

Yinka Ilori's creative practice explored for first time at the Design Museum



Creative Courts, Yinka Ilori, photographed by Matt Alexander

YINKA ILORI: PARABLES FOR HAPPINESS

15 September 2022 until 25 June 2023

[Press images can be found here](#)

- **For the first time, Yinka Ilori's creative practice will be explored in a museum display**
- **The most important aspects of Ilori's work will be placed beside key influences, including Nigerian textiles**
- **Visitors will see over 100 objects, ranging from artworks, photographs and furniture, to textiles, books and personal possessions**
- **Opening coincides with London Design Festival 2022**

The first museum display exploring the work of artist and designer Yinka Ilori is now open at the Design Museum in London. It celebrates Ilori's mix of cultural influences and

unpacks the ingredients of a diasporic visual language. The free display coincides with London Design Festival 2022 and will run until June 2023.

YINKA ILORI: PARABLES FOR HAPPINESS (15 September 2022 until 25 June 2023) showcases key elements of Ilori's vibrant aesthetic, which throughout his career have been drawn from a mix of cultures that came together in the north London diaspora community where he grew up. The display highlights some of the most important aspects of Ilori's work – such as his billboard graphics that promote joy – and places them beside key influences, including Nigerian textiles. These African fabrics of his childhood are the foundation of his practice, and he regularly captures the colourful geometric patterns that feature in Nigerian design in his work.

Visitors will see over 100 objects, ranging from artworks, photographs and furniture, to textiles, books and personal possessions. Seen together, they offer an unprecedented glimpse into Ilori's use of the power of design to absorb cultural influences and express London's rich mix of identities.

Yinka Ilori is a London-based designer whose work enlivens the public realm with installations and murals in a playful combination of colour and pattern. He founded his eponymous studio in 2017. The display begins by introducing visitors to Ilori's studio and the sources it draws influence from. It then highlights three main strands of his work: architecture, furniture and graphic design.

PARABLES FOR HAPPINESS is the first time Ilori's creative practice has been examined in a museum display.

Some of his key architectural projects can be seen, such as *Laundrette of Dreams* which was built from over 200,000

LEGO bricks. This will be shown alongside a maquette by the artist Bodys Isek Kingelez, demonstrating the utopian potential of architecture which resonates in Ilori's work.

There is a spotlight on Ilori's fascination with chairs. One of his earliest projects involved refurbishing old chairs – hacking them to add colour, removing or replacing structural elements and adjusting their forms in order to convey narratives through them. Since then, his obsession with chairs as a medium for storytelling has continued to grow, leading to Ilori designing over 80 chairs to date. His furniture ranges from sculptural to functional and each chair brings Nigerian verbal traditions into conversation with contemporary design. On display are one of his chairs plus models of other examples, seen alongside a number of chairs selected from the Design Museum collection.

A highlight of the section on chairs will be the Washington Skeleton Side Chair for Knoll. Featuring a dense geometric grid in a copper finish, it was designed by architect Sir David Adjaye. The Design Museum has collaborated with Ilori to acquire this chair, and other new objects, for its permanent collection. Within the display, they add new context to Ilori's work and expand on our collection's focus on the traditional canon of contemporary design.

Visitors will also find out about the creation of some of Ilori's most recognisable projects, through key models, photographs, drawings and contextual material. These include an examination of the now-dismantled 10-meter-high *Colour Palace* pavilion for Dulwich Picture Gallery in 2019, and his multi-coloured transformation of 18 pedestrian crossings across central London. Other projects highlighted include his stage design for the 2021 BRIT Awards and *The Flamboyance of Flamingos*, which saw the

transformation of an out-of-use play area in Barking and Dagenham into a colourful and revitalised play park.

Some of Ilori's own items will add a personal touch, from his name badge from Marks and Spencer, where, as an employee, he used to dream about opening his own studio, to a pair of trousers he wears while painting and which contain traces of the paint of some of his career-making projects. These are seen alongside objects reflecting his Nigerian heritage, which is central to his work, including a traditional Dùndún (Talking Drum) and albums of Afrobeat, hip hop, R&B and grime with lyrics in Yoruba or Nigerian. It is these albums and their personal connection which inspires the display's title: Ilori breaks down the lyrics of these tracks and draws on the parables as inspiration for his work.

Priya Khanchandani, Head of Curatorial at the Design Museum said, *"The diasporas of Britain are still finding their place in the cultural canon even though in-between spaces are essential to the fabric of who we are. A fast-rising star of contemporary design, Yinka Ilori's unique aesthetic – drawing on Nigerian textiles with a nod to postmodernism – employs a mix of visual references that come together to inspire joy. This display is a testament to how cultural fusions, frissions and juxtapositions can be rich fuel for creativity and for generating more inclusive architectures in the city. We could not be more delighted to be presenting this story at the Design Museum."*

Yinka Ilori, said: *"Over the years, my work has gained recognition for the strong use of colour, pattern and narrative that comes from my Nigerian heritage. However, it has often deviated from design trends and has been misunderstood. This display charts my inspirations and creative journey as I transitioned from furniture design to*

community driven public installations. I have been visiting the Design Museum ever since I was a student, drawing inspiration from their ground-breaking shows that have brought to life the work of some of the most influential figures in design. I am truly humbled and honoured to have my work exhibited at such an early stage in my career and hope the display provides inspiration for the next generation who might feel they don't fit into the status quo."

Tim Marlow, Director and Chief Executive, Design Museum said: *"The Design Museum's programme has always championed contemporary designers, so we are thrilled to be the first museum to examine the practice of Yinka Ilori extensively. Yinka is undoubtedly one of the most exciting new creative talents working today. In a short space of time he has sparked so much energy and joy with his polychromatic work across London and beyond, as well as establishing a reputation as a critically important designer, and we are proud to be able to showcase the range, depth and vitality of his talent at the Design Museum."*

[YINKA ILORI: PARABLES FOR HAPPINESS](#) runs at the Design Museum from 15 September 2022 to 25 June 2023. Entry is free.

-Ends-

Notes to Editor

Curated by:

Priya Khanchandani, Head of Curatorial

Esme Hawes, Displays Curator

Exhibition Design:

Bamidele Awoyemi

About Yinka Ilori

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Yinka Ilori is a multi-disciplinary artist and designer whose bold visual language draws on his British Nigerian heritage to convey new narratives through contemporary design. Drawing on Nigerian parables and verbal traditions, Ilori touches on a multitude of themes that resonate with a global audience. His work is underpinned by the belief that art and design should be accessible to all. Humorous, provocative and playful, his projects demonstrate how design can bring together communities and have a positive impact on society, evoking a sense of joy and optimism. Often using the city as his canvas, he reimagines spaces to encourage a sense of community and invites audiences to engage and participate in his work and its surroundings. A graduate of London Metropolitan University's BA in Furniture and Product Design, Ilori's work has been showcased globally through solo and group exhibitions, public commissions and set and exhibition design.

PRESS ENQUIRIES:

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About the Design Museum:

The Design Museum is the world's leading museum devoted to contemporary architecture and design. Its work encompasses all elements of design, including fashion, product and graphic design. Since it opened its doors in 1989 the museum has displayed everything from an AK-47 to high heels designed by Christian Louboutin. It has staged over 100 exhibitions, welcomed over seven million visitors and showcased the work of some of the world's most celebrated designers and architects including Paul Smith, Zaha Hadid, Jonathan Ive, Frank Gehry, Eileen Gray and Dieter Rams.

On 24 November 2016, The Design Museum relocated to Kensington, west London. John Pawson has converted the interior of a 1960s modernist building to create a new home for the Design Museum giving it three times more space in which to show a wider range of exhibitions and significantly extend its learning programme. In 2020, the Design Museum was awarded £2,968,634 by Arts Council England from the Culture Recovery Fund announced by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and nearly £1 million National Lottery funding through the Arts Council's Emergency Response Fund. Since opening in Kensington in 2016, the Design Museum has hosted major exhibitions including *Stanley Kubrick: The Exhibition*, *Moving to Mars*, *Amy: Beyond the Stage*, *Sneakers Unboxed: Studio to Street*, *Electronic: From Kraftwerk to The Chemical Brothers*, *Charlotte Perriand: The Modern Life* and *California: Designing Freedom*.

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