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**Skirball Cultural Center presents *The American Library*
by Yinka Shonibare CBE RA**

*An immersive and inventive installation that reflects on the myriad voices in
the ongoing debate about immigration in the U.S.*

October 21, 2023–September 1, 2024

LOS ANGELES, CA—The Skirball Cultural Center presents an exhibition of *The American Library*, an immersive installation by internationally recognized artist Yinka Shonibare CBE RA that celebrates the diversity of the American people and invites reflection on what it means to be American. The installation consists of over 6,000 shelved books bound in vibrant Dutch wax print fabric. Each book features a name on its spine, stamped in gold, of someone who has played a role in the ongoing conversation around immigration, equality, and diversity in America—including individuals with opposing viewpoints, inviting audiences to consider all aspects of the dialogue. *The American Library* will be on view at the Skirball from October 21, 2023–September 1, 2024.

“We are thrilled to welcome Yinka Shonibare’s beautiful installation to the Skirball, a vital and joyful work that resonates deeply with our mission of welcoming the stranger,” said Jessie Kornberg, Skirball Cultural Center President and CEO. “*The American Library* honors immigrants’ contributions to American society and underscores the importance of welcoming and celebrating a diversity of identities in the United States.”

“The Skirball is incredibly fortunate to debut *The American Library* here in Los Angeles and present it for an extended period of time,” added Skirball Vice President and Museum Director Sheri Bernstein. “Shonibare’s engaging and vibrant work mirrors our own efforts to explore the values of equality and inclusion in the U.S. in new and unexpected ways.”

The vibrant fabrics that cover the books in Shonibare’s installation are Dutch wax print cotton textiles—a material with mixed origins that mirrors the multicultural identity embedded in the history of the United States. Many books feature the names of people who immigrated, or whose ancestors immigrated, to the United States. On other books are the names of Black Americans who relocated, or whose parents relocated, out of the American South during the Great Migration, which lasted from approximately 1916 to 1970. These individuals have all made significant contributions to American life and culture, while experiencing discrimination and hardship because of their relocation. A further set of books within the library features the names of people who have spoken out against immigration, equality, or diversity in America. This juxtaposition of people with varied viewpoints spurs viewers to explore their own position on these topics, reflect on their family history, and consider what America would be without immigrants.

“As part of the Skirball’s presentation of *The American Library*, visitors of all ages will have opportunities to share and reflect on their own families’ immigration stories,” explained Associate Curator, Vicki Phung Smith. “As with so many things the Skirball does, our hope is to build a shared sense of community through storytelling.”

The Skirball’s exhibition will offer many opportunities for guests to engage with the artwork. iPads available in the gallery will allow visitors to learn more about the people named in the library and submit their personal story to the artist’s [The American Library](#) website. Expanding on the artist’s invitation for story-sharing through the website, there will be an opportunity in the exhibition for guests of all ages to add their name and share their story to an interactive and tactile bookshelf display that mimics the art installation. Visitors can participate in the conversation and create their own book spine reflecting on a set of questions such as: “What brought you to Los Angeles?” and “How could America be a more welcoming place?” These accompanying “libraries” build on the conversation and bring the books to life. Additionally, there will be a display of Dutch wax fabrics for guests to touch and a short, animated film about Yinka Shonibare’s life and artwork that is designed for children.

About the Artist

Yinka Shonibare CBE, RA was born in London in 1962 and moved to Lagos, Nigeria at the age of three. He returned to the UK to study Fine Art at Byam Shaw School of

Art, London and Goldsmiths College, London, where he received his masters of fine art. Shonibare has become well-known for his exploration of colonialism and post-colonialism within the contemporary context of globalization, especially the historically complex relationship between Africa and Europe. Working in painting, sculpture, photography, film, and installation, Shonibare's work examines race, class, and the construction of cultural identity through a sharp political commentary.

Shonibare has work in such notable permanent collections as the Tate Collection, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome and VandenBroek Foundation, the Netherlands, among others.

The American Library first premiered at the FRONT Art Triennial in July 2018 where it was installed in the main branch of the Cleveland Public Library, next traveling to the Van Every / Smith Galleries at Davidson College, North Carolina in October 2018 and then to the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky in March 2019. The installation was included in the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston's group exhibition *When Home Won't Let You Stay: Migration through Contemporary Art* in October 2019, which then traveled to the Minneapolis Institute of Art in February 2020, and then to Stanford University's Cantor Art Center in June 2021 where it remained on view until June 4, 2023. The Skirball's presentation marks the first time this work will be shown in Los Angeles.

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About the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is a place of meeting guided by the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger and inspired by the American democratic ideals of freedom and equality. We welcome people of all communities and generations to

participate in cultural experiences that celebrate discovery and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society.

Visiting the Skirball

The Skirball is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 12:00–5:00 pm; Saturday–Sunday, 10:00 am–5:00 pm; closed Mondays and holidays. General Admission to the Skirball will include *The American Library* by artist Yinka Shonibare CBE RA and *RECLAIMED: A Family Painting*. Other exhibitions, including *This Light of Ours: Activist Photographers of the Civil Rights Movement* and *Noah’s Ark* at the Skirball, are ticketed separately. Special Pricing: \$18 General; \$15 Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children over 12; \$13 Children 2–12.