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Yinka Shonibare CBE RA to create new sculpture for Leeds that will be a welcoming space for contemplation and a fitting legacy for David Oluwale

A new sculpture from international artist Yinka Shonibare CBE RA, has been commissioned by the David Oluwale Memorial Association [DOMA] to honour the life of the British Nigerian and Leeds resident whose personal story inspired local people to create a lasting legacy to mark his life. The sculpture will be unveiled as part of Leeds 2023, the city's landmark year of culture.

Following years of work by DOMA, Shonibare's sculpture will be a significant project in the programme for Leeds 2023. Currently in the research and development stage, with the support of a challenge grant from Leeds 2023, a scaled maquette will be produced by Shonibare in 2021 to accompany a series of community engagement events, an integral part of the project.

Kully Thiarai, creative director and CEO of Leeds 2023, said: "DOMA have created an extraordinary moment for Leeds by bringing an artist of the calibre of Yinka Shonibare to our city. Yinka's sculpture will encourage us to learn from the past and is an incredible legacy for the future. Across our city, there are many people who are locked out of opportunities and through projects like this one, and more, we have the potential to help create chances to nurture and inspire the next generation of creative talent as well as celebrate the rich diversity and internationalism of Leeds."

Artist Shonibare was born in London and moved to Lagos, Nigeria when he was three years old, returning later to study Fine Art at Byam School of Art (now Central Saint Martin's College) and then at Goldsmith's College. A Turner Prize nominee (2004) and Royal Academician, he commented: "It is an honour to have been asked to create this new work to remember an ordinary man with an extraordinary legacy. This sculpture will be a symbol of hope; an everyday reminder of our desire to improve the lives of all and a place for people

to come together and I'm looking forward to working with DOMA and the communities where David lived in the months and years to come."

The life of David Oluwale was cut short when he drowned in the River Aire in 1969 following years of mental ill-health, homelessness, racism, destitution and police persecution.

Founding patron of DOMA Caryl Phillips first suggested the idea of a memorial. Dr Emily Zobel Marshall from DOMA comments: "The city of Leeds has a responsibility to acknowledge, learn from and take inspiration from the life and death of David and because of Leeds City Council and Leeds 2023 we are now able to progress ideas and plans we've worked over the last few years towards a permanent memorial for David.

His story has left a mark on the city he came to from Nigeria to find a better life. The sculpture will be a memorial for him and also a symbol for the city, a reminder of issues still faced by many today and a place for quiet contemplation as well as cultural celebration. A better future can only be built on a better understanding of the past and remembering David can help us with that, leaving a legacy of hope and creativity."

Leeds City Council commissioned an independent review of Leeds's historic statues and monuments earlier this year amid calls from anti-racism campaigners for sculptures and other public artwork across the UK to better reflect themes such as diversity and inclusivity. The review's findings were considered and accepted by the council's executive board in October. The review recommended the commissioning of more works of art that commemorate the diverse life and times of Leeds, and it is hoped that Yinka Shonibare's sculpture will underline the city's commitment to telling the story of all its residents, past and present.

Shonibare's piece will be an important feature of a new park planned for Leeds city centre on the site of the former Tetley brewery, close to the River Aire. Developed by Vastint UK with work starting on site in 2021, Aire Park will be the largest new city centre green space in the UK.

Councillor Judith Blake, leader of Leeds City Council, said: “The tragic life and death of David Oluwale is a reminder of the giant strides that have been made by our city on diversity and inclusion over the last 50 years. This sculpture promises to be a fitting tribute to David and should also be a source of inspiration and pride for the people who continue to work tirelessly to ensure Leeds is a place that offers a warm welcome to all. We must never forget the events, good and bad, that have helped mould modern-day Leeds, a city where differences are celebrated and communities join together in a spirit of positivity. The sculpture will be a thought-provoking addition to the new Aire Park and I very much look forward to seeing the project taking shape in the months and years to come.”

This project has recently been awarded a development grant from Arts Council England, completing the funding jigsaw for Phase 1 which includes significant support from Leeds 2023, additional funding from Leeds Civic Trust and donations from private individuals and trusts.

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Notes for editors

Leeds 2023's is in place to deliver the city of Leeds' ambition for a transformational year of creative experiences connecting and benefiting people now and into the future. The planned programme will celebrate and transform the city's identity locally, nationally and internationally – creating a lasting legacy of economic and social impact. Leeds 2023 is run by the Leeds Culture Trust, an independent charity set up by Leeds City Council in 2019. The Council recognises the difference culture and creativity can make to a city and its citizens, and is the principal funder of Leeds 2023.

www.leeds2023.co.uk

Yinka Shonibare CBE RA was born in 1962 in London and moved to Lagos, Nigeria at the age of three. He returned to London to study Fine Art, first at Byam School of Art (now Central Saint Martin's College) and then at Goldsmith's College, where he received his MFA.

Shonibare's work explores issues of race and class through the media of painting, sculpture, photography and film. He questions the meaning of cultural and national definitions using his trademark material, the brightly coloured 'African' batik fabric. This type of fabric was inspired by Indonesian design, mass-produced by the Dutch and eventually sold to the colonies in West Africa. In the 1960s the material became a new sign of African identity and independence.

Shonibare was a Turner prize nominee in 2004, and was awarded an MBE in 2004 and a CBE in 2019. He has exhibited at the Venice Biennale and internationally at leading museums. He was elected as a Royal Academician by the Royal Academy, London in 2013.

Shonibare's works are included in prominent collections internationally, including the Tate Collection, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institute, 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. <http://yinkashonibare.com/>

Shonibare is represented by the Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. <https://www.stephenfriedman.com/>

The David Oluwale Memorial Association [DOMA] brings David's story to life and makes his legacy into one of hope and creativity. We acknowledge that the city of Leeds has made great strides since 1969. We aim to help the city in coming to terms with its past, to improve its care for those who remain marginalised, and to promote compassion, cohesion, inclusion and social justice in Leeds. We utilise all types of art to offer vitality and creativity in our collective effort to make a better future for all. Our flagship project, the David Oluwale memorial garden, will be a place of performance and play, beauty and growth. <https://rememberoluwale.org/>

Vastint UK is part of the Vastint Group, an international real estate organisation with 30 years of experience. We have been active in the United Kingdom since 2010. The cornerstones of our operations are the management of portfolio properties and the development of commercial real estate, including residential development. <https://vastint.eu/uk/>

Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, we will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.

www.artscouncil.org.uk | @ace_national

Leeds Civic Trust. Formed in 1965, we are a voluntary, non political body, open to everyone who wants to participate in and influence the development of our city.

We work in co-operation with both the public and private sectors, community groups and organisations and others who share our aims, which are:

- To stimulate interest in and care for the history and character of the city.
- To encourage high standards of design, architecture and town planning.
- To encourage improvements to public amenity.
- To promote co-operation in the achievement of these objectives.

<https://leedscivictrust.org.uk/>