where is the person from, or what is the individual’s nationality?” Shonibare addresses the conceptual idea that race is synonymous with nationality. For example, in figure 3, the central figure in the photograph is black, yet the photograph is titled, The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Asia). By using the visual discord of making the central figure black as opposed to Asian, Shonibare mirrors the conventional attitudes of society by presenting a figure that is outside of the stereotypical race. Earlier, in this paragraph I established that race and nationality are personal things that society may (as on-lookers) attempt to define but cannot do with accuracy because both concepts are personal labels that every individual defines for himself or herself. Shonibare reflects in Robert Hobbs' essay on his objection:

“[Shonibare views] racist stereotypes as subjects that his art could probe and critique. ‘I realized’, Shonibare reflected, ‘that I didn’t have to accept my designation as some sort of doomed other, I could challenge my relationship to authority with humor and parody in
mimicking and mirroring.’’

Additionally, Shonibare adds another layer of argument into his work by changing the textile patterns in his pieces to reflect a stereotypical assumption that the person is wearing an African textile print. This is part of his gentlemanly argument because society tends to answer questions of nationality by looking at clothing for clues (iconography). All of the figures in his piece, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, wear the same outfit (but with different colored prints). The iconography of what a person is wearing sends powerful messages of individualism, especially in Africa. Hobbs explains:

> Not only do these textiles result from an involved fabrication based on a combination of local needs and international business interest, but they are also concerned with constructing shorthand signs for the local narratives that take the forms of letters, depicted and written proverbs, pictures of rulers, and visiting dignitaries, as well as emblems of government authority, political parties, wealth, status, and timely issues, thus enabling people wearing this cloth to demonstrate physically through their dress an allegiance to different facets of the social and political fabric constituting their cultural universe.  

When applying this logic of definition versus ambiguity to the figures in the photographic series, the audience at first glance might think that the figure in the photograph identifies with the nationality of the title of the photograph. With this one cunning idea --titling his work-- Shonibare dispels the idea that a nationality can be determined by simply looking at a person or by looking at the iconography of the figure, and exposes the stereotype that race is synonymous with nationality. Four different nationalities are presented in the title of Shonibare’s *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*. Dictionary.com defines nationality in two different manners: “A group of persons related by common descent or heredity.” And “A body of people sharing a common descent, history, language, etc.; a nation.” When defined by the first definition, nationalism is simply about a geographical location, which is what Shonibare’s work speaks to.

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All too often society defines nationality by the second definition. It is not that this second meaning is incorrect; it is just that the second definition is an anthropological take on a group of people or peoples that belong to the same race. In this manner, a nation is a common group of people, and so it makes sense to think that people that share a common descent are from the same race. When consulting Dictionary.com about the term race--“A group of persons related by common descent or heredity,” Shonibare’s point is that just because a person identifies with a geographical location, this does not automatically mean that they identify with the second form of the definition of nation, meaning a collective group of people sharing the same customs, language, etc. It is important not to automatically lump together people from the same geographical location into the same cultural nation because, unless a person expresses self-identification with the national identity of a group of people, an outsider could be creating a racist stereotype.

Another juxtaposition that needs to be considered when interpreting Shonibare’s photograph, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters in (Africa, America, Asia, Australia, Europe),* ...is the original Goya work, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters,* that Shonibare is referencing. As Shonibare himself said in reference to his appropriation of another historical piece:

“Looking back to art history for images is central to my work insofar as it often yields unexpected images and resonances.....If I work with a Thomas Gainsborough painting such as Mr. and Mrs. Andrews, then that painting historically stands for something, and in using that in my work…., I am appropriating a degree of its power while at the same time offering a critique of it.”

By appropriating the power that Goya’s print brings to Shonibare’s work, the audience can see that Shonibare’s intention is to evoke the spirit of questioning assumptions. In its original

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22 Kent (2014), 44-5.
context, Goya’s print reflects upon the Enlightenment, a movement fueled by the logical ideals and reform that is rooted in information brought about by education. *Los Caprichos*, as a series, presents satirical criticism of the Spanish monarchy. Its purpose was to criticize eighteenth century Spain’s belief in the divine right to rule.

Like Goya, Shonibare uses satire as a tool to communicate his ideas about the contemporary society that he lives in. Moreover, it is easy to see parallels between Goya’s ideas about the human condition and Shonibare’s ideas about society’s need to step back and analyze its thoughts and opinions. Both Shonibare and Goya criticize society as a whole; neither artist is pointing out any one particular group that is a worse offender than another in terms of yielding to human folly. Moreover, Shonibare demonstrates his span of global consideration by presenting 5 chromogenic prints, one representing each country or continent: The United States, Africa, Australia, Europe and Asia. The visual evidence of Shonibare’s ideas are whispered into this body of photographs. The artist discusses the significance of this whisper:

“it is precisely the arrogance of liberal democracy that has been used as a justification for a number of wars and, most recently, the war in Iraq. The appeal to transcendentalist notion of democracy has effectively presaged an unjust war. The arguments are familiar from a colonial period: they, the other, are an “uncivilized” people and we, enlightened Europeans that we apparently are, will endeavor to enlighten them…they refuse to be enlightened so we will force democracy on them by the gun.”

If I compare Goya’s piece to Shonibare’s piece, the full scope of the satirical implication becomes more apparent. In both works, the fantasy is in the dream state of the man that sits at his desk; he is dreaming and the monsters that surround him are personified into fearsome animals: owls and bats. To see what Goya had intended to be etched on the desk of his print, the preparatory drawing for the etching has to be consulted [fig. 8]. It says, “Universal language.

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Drawn and etched by Francisco de Goya in the year 1797.” Below the design in pencil, it states, “The author dreaming. His only purpose is to banish harmful superstition and to perpetuate with this work of fancy the solid testimony of truth.”

The animals in Goya’s work represent the monsters that are a symbol for the harmful ideas that are believed by man. And the lynx and the man represent the fight against the follies of human nature with truth, and education. The Lynx is present because the man sleeps, literally, as the Lynx is required to keep a successful watch over the safety of man from folly. The lens that is used by Shonibare to absorb the satire that Goya created is achieved simply by Shonibare recreating Goya’s piece with his own spin.

In The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters, Shonibare establishes a groundbreaking foundation for his tableaux-vivant works, developing this approach as a tool to bring about important contemporary discussions with his viewing audience. He uses Goya’s piece as a lens because his work has many parallels to the purpose of Goya’s work, thus appropriating the messages and social connotations that Goya’s work carries. Goya was an artist that went against the establishment and did so in an ambiguous and non-confrontational way. Shonibare states that he feels the need to protest like a gentleman as well.

The Sleep of Reason Produces Monster (Africa); The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Europe); The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Australia); The sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Asia); The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (America) [figs. 2-5], a series, that appropriates the power of Goya’s entire Los Caprichos series, which is a body of work that resonates within the art historical community. By doing so he establishes a lens through which he aligns his photographs, and in

25 Nehamas, 38.
26 Deloitte Ignite, Yinka Shonibare in Conversation with Gus Casely-Hayford, directed by The Royal Opera House (2012; London), you tube.
some cases he also critiques the very piece that he is appropriating, as in the case of *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews Without their Heads*. In this piece, the artist explores the same appropriation techniques he had developed in photography and applies them to a sculptural format. In *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews Without their Heads* (1998) [fig. 11], he uses the context of the subject versus the contemporary social structure of contemporary society to make a point about social class, racism and nationality.

*Mr. and Mrs. Andrews without their heads* is a social-satire, tableaux vivant sculpture after the painting, *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* that was originally done in the mid eighteenth century by Thomas Gainsborough [1750’s, National Portrait Gallery, London]. Shonibare’s sculpture is built on a stark museum white platform that raises the scene above the floor so that the viewer’s field of vision is about eye level with Ms. Andrews’ shoulders. Mrs. Andrews sits erect on a decorative wrought iron bench that is a pale celadon color. The bench is large enough for two people to sit on however; Mrs. Andrews’ English style leisure dress takes up three quarters of the sitting area. The bench has a scrolling pattern that forms the back and sides of the seating area; this pattern mimics the shape of a script letter S. The four feet and legs support the seating area that Mrs. Andrews’ two-piece day dress sprawls upon. The dress is composed of leisure separates, a skirt and top, that make up a dress. The skirt is full and seems to go on forever in volume, which is accentuated by the fact that Shonibare has constructed the skirt out of a Dutch Wax fabric that is orange and red with a repeating, scrolling brown pattern. The sleeves of the top are flowing and drape onto the lap of the garment. They are constructed out of a red printed fabric that is accented with a blue handkerchief collar, revealing an idealized neck of a headless mannequin. The mannequin has a distinct collarbone that is dainty with divots where the neck

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27 Kent, 41-2.
meets the clavicle. Mrs. Andrews’ skin tone is a pale orange; her hands rest on her lap. Her shoes are made of fabric that matches her sleeves; they are simple and accentuate the smallness of her feet as she daintily crosses them at the ankles under her billowing skirt.

III. Mr. and Mrs. Andrews Without their Heads

Mr. Andrews leans on his left elbow that is poised on the back of the celadon iron bench. His hand hangs loosely at the wrist and is turned inward towards Mrs. Andrews. He tips slightly forward at the waist to allow him to cross his left leg over his right calf. Mr. Andrews wears a hunting tunic that has a billowing collar, adding to the nonchalant feel of his stance; a shirt peaks out from underneath the tunic to reveal a thin necktie; his knickers, yellow tights and shoes complete his dress. His tunic is of red and blue Dutch Wax fabric, with a print pattern that is bolder, with larger shapes and contrasting colors, than those of Mrs. Andrews’ garment. His knickers come to just above the knee and are made of a deep red and white swirl pattern. He sandwiches his hunting rifle between his right arm and his waist so that he can leisurely insert his hand into his pocket while still holding the rifle; we see his bags of ammunition dangling from his pocket. The shirt that he wears under his hunting tunic has sleeves that peek out from under the wide cuff of the tunic. They also add to the less formal look of the couple’s attire. His shoes are simple black, European loafers with silver buckles.

Mr. Andrews, like Mrs. Andrews, is headless, with only two main areas where an orange skin tone is visible; his skin tone is darker than hers. At his right side, Mrs. Andrews’s hunting hound lifts his head and looks upward at him as if looking for direction from his master. The hound is black with white legs, paws and muzzle. The dog’s eyes are a deep shiny black and his ears fold back against his head the way a dogreacts when anxious. Its stance is indicative of inferiority as the dog bends at the hips in a slightly downward motion and stretches his neck fully
up at his master; this stance, combined with the facial expression of the dog, create the visual representation of the master and servant relationship between man and the dog.

The use of the Dutch wax fabric in this satirical piece lays the foundation for a much greater discussion that the sculpture focuses on, social class. The fabric clues the viewer into the idea that the tableaux vivant style sculpture addresses the contemporary relationship that Africa has with England in the same way that Shonibare establishes contemporaneity in *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Africa, Europe, Australia, Asia, America)*. Furthermore, Shonibare’s *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* establishes deeper insights to reveal the social class structure of English society compared to the social class structure of contemporary society in the global world. The artist establishes this juxtaposition by appropriating the social connotations of eighteenth century England, when the original work by Gainsborough is addressed [fig.11]. In the painting, Gainsborough addresses the couple as smug and haughty by showing the couple in the forefront of the landscape, eyeing the viewer. Mrs. Andrews sits on a bench that is located directly in front of a robust tree belonging to their new estate. She is depicted coyly looking at the artist but not so confrontationally as Mr. Andrews, whose face looks directly at the painter with an assuredness that communicates self-confidence. Mrs. Andrews’ eyes have the same air of confrontation that the viewer sees in Mr. Andrews, but they do not seem to communicate the same self-assurance as her new husband’s. A dog, with a gold collar, stands just behind Mr. Andrews’s feet, looking up at him in loyalty, communicating that Mr. Andrews is in charge.

Their clothing, while formal by today’s modern standards, was informal for the 1750s. Generally, Gainsborough would sketch his subject in their natural setting and then go to his studio where he kept costumes; he would then pose a joined model in costume, and complete the

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28 Egerton, 83.
painting in his studio.\textsuperscript{29} It would seem that this artistic practice probably allowed Gainsborough the ability to add in his own elements to the painting, including the implied emotion of the subject(s) that communicates the sitter’s personality that he was so famous for.

\textquotedblleft Portraiture also had an intellectual side. It was seen as a serious site for the penetrating observation of character, for revealing what the poet Alexander Pope called the ‘ruling passion’ in a person.\textsuperscript{30}\textquotedblright

Gainsborough conveys Mr. and Mrs. Andrews’ personalities through the way he depicts their confrontational gaze at the viewer, by his choice of aloof costumes that he dresses the couple in, and by the way he chooses to pose them in the painting: disconnected from each other, with Mr. Andrews seemingly preoccupied and Mrs. Andrews seemingly less confident. Vaughan posits that this was definitely Gainsborough’s intention:

\textquotedblleft Gainsborough certainly knew Robert Andrews and Francis Carter from childhood, but not as equal……He had gone to Sudbury Grammar School like Robert Andrews, but he had not gone on to Oxford University like Andrews. He had become a humble apprentice in London. When his father had suffered the humiliation of bankruptcy, Francis Carter’s father had been one of those who had bailed him out. In her eyes, Thomas Gainsborough was the son of a charity case. The artist knew those looks that this couple were giving him and recorded them with sarcastic exactness.\textsuperscript{31}\textquotedblright

The portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Andrews not only records the union of the couple, it also records their inheritance of the property. Gainsborough uses his skill in landscape to show the Andrews’ economic status in society. We know that the Andrews are from the upper class of society by looking at their clothing and the bench that Mrs. Andrews sits upon; however, Gainsborough's true clue to the viewer that the Andrews are of landed gentry social status is the depiction of the landscape, and the iconography that is associated with Mr. Andrews.

Shonibare's contemporary sculpture and the nineteenth century painting, both declare the socio-economic status of the Andrews. Moreover, marriages were often arranged to secure the

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\textsuperscript{30} Vaughan, 9.
\textsuperscript{31} Vaughan, 56-7.
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social status or the wealth of young adults launching into society. In the painting, the property is focused upon to show the wealth possessed by the couple. Gainsborough was acknowledged to be a significant painter in his time by his contemporaries, such as Joshua Reynolds.\textsuperscript{32} Scholars cite Gainsborough as being a significant visual historian of the English social class system:

“We are lucky to have Gainsborough’s work still with us. It is both a delight in itself and a crucial record of sensibilities that prevailed in British culture in the latter part of the eighteenth century, a key period in the history of the country when it was rising to become a leading European power.”\textsuperscript{33}

Mrs. Andrews’ father (Mr. Carter) commissioned this painting to commemorate the marriage of the young couple. In turn, the painting itself is a status symbol; the patrons knew this and requested the inclusion of new farming technology that Mr. Andrews had pioneered to cultivate corn showing him as a knowledgeable and productive landowner.\textsuperscript{34}

The clothing in the original painting and in Shonibare’s sculpture thus forms the iconography of the couple. Shonibare appropriates Gainsborough’s established iconography by copying the figures’ stance and clothing verbatim, but transcribing it into Dutch Wax fabric, bringing this mid eighteenth century painting into the 2017 contemporaneity. Moreover, by spotlighting post-colonial discord with the Dutch Wax fabric, he evokes the complex history that Africa has with Europe and aligns that history with the current social climate of society today. In this case, the Dutch wax fabric brings the sculpture into the world of modern day Africa because the clothing is made out of common prints that West Africans typically wear today [fig.]. Additionally, the fabrics carry messages of contemporary West African culture because they incorporate images of political parties, wealth, status, and government authorities: “Thus

\textsuperscript{33} Vaughan, 15.
\textsuperscript{34} Turner, 908.
enabling people wearing this cloth to demonstrate physically through their dress an allegiance to different facets of the social and political fabric constituting their cultural universe."35

Additionally, Shonibare subtly layers the appropriation of the painting into his sculpture. Even though Shonibare chooses to not surround the Andrews’ with their land or even a hint of their land, the social connotation of the painting already exists and so he channels the socio-economic message of the work by using it as lens. Moreover, it is safe to assume that the Andrews also benefitted, if not contributed to the slave trade, as it was typical to depict gentlemen in the 1750’s with their possessions and land but not the prime source of the wealth.36 I have no direct record that Mr. Andrews or Mr. Carter owned slaves but Bindman states that the whole of the socio-economic fabric of eighteenth century Europe was based on the slave trade in one way or another.37 Bindman writes, “Slavery was a presence, in one way or another, in virtually all eighteenth-century British art, because of the decisive economic role it played in the expansion of the British economy.”38 Just as abruptly as he uses the Dutch Wax fabric against the stark white land-less background of the sculpture’s platform, Shonibare strips the Andrews of their power by presenting the couple without their heads. It is here that I can see Shonibare playing with his own tricks to make us see what he wants us to see—the stereotype the viewer produces in their heads—to the artist’s advantage.

The presentation of the Andrews’ without their heads in the tableaux vivant de-individualizes the couple in society. Shonibare states that he uses the ideas of reverence and

35 Hobbs, 30.
37 Hobbs, 30
38 Bindman, 69.
irreverence to deflate the characters in the stories from which he is appropriating.\textsuperscript{39} Moreover, the head is the part of the body that humans think with and use to create identity; in some ways the heedlessness of the sculpture seems to say that they had no brains, they were people with no individuality who went along with the status quo of society. Shonibare highlights this significance in his work:

“In the contemporary world, Gainsborough’s painting is anachronism of sorts insofar as a man stands next to his belongings, in this case his wife, dog, and gun—in no particular order—and displays the extent of his land ownership in the background indicates a society where reverence, if not deference, is absolute. This painting is first and foremost a celebration of deference, and I want to deflate that somehow. I think that I achieve that by be-heading them, which is a reference to the French Revolution and the beheading of the French Landed gentry and aristocracy. It amused me to explore the possibility of bringing back the guillotine in the late 1990s, not for use on people, of course—my figures are mannequins—but for use on the historical icons of power and deference.”\textsuperscript{40}

This point is well defined by Shonibare and is part of his hallmark. I believe that he leaves the idea of figures not having heads open for interpretation by the viewer as well, to build the dialogue between the artist and the viewer, to raise questions with the audience about why the heads are gone. In this way the artist tricks the viewer into making assumptions. It is the viewer’s responsibility to step back and question their own assumptions, to think about what a head and face tells others about an individual and also what the function of the head. Perhaps Shonibare wants us to use our heads for more than just identification of gender, race, and nationality.

Just as powerful as Shonibare’s statement of Mr. and Mrs. Andrews not having a head is the presence of the dog’s head. I noted earlier in this paper that the pose and gesture of the dog

compared to that of Mr. Andrews, creates a master and servant relationship between the two figures. The dog is a status symbol that helps to show that Mr. Andrews is of the wealthy landed gentry class because only people with substantial land were allowed to hunt; a law that stemmed from the time when only the king could grant hunting rights to land owners. If one was caught hunting on the land and had not been approved by the king the hunter was subjected to poaching violations. Furthermore, hunters who paraded with dogs and guns were game hunters, they only hunted birds—a restriction to only the most skilled and qualified huntsmen—in turn, it was considered suspicious to own a sporting breed dog without the proper title that claimed the huntsman’s right to hunt. Spaniels, Foxhounds and Greyhounds were associated with the Landed Gentry.

The dog’s presence is fascinating to me, as Shonibare uses it to bring out contemporary ideas about social class. The dog elevates Mr. Andrews (without a head) as a member of the aristocracy. The dog also establishes visually and historically the master and servant relationship between the higher social class and lower social classes, especially when the past historical contexts of the hunting laws in England are consulted. It was a social statement to own a dog and gun; the lower classes were not allowed to own such things, nor were painters allowed to depict violence towards the animal for fear of an uprising. Martin Wallen cites:

“It had become too easy to see the aristocratic enjoyment in a sport that resulted in the violent death of a victim as an analogue for upper-class oppression of peasants and commoners.”

Visually, the dog’s posture, the gold collar that it wears, and the dog’s breed establishes that it is a hunting dog, belonging to a person of high social class; typically, these type of collars

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42 Wallen, 857.
43 Wallen, 585-6
belonged to wealthy gentlemen. Dogs that were favorites of slaves and lower class persons were not permitted to wear the gold collars that Gainsborough’s painting documents and Shonibare’s sculpture depicts.\textsuperscript{44} Furthermore, slaves were often painted with gold collars similar to those seen in Gainborough’s painting and in Shonibare’s sculpture (figs. 13 and 14).

Another ambiguity that Shonibare uses in the tableaux vivant is the ambiguity of the Andrews’ skin tone. He treats the skin as an orange color. There is no race that is defined by the color orange. Shonibare states that this ambiguity is intentional to create the question, “How does one define the race of a person”. Typically, the answer to this question is through facial features and skin tone. In turn, Shonibare is arguing that viewers make assumptions about race simply by looking at skin tone and facial features. To further develop the elusiveness of race and nationality, Shonibare chooses to depict the Andrews without heads altogether. The lack of the head leaves the audience to rely solely on the painting that the artist is satirizing to identify who the Andrews were and what their role in British society was.

Shonibare, being from London, knows this and he uses it to make a broader statement about the amoral reflection of how people in English society made their money, through owning land and investing in the slave trade, in addition to the socio-economic practice of colonization. In turn, the viewer might consider the appropriation of the painting.

Gainsborough’s Mr. and Mrs. Andrews backs up the social status of the Landed Gentry in the same way that Dorthea Lange’s Migrant Mother shows us what life was like during the great depression. While Shonibare’s sculpture may not be one that travels the country in protest to the plight of the African Diaspora, it still appropriates the power of the Andrews’ as a symbol of how the landed gentry fit into the socio-economic life of mid eighteenth century Europe.

\textsuperscript{44} Wallen,
Portraits like Gainsborough’s were often commissioned from this class of society in the mid eighteenth century to commemorate important events of the sitter’s life, in the same way that people take photographs of their family and friends to commemorate rites of passage in contemporary society.

It is not difficult to see the superiority and inferiority parallels of the mid eighteenth century slave trade and today’s social structure that stemmed from the European internment of Africa. In our modern global society, social class structure is a direct result of the past, which is Shonibare’s main point in his sculpture, *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews without their Heads*. It is modernized by the fact that Shonibare is an artist who comments on contemporary themes, that are present social concerns in our society today—racism, globalism, sexism—and that museums of contemporary art are showing his work. More poignantly, he dresses the figures in fabrics that are worn in modern day society. In both pieces, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* and *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews Without their Heads*, Shonibare makes visual arguments that are based on his hallmark use of Dutch Wax fabric; historical and contemporary juxtapositions and ambiguities versus finite definitions. Each piece has been critical in Shonibare’s establishing a style or artistic brand, addressing post-colonial discord juxtaposed with contemporaneity, and taking space in the modern world of art.

While Shonibare does not offer an alternative solution to the pitfalls of contemporary discord that is exposed, via the dichotomies that he presents, in *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* and in *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews Without Their Heads* he does bring tools to the contemporary conversation. Tools—visual comparisons that contrast and parallel, to conjure up cultural ideas/norms of stereotypes and socio-economic injustices—that culminate in a
complexly layered apex by utilizing juxtapositions that he has established; this culmination manifests itself in his piece, *The Last Supper After Leonardo*.

**IV. The Last Supper after Leonardo**

*The Last Supper* is a tableaux vivant sculpture that parodies Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper* from the High Renaissance. The tableaux is set around a long, oblong banquet table in which figures are placed along the back edge and sides (of the table), facing the viewer. The table has four sets of cherry wood legs, with claw feet that are dog paws [figs. 15 & 16]. A single chair is set out on the left side of the table is made of cherry wood and has a seat that is covered in Dutch Wax fabric. The central figure seated at the table has the upper torso of a man and the feet of a goat [fig. 16]. The six figures—male and female—to the left and right of the central figure have expressive hand gestures and some of them are in the midst of sexual practices. All thirteen figures wear Shonibare’s signature costumes created from Dutch Wax fabric cut into proper Mid eighteenth century colonial period clothing. On the table, there is a white/ivory tablecloth. The table is overloaded with food that is rotting and decaying; the food sits upon glass plates that allow the viewer to focus on the excessive amount that spills over on to the table itself. A large vase of tulips is in the center left of the table cheekily hides a sexual encounter between two of the mannequins. In addition, bowls of silver and crystal candelabras cover the table, all adding to the statement of excess that is made in the sculpture.

Earlier I established that each of the three pieces I am discussing have common juxtapositions that link the pieces together and present a particularly strong argument for Shonibare’s contemporary ideas: that we all live in the same global world and that the social

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45 It is interesting to note that this central figure would take the place of Jesus in the tableaux vivant of da Vinci’s last supper and that traditionally the goat can represent the devil.
injustices of our contemporary global society are injustices that were also present in the past. The artist creates a dichotomy of parallels by presenting post-colonial discord, represented by the conceptual ideas that are seen in the costumes of the mannequins; ambiguities versus definitudes, and past ideologies versus contemporary attitudes are found in the works as well. In turn, The Last Supper after Leonardo, also contains all of the elements that have been previously analyzed in this paper: Mid eighteenth to nineteenth century costumes made from Dutch Wax fabric; ambiguous skin tone colors; headless mannequins; past historical appropriation paired with contemporary discussion. The Last Supper is Shonibare’s conjunction launching the crescendo of the tableaux vivant sculptures that he is so well known for.

When looking at the costumed mannequins in the sculpture, The Last Supper After Leonardo, the role that the mid-eighteenth- to nineteenth-centuries play in Shonibare’s work extends beyond the relationship between Africa and England, expressing Shonibare’s own personal feelings about the English social class system:

‘Of course I realized, as an African that Victorian values for me, were very draconian…The Victorians colonized Africa. Basically the Victorians made Africans work to produce a great Empire. So Victorian values, to me, were values of repression, values of making me feel inferior.’

The argument that Shonibare felt inferior to those that align themselves with British values and the British themselves [in today’s contemporaneity]—which aided in defining the English social class system of today-- creates the premise for why he chooses to use early nineteenth century colonial costumes as a symbol for racism and nationalism. While the national argument might be a bit subtler it is still very much part of the message that Shonibare intends to convey. Shonibare deflates the wholesome British values even further by exposing the hypocrisy of the common social practices of the British elite.

\[46\] Hobbs, 32.
In this case, he is exposing the hypocritical way that relationships were made to look conventional and socially acceptable on the surface but in reality—behind closed doors—homosexual relationships and forbidden romance between men and women, who were having affairs, prevailed as a legitimate part of society. The illusion that Eighteenth to nineteenth-century European values were wholesome and pure becomes deflated by the representation of each one of the figures, except for the central figure, touching one another female-to-female, male-to-male, male and female together. When looking at the history of homosexuality, this “friendly” touching was common in this era and establishes each of the participants of the banquet as friends with the potential of lovers. Each of the guests might not be in full sexual contact with the figure next to them, but are connected through voyeurism, touching or full engagement in a sexual act. The full [sexual] engagements are happening at the far left of the central figure [fig. 18], where a female that lays diagonally across the table as a man and a woman have their hands up her skirt; meanwhile, at the far right a male figure is in the initial processes of instigating a sexual act with the figure, next to him [fig. 17]. He has his hand on her leg and is beginning to stroke her shin; he has his arm around her and his body is turned toward her. Her attention seems to be somewhat voyeuristic as she looks on to a grouping of three men that are engaging in sexual acts with one another. Because the figures are mannequins and do not have heads, Shonibare implies the sexual act by gesture. Furthermore, gesture becomes even more important because Shonibare leaves his figures fully clothed.

One reason he does this is to maintain the iconography--that these were in fact the actual acts of the British—but also to maintain the idea that orgies were not an open discussion in

48 Reay, 220.
eighteenth to nineteenth-century British society, which carries Shonibare’s point full throttle in claiming that the Eighteenth to nineteenth-century Europeans were not as wholesome as society claims. Furthermore, homosexuality was considered illegal between men and not possible between women. Kent states that these wholesome Eighteenth to nineteenth-century European values, “to prominent Victorians of all sexual persuasions, nothing could be further from the truth.”

Additionally, the artist is showing statements about power and social class when one takes into consideration the practice of seduction of the inferior classes. It was often accepted for well-established men of the landed gentry to fraternize with men who were younger than them, may have been of a lower station than them, and may have been their pupils.  

“An influential school of historians now interprets the idea of respectability, and all the virtues connected with it, as instruments of “social control”—the means by which the middle class, the ruling class, sought to dominate the working class; a subtle and covert way of conducting the class struggle.”

Furthermore, historical data shows that upper class men funded the market for prostitution of the lower class. In turn, Shonibare’s exposure of sexual practices of Eighteenth to nineteenth-century European society shows that they exploited the lower classes: for sex through prostitution; for labor and power through the slave trade and colonization; for monetary gain through the slave trade, Kent states that:

“Victorian morality represents a subject of much literary discussion. Equal if not greater interest has been aroused by its indiscretions and sexual mores, from the rumored relationship between Queen Victoria and her Scottish manservant John Brown to the flamboyant sexuality of cultural figures such as Oscar Wilde. Running distinctly contrary to the ‘proper-proper’ Victorian veneer of manners and social acceptability…the many

49 Kent (2014), 15.
51 Himmelfarb, 96-7.
52 Reay, 221.
inherent contradictions of Victorian culture have provided rich subject-matter for Shonibare” \(^{53}\)

The portrayal of uncouth European sexual practices—the unaccepted practice of homosexuality and forbidden heterosexual affairs—that Shonibare highlights, not only deflates the propriety of nineteenth-century European social norms but brings the nineteenth-century into our contemporary society. In turn, addressing themes of sexuality in 2017 contemporary society today, as modern society deals with questions about moral sexual practices and presents us with the confrontation of legal representation of those conflicts. In turn, Shonibare shows that in some ways the attitudes of contemporary people who align themselves with the moral and proper convictions of the European-ness, are people who make him and many others in his society feel inferior.

“While the leisure pursuit might look frivolous. My depicition of it is a way of engaging with that power. It is actually an expression of something much more profoundly serious insofar as the accumulation of wealth and power that is personified in leisure was no doubt a product of exploiting other people.”\(^54\)

Adding to Shonibare’s deflation of European wholesome values, is the sense of excessiveness that he conveys through *The Last Supper after Leonardo*. The element of time in the sculpture is particularly important as it highlights the peak of excess in the sculpture’s story. The excessiveness comes through in the abundance of food that has been half eaten and turned over on the table. Dinner has been eaten; the artist tells the audience this with overturned, mostly downed goblets of wine and half-finished platters of food. Yet, the abundance of food that has only been half-eaten is still visible, creating an urgency in the piece that leads to the question: What is so urgent, so exciting that guests have come to the table and only sampled the food? The answer lies in the actions of the mannequins; they are all frolicking in sexual ecstasy with one

\(^{53}\) Kent (2008), 17.  
\(^{54}\) Kent (2014), 45.
another--heterosexual couples and homosexual couples, to the right and left of the central figure, who is half man and half goat.

This tableau vivant sculpture uses art history as a lens (just as in the other two pieces that I have presented) to frame the contemporary issues that Shonibare addresses in his piece. The lens also appropriates a power that is not limited to the local fame of one country (or set of European attitudes), the way Gainsborough’s Mr. and Mrs. Andrews painting does. Da Vinci’s painting is a global icon that stands for Humanism, a movement launched by the Renaissance, and public acclaim. The history of this painting makes the work an icon of the Western Renaissance, which Shonibare uses as a lens to appropriate messages of the Renaissance conjuring the concepts of humanism, and exposes the rebirth of new ideas and thinking that led the way to the modern society which is becoming more and more global daily. The lens is created by Shonibare through copying the grouping and gestural patterns of the figures in The Last Supper. Da Vinci’s goal was to depict the emotional context of the character’s mind through gesture, facial expression, and body position. Shonibare copies the grouping of the figures and patterns the hand gestures after da Vinci’s piece. The intriguing thing about Shonibare’s piece compared to da Vinci’s is the replacement of the central figure, who in da Vinci’s piece is Jesus, with a half man half goat. Scholars identify the half man half goat as a symbol of lust, sensuality, and vileness. Many great writers, such as Ulysses, use the goat as a beast seeking sexual pleasures. Yet, in a religious context the half man half goat has been identified as a repugnant creature full of sin, having guilt and lust.

57 Elbarbary, 266-7.
When considered in the context of the lens that Shonibare uses to frame the satire of *The Last Supper*, the goat could be seen as humorous, the way that Shonibare talks about it being humorous to behead his mannequins by bringing back the guillotine. Taken into religious context Shonibare’s *The Last Supper (After Leonardo)* could be looked at as a visual attack on Christianity, or possibly a visual representation of the Europeans saying, “Manners, not Morals”, as the Goat would be the symbol for rejection of religion.\(^{58}\) These notions I assert, regardless the half man, half animal have been a sign of the beastly human condition in mythology, literature and early Renaissance Art.\(^{59}\) Ultimately, his piece seems to be a satire on the concept of Western art. The Renaissance was the origin of the ideas that have come to shape our current world. It began the knowledge awakening that made way to industrialization, in turn launching the foundations for our current socio-economic system that we live by. Shonibare leaves no part of the Renaissance out of this cunning satire as he highlights both the Italian Renaissance and the Dutch Renaissance. The Italian Renaissance is appropriated by the use of da Vinci’s painting as a lens. The Northern Renaissance is appropriated by the presentation of the food. The food sprawls across the table in a half eaten state seemingly having been there for some amount of time; it has a sense of finality to it the way that vanitas paintings had in the late Renaissance and Baroque. The tulips are another take on the Dutch origins of the Dutch Wax Fabric and add to the feel of the vanitas because they are overturned. We know that if left, the food and the flowers will rot and become rancid.

Lastly, Shonibare hints at the master and servant relationship that he highlighted so well in *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews Without their Heads* by adding the dog paws to the feet of the oblong table. While this may not be a direct reference to the slave trade or to colonization, it is another

\(^{58}\) Himmelfarb, 90-1.  
\(^{59}\) Elbarbary, 263-4.
level of iconography that defines the class of those that feast around the table and lavish in the excesses of life. Those excesses are as relevant today as they were in the mid-eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. Furthermore, by appropriating the power of the Renaissance, I believe that Shonibare is giving his audience the opportunity to think about their own consumption and frivolous activates that ultimately should jog a personal conversation evaluating our values and actions in a world that values individualism and personal accomplishment, aiding in our tendency to classify things by evaluating them against our own limited experiences.

V. Conclusion

In order to analyze the ways in which Shonibare’s social satire allows him to comment on the social norms in today’s society and post-colonial identity, scholars could benefit from looking more closely at the social themes that each work focuses on. When analyzing the common threads of juxtapositions that are incorporated in all three pieces: the use of Dutch Wax Fabric juxtaposed with Traditional mid-eighteenth- to nineteenth-century European English clothing patterns; the use of well-known art historical works juxtaposed with statements about contemporary society; and ambiguity juxtaposed with finite definition; it becomes easier to understand and assess his argument that colonization affects society on a global scale. Looking at how he adds sub-juxtapositions and symbols to his sculptures, it becomes apparent that Shonibare has analyzed his own feelings about colonialism, racism, nationalism, sexuality, and greed.

In *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, the artist’s own feelings of nationalism and his struggle with defining what labels he wants to apply to himself are exposed by looking at how nationality is determined; he then questions his audience as to how they define nationalism by using ambiguity and definition to evoke a response from the viewer. In *Mr. and Mrs.*
Andrews *Without their Heads*, the artist appropriates the past to expose the social class structure that has dictated the way Europe and the United States lives today. In *The Last Supper After Leonardo*, he layers his thinking and argumentation to bring forth a complex statement about sexuality, social norms, excessive greed and how our global world came to embrace ideals that lead to hypocrisy and gluttonous behaviors. Shonibare can now move on in his career, relying on the brand that he has created. Each work that he creates in the future absorbs the past overture of art history (that he has used as a lens). As he develops a new wave of artistic practices, the deep understanding of the artistic movements that he has used as a vehicle for his voice will follow his work making the dialogue and the branding synonymous with his name carry forth the criticism and social activism that has been imbued within his past works. In the past five years, Shonibare has experimented with large-scale fabrication of Dutch Wax Fabric, large-scale photography and large public sculptures for areas around London where he is based. As Shonibare’s work takes a turn to larger fabrication it is important to remember the beginnings of how he created the branding that has become “Yinka Shonibare (MBE)” without losing sight of the challenges that faced Shonibare in creating a name for himself.

Issues in modern African art stem from the tendency of scholars and curators to interpret and evaluate African art (largely) based on-Western ideals and classifications of the art. Furthermore, they stem from the western tendency to value an object because it is old or more authentic than something that is new. Additionally, if the art is by a contemporary African artist, then we, as a Western audience, typically expect the art to be about Africa. In *Contemporary African Art Since 1980*, Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu both theorize that the entire current structure of contemporary African Art is at an outgrowth of a time when artists are
developing important conversations about the art that represents their country and the structure in which that art should be evaluated.\textsuperscript{60}

The basic thesis we propose is that, rather than frame our assessment in ethnographic terms, we attempt to map the field by attending to both the socio-political boundaries delineated by decolonization and the geo-political spaces mapped by diasporic and transnational movements. From there, we look at the thematic and conceptual preoccupations of the art of the last three decades. Most importantly, the works presented here and the arguments for them, are put forward as part of the broader foundation of the architecture of the global reception of contemporary art.\textsuperscript{61}

Not only does Shonibare agree with Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, he proves to his audience that social attitudes are cyclical, continuous and repetitious in pattern--much like the repeated visual patterns of the Dutch Wax fabric that his art has become known for--protesting that it is not just or globally productive to impose such rules of categorization. Furthermore, due to the cyclical nature of social norms, it is imperative that society makes room for less definitive, restrictive rules and viewpoints about social class, identity, gender, sexual orientation and the nationality of its citizens, to enrich the social fabric of our growing global social order. This must be so because it is only ethical to view those around us as valuable individuals with individual ideas, individual thought processes, and individual ways. In the words of Michael Jackson, Shonibare wants us to “start with the man in the mirror”.

\textsuperscript{60} Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, (2009), 16.
\textsuperscript{61} Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, (2009), 16.
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[Figure 1] Yinka Shonibare. *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, 1998.
http://www.yinkashonibarembe.com/artwork/photography/?image_id=49
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A version of this thesis with images is available through Kent State University School of Art

[Figure 7] Goya. The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters, 1799.
[Figure 8] Goya. *Dream 1, Universal Language, The Author dreaming*, 1797.
[Figure 9] Vilsco, Dutch Wax Fabric.
[Figure 10] Vlisco. l’oignon Matungulu
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[Figure 12] Thomas Gainsborough, *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews*, 1750's.
[Figure 13] Antoine Pense, Portrait of Frederick II the Great as a child and his sister Wilhelmine. 1714. Berlin.
[Figure 14] Francesco Guardi, Votive portrait of Lazzaro Zen, 1770, Venice.
[Figure 15] Yinka Shonibare, MBE. *The Last Supper (After Leonardo)*, 2013, Mixed Media. Private Collection
[Figure 16] Yinka Shonibare, MBE. The Last Supper (After Leonardo), 2013, Mixed Media. Private Collection
[Figure 17] Yinka Shonibare, MBE. *The Last Supper (After Leonardo)*, 2013, Mixed Media. Private Collection
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[Figure 18] Yinka Shonibare, *The Last Supper (After Leonardo)*, 2013, Mixed Media. Private Collection
[Figure 19] Leonardo Da Vinci. *The Last Supper*, 1498.
C  Black silk day dress with white lace neck and waist frills. Hat to match. Actual costume, English. Gallery of Costume, Platt Hall, Manchester, 1872.
E  Deep magenta cashmere day dress with black braid edging and black velvet trimming. Hat to match. Actual costume, English. Gallery of Costume, Platt Hall, Manchester, 1870.
G  Black cloth coat, grey trousers, white spats, black boots, grey hat. English fashion plate, 1875.

[Figure 20] examples of male and female attire from 1865-1890.


[Figure 21] Examples of Male attire, 1865-1890.
[Figure 22] Add for a dress from Vilsco.