

YINKA ILORI

PARABLES

FOR HAPPINESS

Large Print Guide

the
DESIGN
MUSEUM



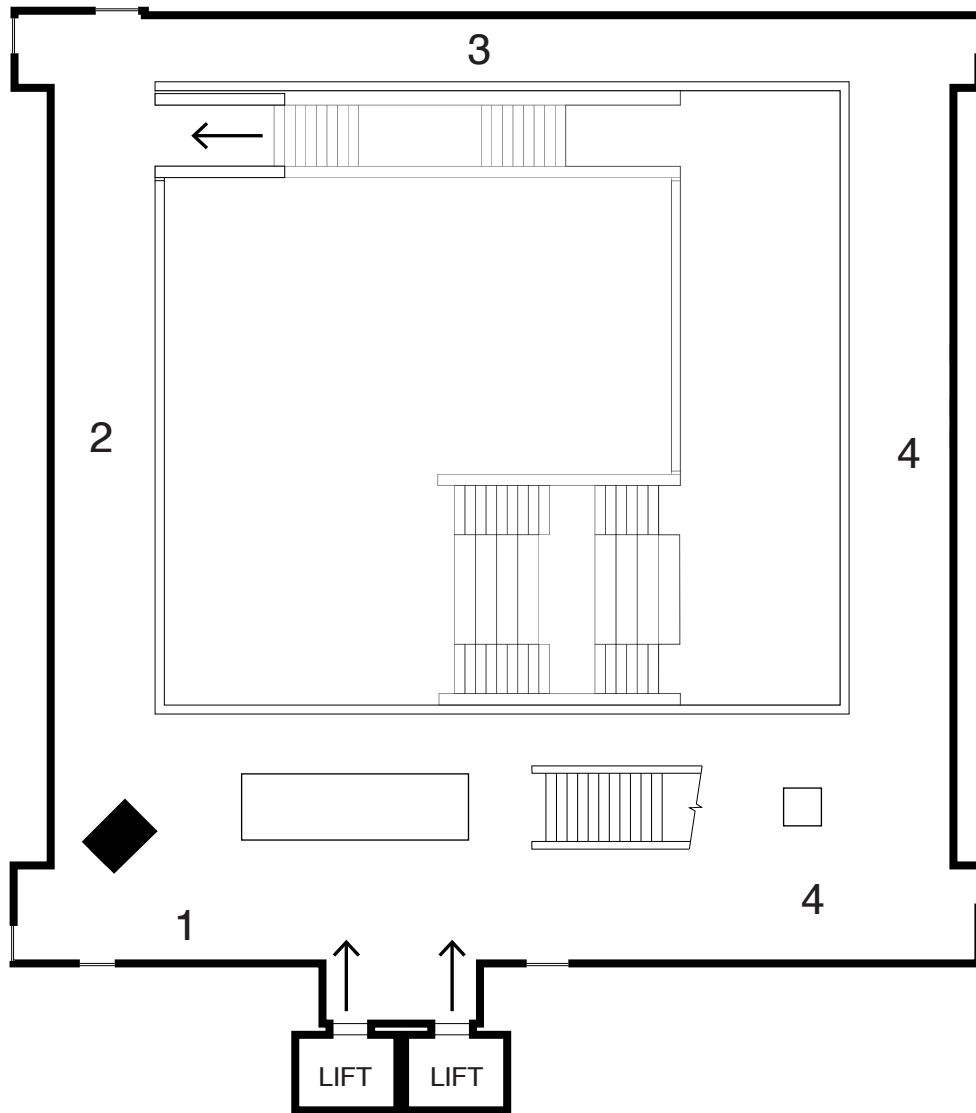
INTRODUCTION

What can design tell us about how to be happy? Yinka Ilori's interdisciplinary work starts conversations and sparks joy. His practice weaves together a wide range of influences, drawing on his Nigerian heritage and the diverse north London community where he grew up. In Ilori's hands, design becomes a rich canvas for the expression of identities.

For this display, the Design Museum has unpacked the ingredients of a diaspora visual language and has collaborated with Ilori to acquire new objects for our permanent collection. Dotted around this gallery, the new acquisitions add context to Ilori's work and expand on the collection's focus on the traditional canon of design.

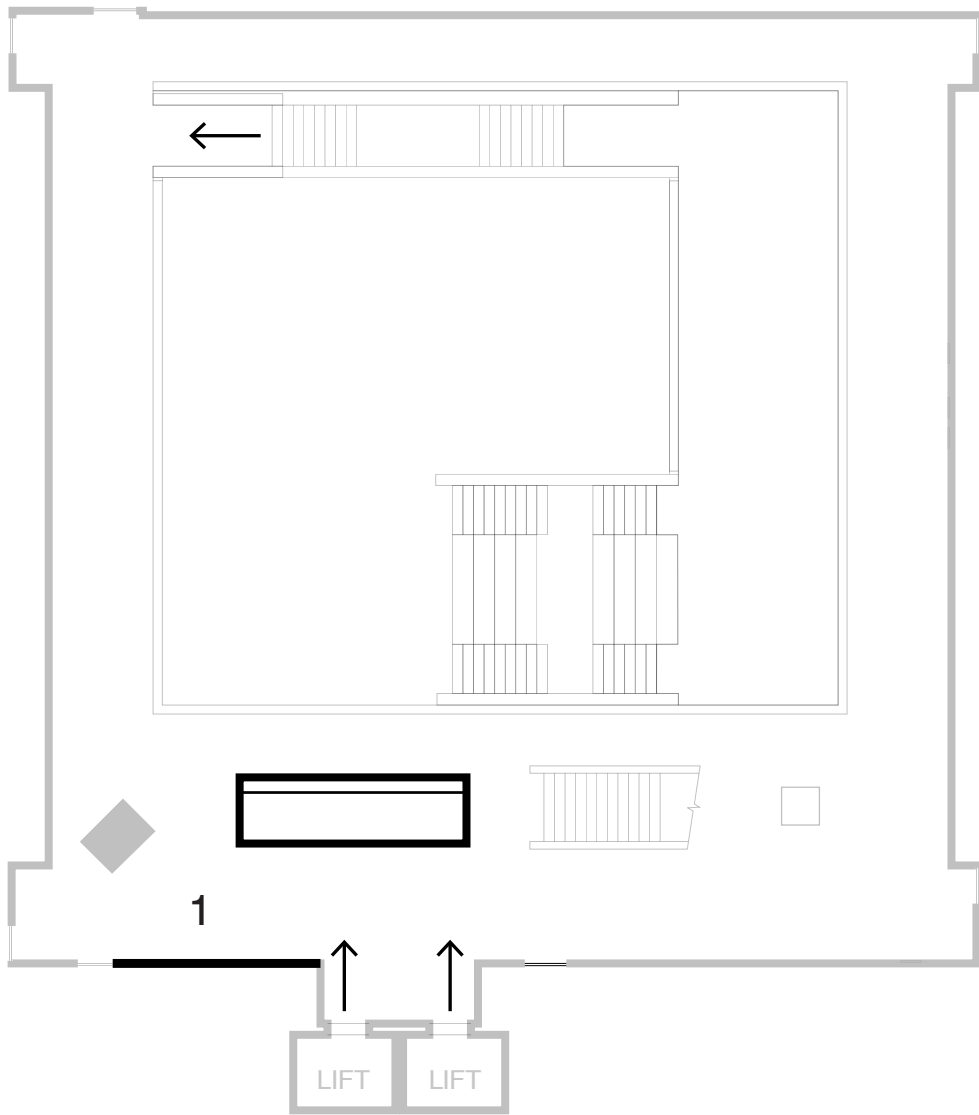
Storytelling as shared inheritance is integral to Ilori's process. Inspired by the Nigerian parables that his parents told to him as a child, he believes that design is about "trying to create a memory of something, so it lives and you can pass it on."

Yet parables are more than just stories. They also ask us how we want to live together as a community. How should we act towards one another? How can we foster collective happiness? From Ilori's playful chairs to his lively, welcoming public spaces, his work acknowledges the power of design to create a more inclusive society.



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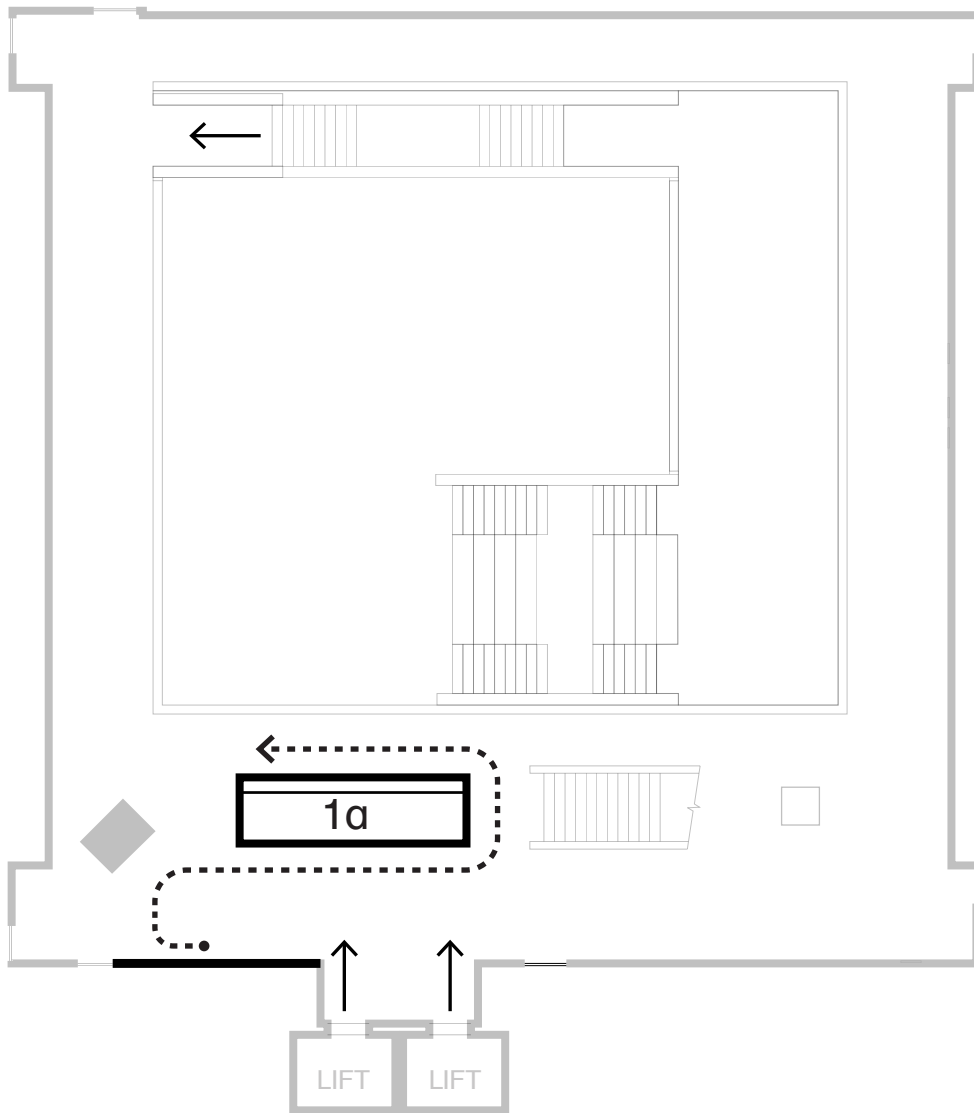


1. STORYTELLING WITH FURNITURE

‘Vanity of vanities; all is vanity’

– Ecclesiastes 1:2-11 (Old Testament)

Furniture can be more than neutral or functional. Chairs and tables have lives and histories – for Yinka Ilori, they are “powerful objects that hold personal stories, secrets, emotions and sentiments.” Ilori seeks out these stories from used furniture and weaves them together with new stories, inspired by his own identity and his family’s Nigerian culture. These narratives give designed objects deeper, richer meanings. Ilori’s furniture is not just an exercise in aesthetic “vanity”; like the parables that filled his childhood, it asks us who we are and how we want to live.



CHAIRS

Chairs are deceptively simple objects that are central to our daily lives. Chairs can demand status and create hierarchy. They can spark conversation and foster intimacy. Ilori's own designs playfully reanimate used chairs with new narratives by reconfiguring them, adding colour and pattern. The works on display here, by a variety of designers, were chosen by Ilori to encourage us to look at furniture in a new light.

As part of this display, Ilori chose a selection of chairs from the Design Museum's collection. For Ilori, this assortment embodies the potential of design and examines new ways of making. From Jane Atfield's explorations into recyclable materials to Thonet's egalitarian chair, these designers all shared an interest in changing the course of design and opening up new perspectives.

RCP2 chair

Designed by Jane Atfield

Manufactured by Made of Waste

1993

Recycled high-density polyethylene board

Design Museum Collection

Armchair

Designed by Gerald Summers

Manufactured by The Makers of Simple Furniture

1934

Plywood

Design Museum Collection

No. 14 side chair

Designed by Michael Thonet

Manufactured by Gebrüder Thonet

1859

Beech, cane

Design Museum Collection

Red and blue chair

Designed by Gerrit Rietveld

Manufactured by Cassina

1918

Lacquered wood

Design Museum Collection

This chair was designed by architect David Adjaye and chosen by Ilori for the Design Museum's collection. Adjaye has been a mentor to Ilori, particularly in encouraging him to creatively explore his Nigerian heritage.

Washington Skeleton Chair

Designed by David Adjaye

Manufactured and commissioned by Knoll

2013

Copper-plated aluminium

Courtesy of Knoll

These stools are made from the same sheet metal used to build casings for electrical generators, commonly used in Nigeria to deal with regular power cuts. Like Ilori, contemporary designer Nifemi Marcus-Bello interprets Nigerian culture in often unexpected ways.

LM Stool

Designed by Nifemi Marcus-Bello

Manufactured by nmbello Studio

2018

Sheet metal

Design Museum Collection

This chair is one of Ilori's most recent designs. His new series of chairs is an exercise in self-reflection: he aims to compare them with the chairs he designed over ten years ago, reflecting on both change and consistency in his own work.

Untitled I

Yinka Ilori

2022

FSC wood

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Ilori's interest in chairs has shaped his community collaborations. In 2017, his series of workshops in partnership with social enterprise Restoration Station helped each participant to restore a chair. The furniture created was then auctioned to raise funds for future workshops.

Chair Workshop pamphlet

Yinka Ilori for the 7th Athens Biennale – ECLIPSE
2021

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Restoration Station x Yinka Ilori workshop

Photography by Dan Weill

2017

Courtesy of Dan Weill

These model chairs are a form of three-dimensional autobiography. Each one tells a story about a different period in Ilori's life. Some represent a particular individual he grew up with; some express a specific moment; and others explore his Nigerian heritage more broadly.

I Got Chairs For Days

Yinka Ilori commissioned by Browns East

2020

MDF

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Italian designer Martino Gamper's '100 chairs in 100 days' project has been a major influence for Ilori because of its focus on reuse. Gamper took used chairs and transformed them into 100 new pieces – revitalising them with new stories, functions and personalities.

'100 Chairs in 100 Days' exhibition poster

Martino Gamper

Poster designed by Åbäke

2017

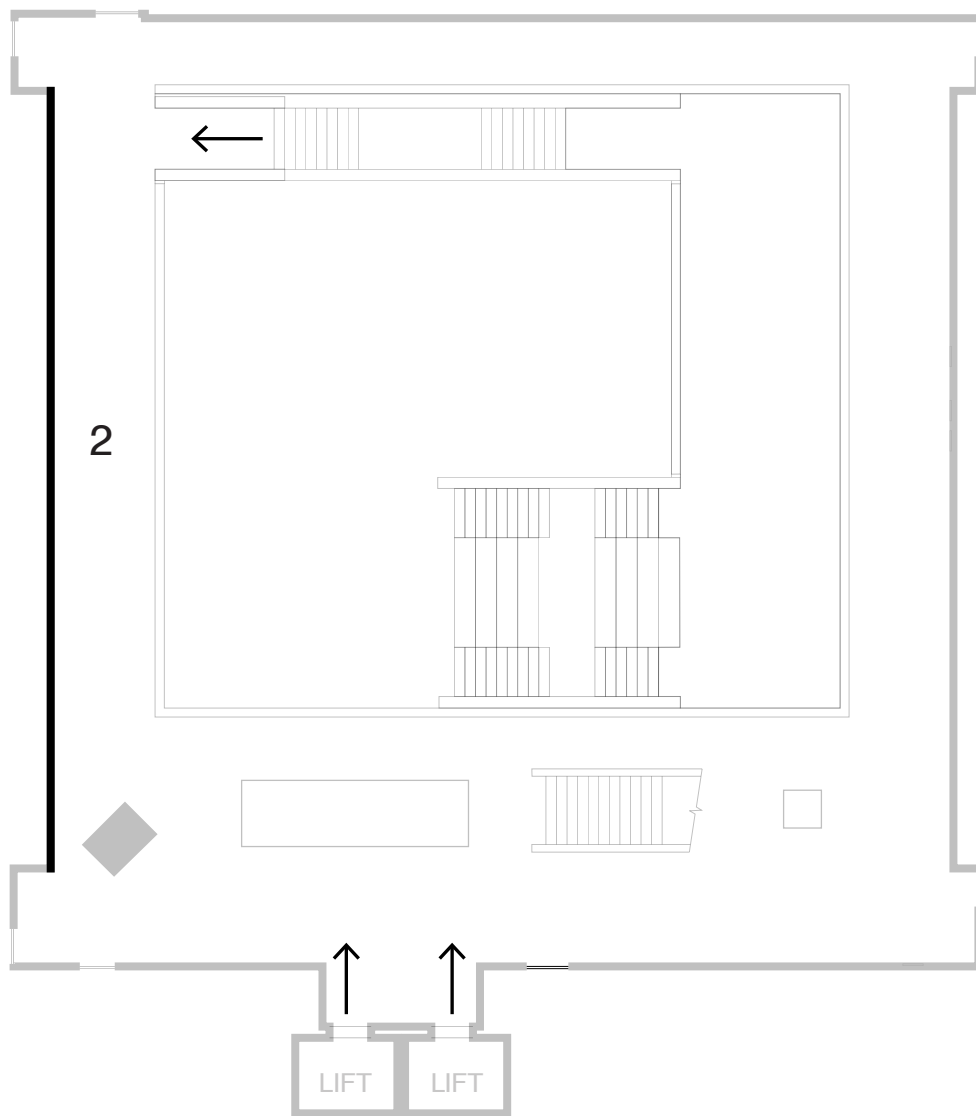
Courtesy of Åbäke

Chair Collection

Yinka Ilori

2003-2022

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection



2. IIN

THE STUDIO

‘A single man cannot build a house’

– Nigerian parable

Yinka Ilori’s practice started as a solo endeavour in 2012 and his studio was founded in 2017. Today, it consists of a team of architects and designers who work together to create projects that blur the lines between many different forms of design. Nestled in an industrial estate in west London, the studio is an explosion of colour. Its energetic interior creates a powerful sense of immersion: Ilori observes that, “When people walk in here, they lose their breath... they step into a different world.” The space is arranged to encourage the team to share ideas, embodying the collaborative values also present in Ilori’s work.

Ilori's studio invites conversation, creativity and flexibility. Its three sections – an office, an exhibition area and an archive/kitchen – are divided by sliding doors and curtains. Ilori and architect Sam Jacob developed the designs during the Covid-19 pandemic, sketching ideas together on Zoom.

The kitchen area in Yinka Ilori's studio

Designed by Yinka Ilori and Sam Jacob

Photograph by Lewis Khan

2022

Courtesy of Lewis Khan

Objects on display in Yinka Ilori's studio

Designed by Yinka Ilori and Sam Jacob

Photograph by Lewis Khan

2022

Courtesy of Lewis Khan

Ilori's journey to becoming a designer has not been a linear path. Before setting up his practice, he worked at Marks & Spencer for almost eight years, dreaming about design while on the tills. Whenever he forgot his name badge, he would create his own temporary one.

Yinka Ilori's M&S name badge

Yinka Ilori

2003

Plastic, paper

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Ilori's studio trousers are a colourful record of his many different projects. He has worn these trousers to paint in since 2012 – just before he set up his own practice in 2017.

Studio trousers worn by Yinka Ilori

Made by Nike

2012 – ongoing

Denim, metal hardware

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Ilori was invited by former editor of British design and architecture magazine Icon, Priya Khanchandani, to design the front cover for the magazine's 'London and Londoners' issue. Offering his own perspective on this multicultural city, Ilori's accompanying interview articulates his belief that design should be for everyone.

Cover of ICON magazine, issue 196

Designed by Yinka Ilori

October 2019

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

After the Covid-19 lockdowns in the UK, Ilori designed this cover for ES Magazine to celebrate London's reopening in the following spring. The cover's joyful colours signified the return of summer, social contact and shared public life.

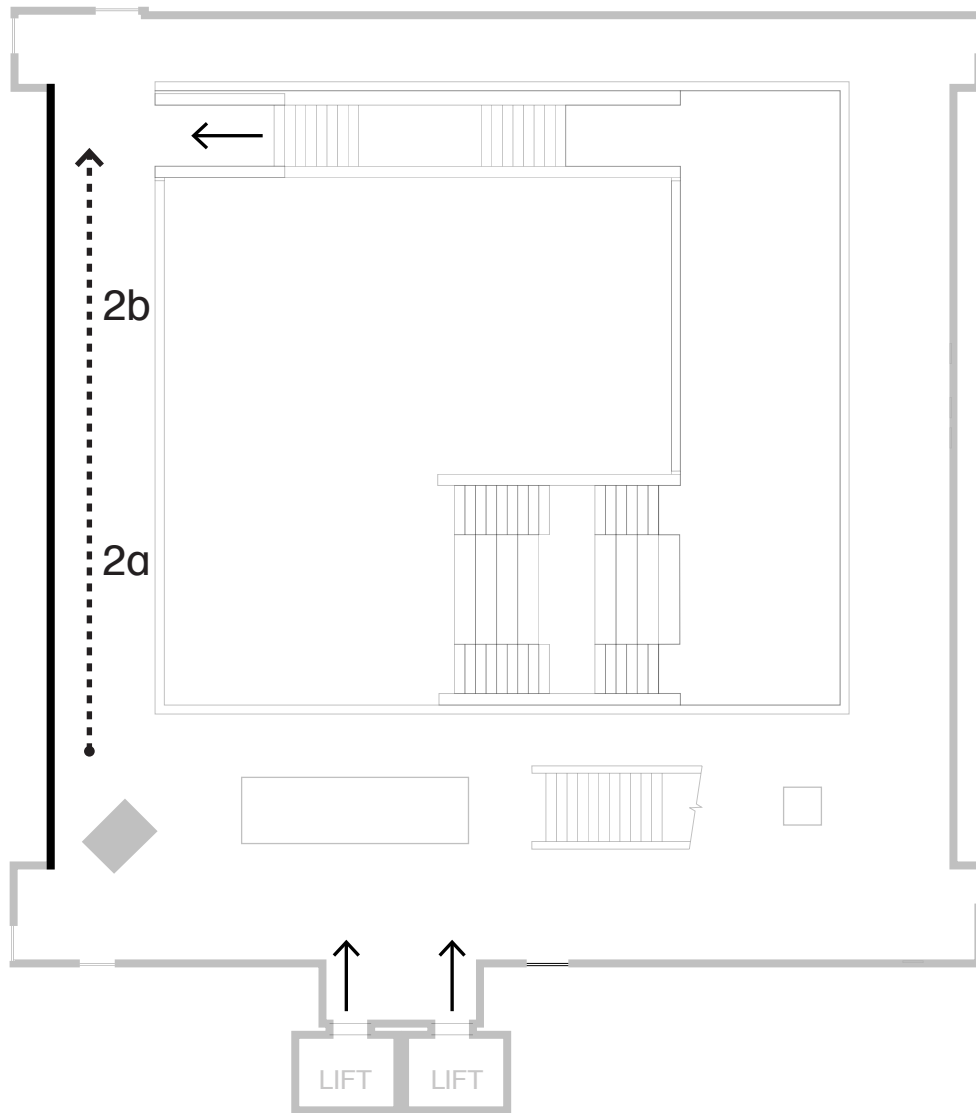
Sun and Trees

Cover of ES Magazine, 9 April 2021

Designed by Yinka Ilori

2021

Courtesy of the Design Museum



MUSIC

Music, for Illori, is a way to bring back memories and to dream. Growing up, music was a large part of his everyday life. His parents hosted parties regularly and would play West African music, resonant with memories of their family and friends back in Nigeria. This spirit lives on in Illori's studio, where he and his team take turns DJing while they work.

This dùndún, or talking drum, is Ilori's own. Originating from West Africa, the dùndún mimics the patterns and rhythms of speech, enabling the player to tell parables and stories through the unique 'voice' of the drum.

Mini dùndún (talking drum)

Unknown maker

Unknown date

Leather, cotton

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Set of conga drums

Gear4Music

Unknown date

Leather, wood, metal

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Ilori listens to music genres such as Afrobeat, hip hop, R&B and grime. Nigerian artists like Fela Kuti, King Sunny Adé and Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey feature heavily on his playlists. Ilori says, “They often sing in parables, so I take these words and put them into an object.”

Alagbon Close

Fela Kuti and The Africa '70
Designed by Lemi Ghariokwu
Produced by Jofabro Nigeria Ltd.
1974
Vinyl record
Design Museum Collection

Synchro Series

King Sunny Adé And His African Beats
Designed by Ibukunola Printers (Nig) Ltd.
Produced by Sunny Alade, Nigeria
1983
Vinyl record
Design Museum Collection

Boy in Da Corner

Dizzee Rascal

Designed by Ben Drury

Produced by XL Recordings

2003

CD

Design Museum Collection

The College Dropout

Kanye West

Designed by Eric Duvauchelle

Produced by Roc-A-Fella and Def Jam Records

2004

CD

Design Museum Collection

Home Sweet Home

Kano

Designed by Ben Sansbury

Produced by 679 Recordings

2005

CD

Design Museum Collection

Board Members

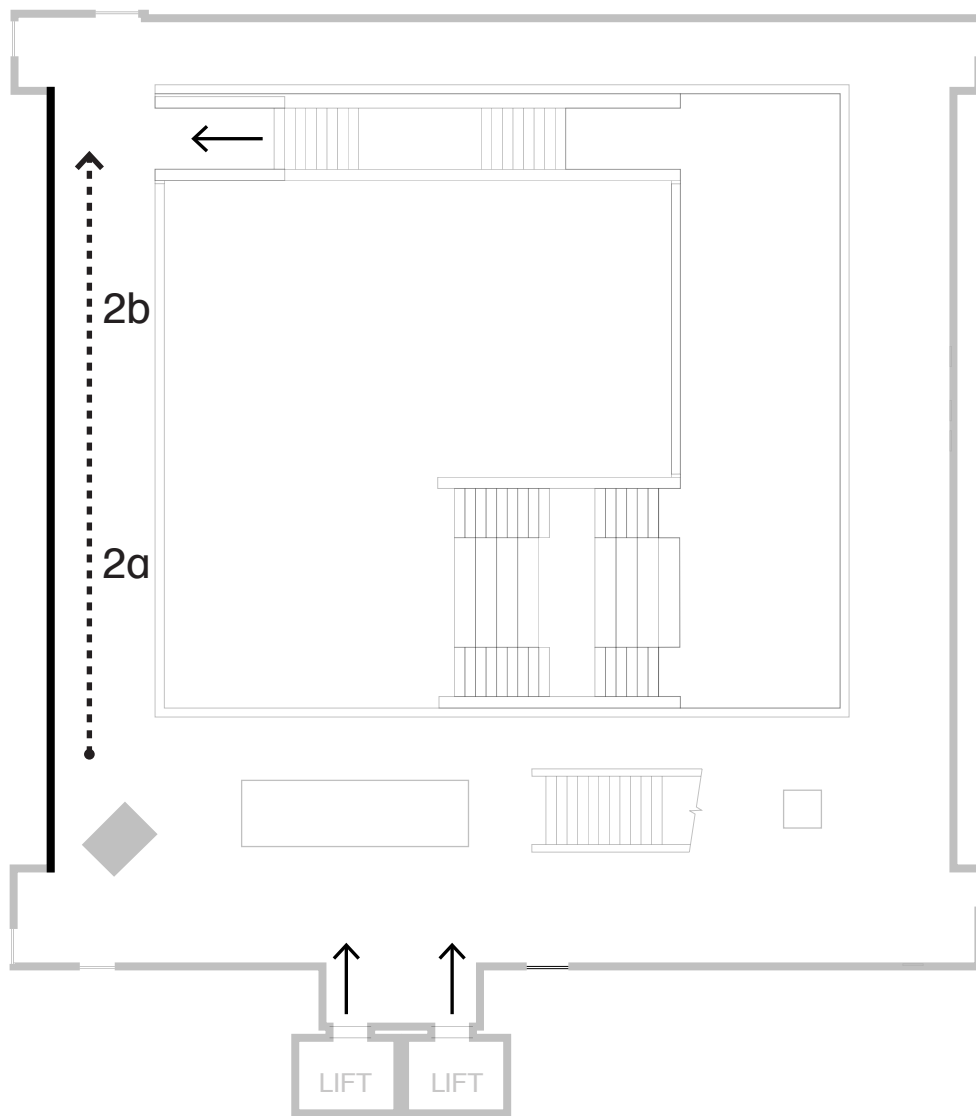
Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey

Produced by Decca (West Africa) Ltd.

2012

Vinyl record

Design Museum Collection



CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Alongside his own work, Ilori's studio is peppered with objects that inspire him and his team. His Nigerian roots have been a significant influence on his work, as well as his experiences growing up on a multi-cultural estate in London. He fuses these elements to help him design objects that tell stories and are imbued with collective memory.

Scattered around Ilori's childhood home were the Nigerian newspapers and magazines read by his parents. Influential publications such as The Trumpet, Drum and Ovation provided a platform for a new generation of creatives, who radically changed the way in which Black people were represented.

DRUM magazine

October 1967

Courtesy of Black Cultural Archives

DRUM magazine

June 1968

Courtesy of Black Cultural Archives

DRUM magazine

February 1969

Courtesy of Black Cultural Archives

DRUM magazine

July 1966

Courtesy of Black Cultural Archives

DRUM magazine

May 1960

Courtesy of Black Cultural Archives

Bridget Riley's geometrical optical illusions provide inspiration for Ilori.

***Bridget Riley:
The Complete Series 1962 – 2020***

Contributed to by Bridget Riley, Lynn MacRitchie, Craig Hartley, Robert Kudielka, Alexandra Tommasini and Rosa Gubay

Co-published by The Bridget Riley Art Foundation and Thames & Hudson

2020

Courtesy of the Design Museum

Ilori's work features in this influential book on the work of African artists and designers. The book seeks to redefine African creativity and calls Western stereotypes and clichés into question.

Africa Rising: Fashion, Lifestyle and Design from Africa

Co-published by Design Indaba and Gestalten

2016

Courtesy of the Design Museum

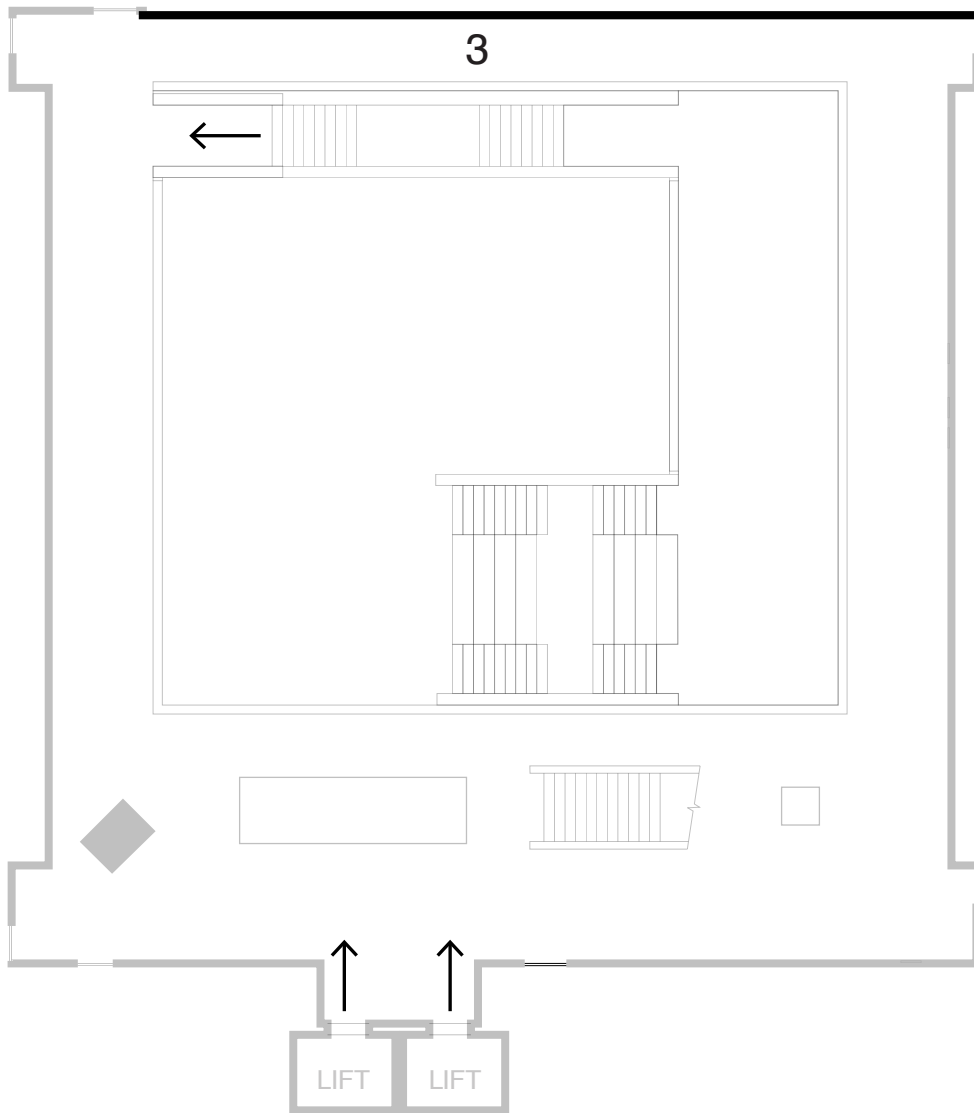
Ilori's Instagram account offers a glimpse into his inspirations. From artists and designers to films and books, as well as images from his own past and motivational quotes, his posts reveal his playful fusion of cultural influences and the infectious optimism that characterises his work.

Various posts from Yinka Ilori's Instagram account

Yinka Ilori

2017 – ongoing

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection



3. GRAPHIC LANGUAGE

‘A smiling face dispels unhappiness’

– Nigerian parable

Bold, bright and distinctive, Yinka Ilori’s graphic language is instantly recognisable. His visual approach goes deeper than simply coloured surfaces, drawing on the motifs and meanings of West African textiles to blend his cultural heritage and influences with contemporary urban life. Ideas of community, welcome, celebration and dialogue are addressed through his use of graphics, patterns and colour, which are not just aesthetic but “a way of starting a conversation.” Ilori’s work also delves into research and ideas about happiness, asking: can design help us to live more joyful – and even healthier – lives?

Portrait of Yinka Ilori's grandmother

Inca Jordan

c. 2018

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Aso-Oke fabric

Unknown maker

Unknown date

Loom-woven cotton

Courtesy of the Design Museum

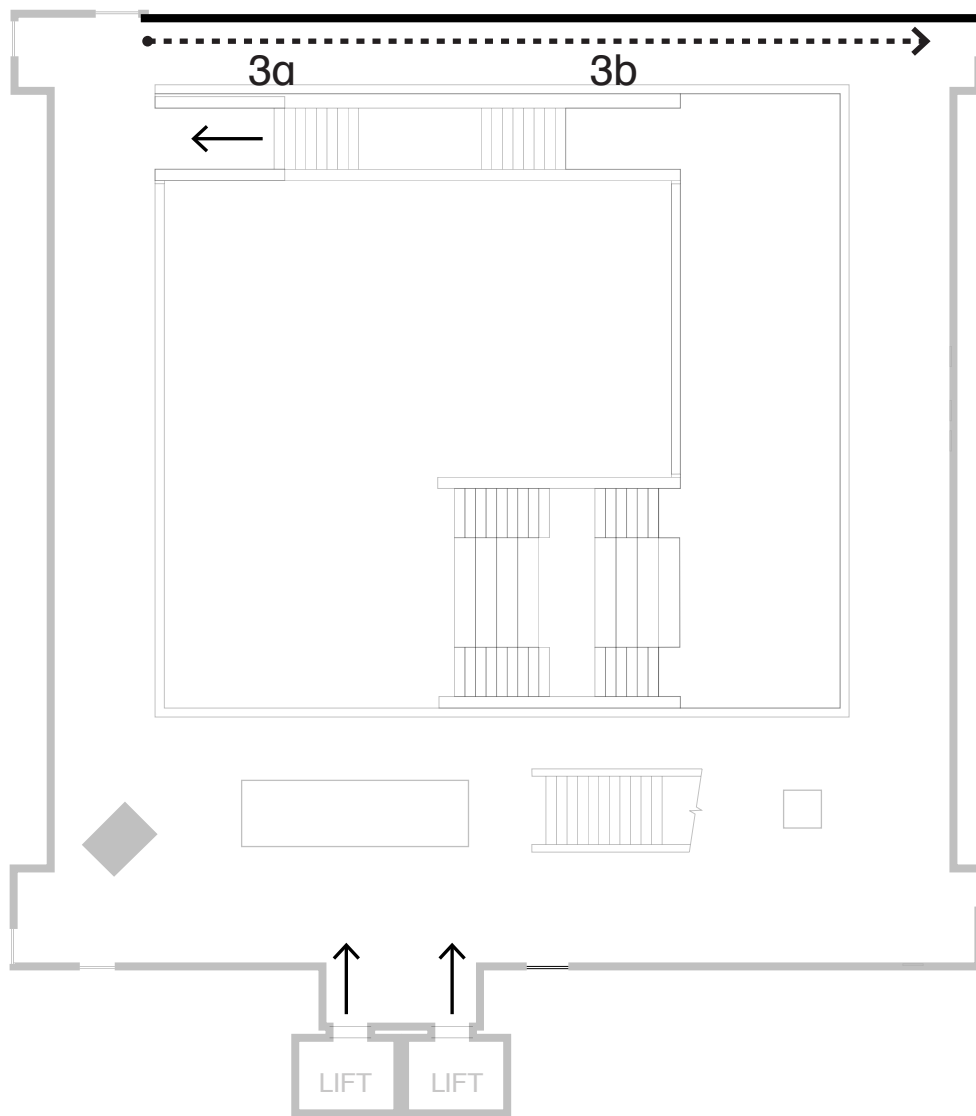
'The Oye's' (Tolu Oye, Kanyinsola Oye and Enoch Oye)

Photograph by Dotun Abeshinbioke

Creative Director: Tolu Oye

2019

Courtesy of Tolulope Oye



NIGERIAN FABRICS

Ilori's first memories of pattern and colour come from the vibrant fabrics that his family wore to weddings and church services. He remembers his grandmother's bold, bright outfits, affectionately nicknaming her "the real queen of colour." The layers of stories and meanings within each pattern inform Ilori's own work, bringing in often complex narratives of culture, history, trade and identity.

The Dutch fabric company Vlisco began designing wax printed fabrics in the late 19th century.

Although the company has a complex colonial history that includes the use of violent practices and appropriation of indigenous artistic cultures, its long involvement in West Africa means that its fabrics remain readily available and popular there.

The designs, which are often highly symbolic, are imbued with meanings and stories – not only those intended by the designers but also those created by the people who wear them.

Vlisco fabrics hanging in Yinka Ilori's studio

Photograph by Mariell Amelia Lind Hansen

2019

Courtesy of The Modern House

This irreverent design features the sort of fan found commonly during hot African summers. It reminds Ilori of the stories his parents would tell him of life in Nigeria.

‘Table Fan’ fabric

Designed by Vlisco

c. 2020s

Wax printed cotton

Design Museum Collection

This now-iconic design was commissioned by a Portuguese trader in 1940. In order to display his wealth, he asked for a fabric depicting six spark plugs (or ‘bougies’), representing his six-cylinder car. The design has since been revised and reimagined in many ways.

‘Six Bougies’ fabric

Designed by Vlisco

c. 2020s

Wax printed cotton

Design Museum Collection

The jumping-horse motif has several different meanings across West Africa. In Côte d'Ivoire it expresses the rivalry between co-wives, whereas in Nigeria it is worn by women to show unity with other women.

'Jumping Horse' fabric (also known as 'I Run Faster Than My Rival')

Designed by Vlisco

c. 2020s

Wax printed cotton

Design Museum Collection

This pattern has many interpretations. Originally designed to look as if the background is being spray-painted, it has also been read as depicting perfume or insecticide. The fabric is often informally referred to by the names of popular brands, such as 'Lover's Spray' or 'Fly-Tox', reflecting its ambiguous symbolism.

'Fly-Tox' fabric (Nigeria) / 'Holy Ghost Fire' (Nigeria) / 'Lover's Spray' (Ghana) / 'Parfum d'Álassane Ouattara' (Côte d'Ivoire), 'Baïgon' (Côte d'Ivoire)

Designed by Vlisco

c. 2020s

Wax printed cotton

Design Museum Collection

These two patterns are Ilori's favourite Vlisco designs. The dreamy pink pattern appeals to him because it looks like an abstract paradise, while the trumpet pattern evokes the joy of play.

Abstract pink pattern fabric

Designed by Vlisco

c. 2020s

Wax printed cotton

Design Museum Collection

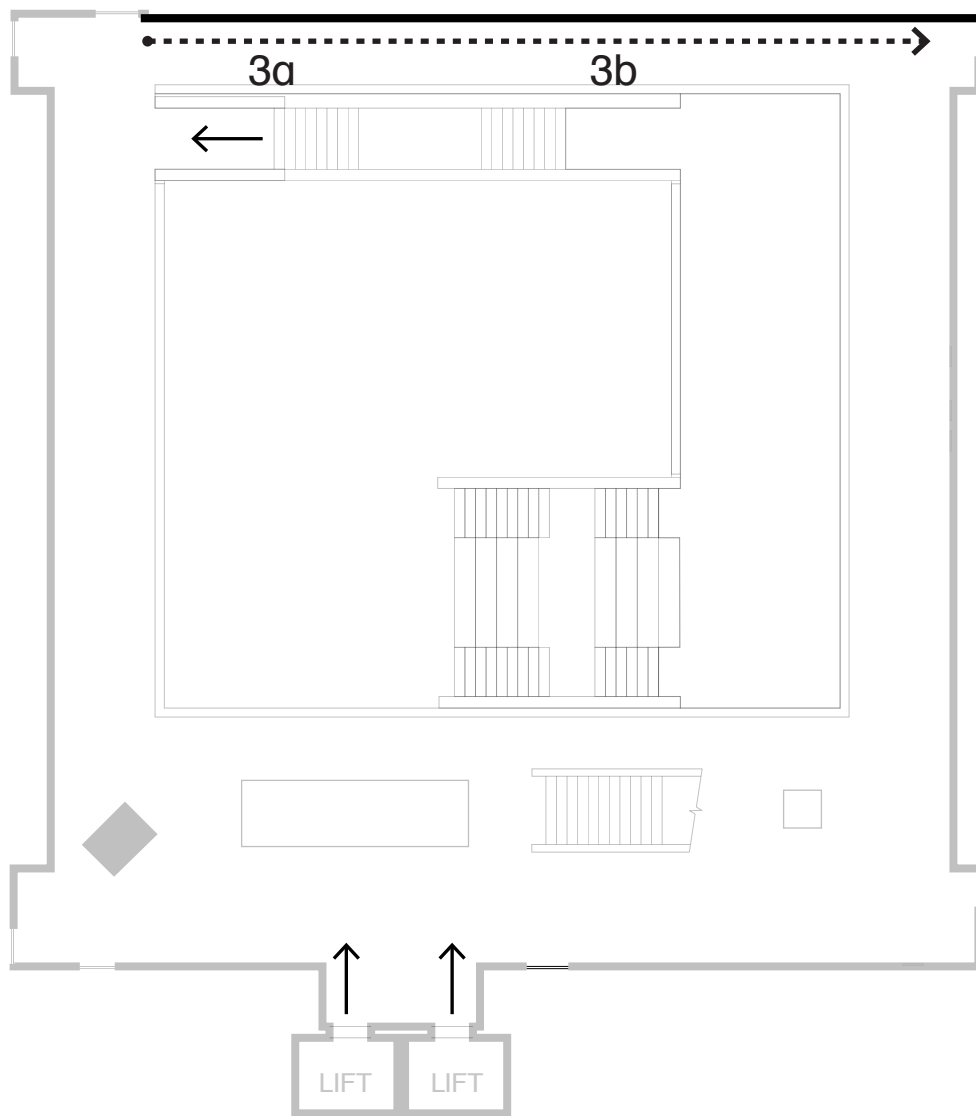
Trumpet-patterned fabric

Designed by Vlisco

c. 2020s

Wax printed cotton

Design Museum Collection



SPACES

Designing spaces that are lively and uplifting is an hugely important aspect of Ilori's practice. His 2019 exhibition *Types of Happiness* explored a spectrum of 16 types of happiness that were shown to improve wellbeing, developed by researchers at Weill Cornell Medical College. This multifaceted view of happiness inspires Ilori's spatial design. The urban environment becomes a canvas for creating moments of delight in a city that is often overwhelming and impersonal.

With its rainbow border and motifs drawn from Nigerian wax-printed textiles, this permanent mural was so popular that Ilori created limited-edition prints and flags based on the same design. Installed on a wall in Harrow, the mural invites a sense of communal ownership of public space.

‘Love Always Wins’ flag

Yinka Ilori, commissioned by Harrow Council and The London Mural Company

2021

Cotton, wood

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori’s personal collection

**‘Love Always Wins’ mural,
Gordon Road, Harrow, London**

Yinka Ilori, commissioned by Harrow Council and Accent London Ltd.

Made by The London Mural Company

2021

Photograph by The London Mural Company

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori

Ilori's billboard campaign was designed to keep up morale during the Covid-19 pandemic. These motivational posters, installed in prominent locations around London, saw awareness of Ilori's work extend beyond the architecture and design community.

**'If You Can Dream Then Anything Is Possible',
Broadway Market, Hackney, London**

Yinka Ilori, commissioned by Jack Arts
2021

Photograph by BUILDHOLLYWOOD

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori x BUILDHOLLYWOOD for Your
Space or Mine

**'If You Can Dream Then Anything Is Possible',
Upper Clapton Road, London**

Yinka Ilori, commissioned by Jack Arts
2021

Photograph by BUILDHOLLYWOOD

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori x BUILDHOLLYWOOD for Your
Space or Mine

Inspired by the green spaces in London that offered him sanctuary during the Covid-19 lockdowns, Ilori created this mural to celebrate the many acts of kindness that were seen across the country during the pandemic.

**‘This Is Human Kind’,
Ebor Street, Shoreditch, London**

Yinka Ilori, commissioned by the British Red Cross
2021

Jack Arts/British Red Cross

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori

Enlivening pedestrian crossings and roads across London, Ilori's designs for the 2021 London Design Festival transformed mundane streets into works of art. Ilori's aim was to "make people smile and bring a sense of joy and positivity to their day."

**'Bring London Together', design for a pedestrian crossing,
Tottenham Court Road, London**

Yinka Ilori, commissioned by London Design Festival in collaboration with Camden Council and Bloomberg Philanthropies

2021

Photograph by Jason Alden

Courtesy of the Bloomberg Philanthropies Asphalt Art Initiative

**Print of 'Bring London Together' design for a pedestrian crossing,
Tottenham Court Road, London**

Yinka Ilori, commissioned by London Design Festival in collaboration with Camden Council and Bloomberg Philanthropies

2021

Print on paper

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Ilori's design for the 2021 Brit Awards uses colour and pattern to tell a complex story. A three-dimensional maze structure symbolises the complex paths that many creative-industry professionals navigated through the pandemic. In contrast, the soft shapes of the tablecloths express hope.

2021 Brit Awards stage

Yinka Ilori and Es Devlin commissioned by Brit Awards 2021

Photograph by John Marshall

Courtesy of JOHN MARSHALL/JM Enternational

Tablecloths for the 2021 Brit Awards

Yinka Ilori and Es Devlin commissioned by Brit Awards 2021

Cotton

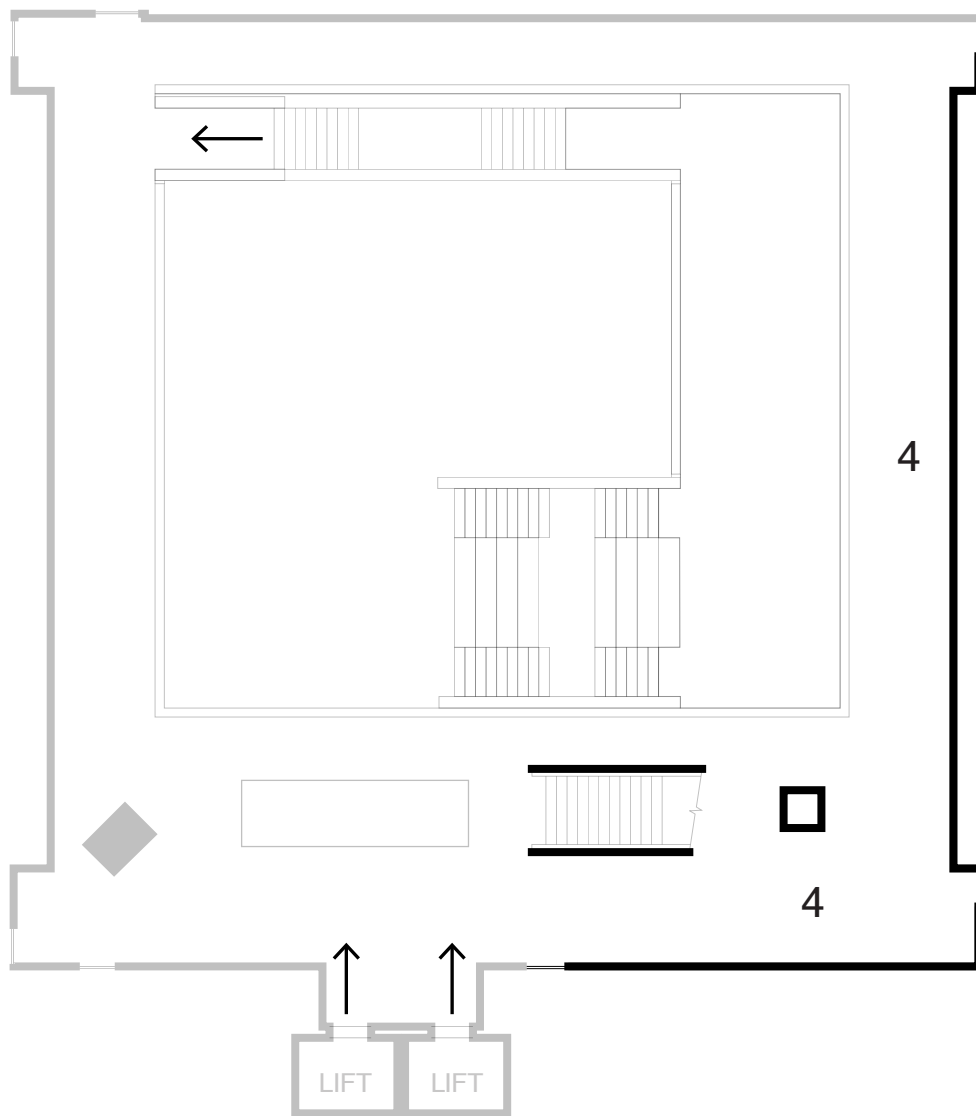
Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Sample section of the floor design for the 2021 Brit Awards

Yinka Ilori and Es Devlin commissioned by Brit Awards
2021

Fiberglass

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection



4. ARCHITECTURE FOR ALL

‘Milk and honey have different colours, but they share the same house peacefully’

– Nigerian parable

At the heart of Yinka Ilori’s work is his conviction that design should be for everybody. Since 2017, Ilori has turned his attention to designing in public spaces – recognising the importance of creating work “for people who don’t get access to art: who can’t afford to get the bus or train to a museum, or who don’t feel comfortable going to those places.” Ilori’s revitalised spaces bring design out into the world, inviting everyone to enjoy it.

Ilori grew up on the Marquess Estate in north London. This context shaped his belief in the importance of shared spaces and the use of design for social good. He describes the area as “rough” but inhabited by “every nationality: we were all like one family.”

1:500 architectural plan of Marquess Estate

Darbourne & Darke

1968

Courtesy of Islington Heritage Service, Islington Local History Centre

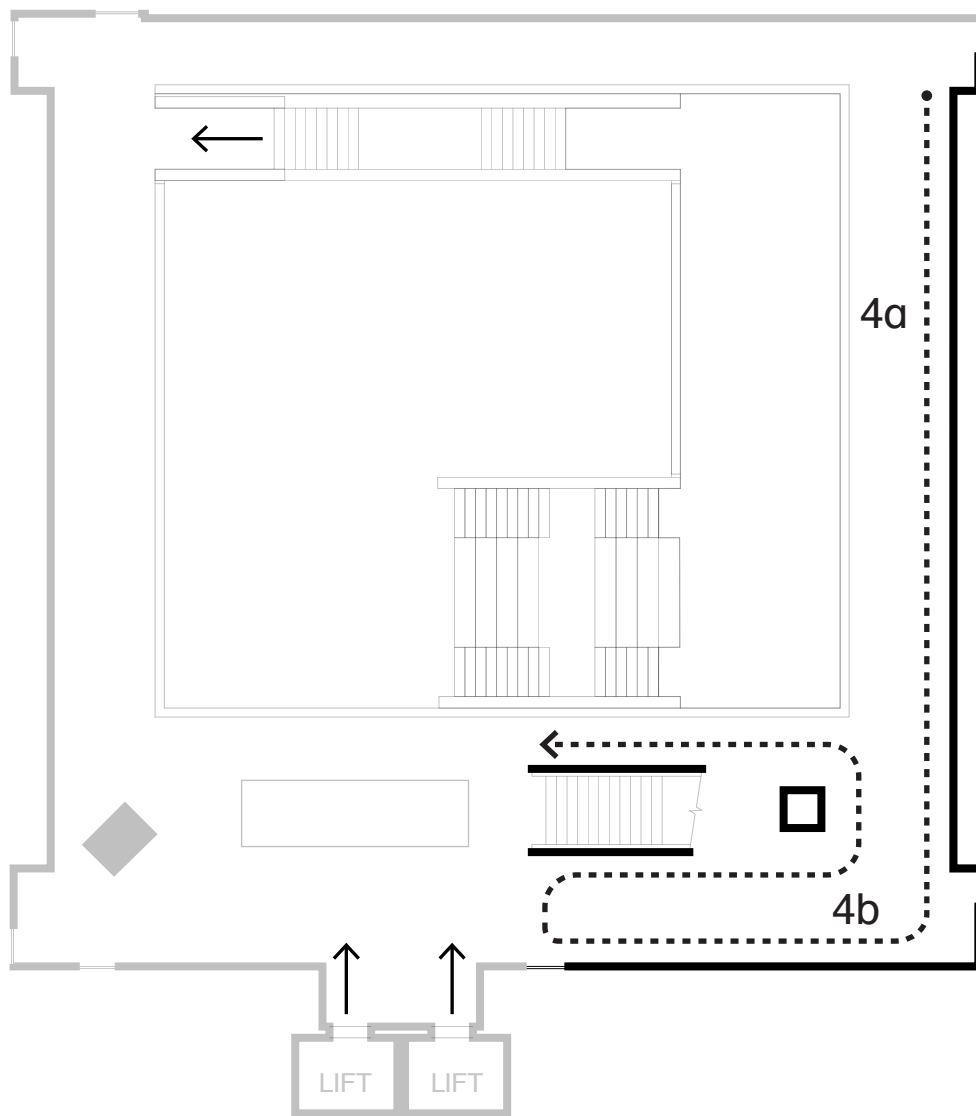
‘Housing, Marquess Road, Islington’

Published in Architectural Review

Photograph by Michael Reid and Sam Lambert

September 1974

Courtesy of Islington Heritage Service, Islington Local History Centre



MULTICULTURAL LONDON

Ilori's perspective on the city he lives in is also a call to action: "London is such a diverse city," he says, "but it's not reflected in the buildings." Applying his distinctive visual language across urban environments, he uses colour and a sense of play to make everyone feel welcome. His interventions invite us to revalue the under-loved parts of this city.

Ilori's designs often question the apparent insignificance of everyday spaces. Recalling his childhood memories of playing in the Essex Road laundrette, Ilori worked with children to create their own imaginary laundrette using Lego. The project highlights the important, and usually unacknowledged, role that laundrettes play in communities.

Chair from 'Laundrette of Dreams'

Yinka Ilori

2021

Lego, MDF

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

'Laundrette of Dreams'

Yinka Ilori in collaboration with students from St Jude and St Paul's C of E Primary School

2021

Photographs by Mark Cocksedge

Lego, timber, mixed materials

Commissioned by Lego Group for their Rebuild the World campaign

Courtesy of The LEGO Group

Essex Road Laundrette

Photographs by Joshua Blackburn for his Launderama series

2018

Courtesy of Joshua Blackburn

The Making of the 'Laundrette of Dreams' by Yinka Ilori

By Lego Group

Duration: 2 minutes, 3 seconds

Directed by Ben Woolf

Courtesy of The LEGO Group and Exposure

Next to the elegant Dulwich Picture Gallery, Ilori's commission for the Dulwich Pavilion – titled the 'Colour Palace' – stood out with its popping colours and joyful appearance. Working with the architects Pricegore, Ilori drew on both European and African cultural traditions, from textile markets in Lagos and Ridley Road market in London to the Doge's Palace in Venice. The pavilion's exuberant design speaks to the vivid fusions of multicultural London.

'Colour Palace' installed at Dulwich Picture Gallery

Yinka Ilori and Pricegore, commissioned by Dulwich Picture Gallery and the London Festival of Architecture
Structural engineering by HRW
Made by RASKL
Photographs by Andy Stagg
Courtesy of @studiostagg

1:75 model of the 'Colour Palace'

Yinka Ilori and Pricegore
Made by Pricegore
2019
Paper, brass, MDF, acrylic, paint
Courtesy of Pricegore

The Balogun textile market, Lagos, Nigeria

Photograph by David Evans

2014

Courtesy of David Evans

Textile stall, Ridley Road market, London

Photograph by Andrea Scaringella

2005-2006

Courtesy of Andrea Scaringella

To encourage friends and communities to gather at the 'Colour Palace', Ilori drew inspiration from Francis Kéré's 2017 Serpentine Pavilion. Kéré's design references a tree in his hometown of Gando, Burkina Faso, that acts as the central meeting point for members of the community.

Serpentine Pavilion

Kéré Architecture: Diébédo Francis Kéré

Collaborators: AECOM, Stage One Creative Services Ltd., Goethe-Institut

2017

Steel canopy, wooden shading elements, prefabricated wooden block wall system

Photograph by Iwan Baan

© Kéré Architecture, Iwan Baan

**Early sketches envisioning the 'Colour Palace' in
situ and in use**

Yinka Ilori and Pricegore

2019

Pencil on paper

Courtesy of Pricegore

After the 'Colour Palace' was disassembled, the timber lengths were distributed to local schools and community sites to be reused. School students followed flat-pack instructions created by the architects, alma-nac, to build their own planters out of the colourful wood.

Planter construction manual

Planter design developed by alma-nac with students of Dulwich Prep London

Instructions by alma-nac

2019

Courtesy of alma-nac

Students at Dulwich Preparatory School, London constructing the 'Pavilion Planters'

2019

Photographs by Belinda Lawley

Courtesy of Belinda Lawley

A 'Pavilion Planter' from Dulwich Prep London with original timber from the 'Colour Palace'

alma-nac with students of Dulwich Prep London

2019

Re-purposed timber

Courtesy of Dulwich Prep London

Ilori's designs often transform unwelcoming areas into places where local communities can enjoy going about their daily lives. Working with south London residents and students, Ilori transformed this foreboding underpass into a space of safety, happiness and wellbeing.

'Happy Street'

Yinka Ilori in collaboration with Wandsworth Council, residents, and students of St George's Church of England Primary School

2019

Commissioned by Wandsworth Council as part of the London Festival of Architecture

Photographs by Luke O'Donovan

©Luke O'Donovan

Early balustrade prototype for 'Happy Street', which was not incorporated into the final design due to cost

Yinka Ilori

2019

Metal, lacquer paint

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Prototype of one of the 56 pattern-enamel panels installed for 'Happy Street', selected for their low cost and durability

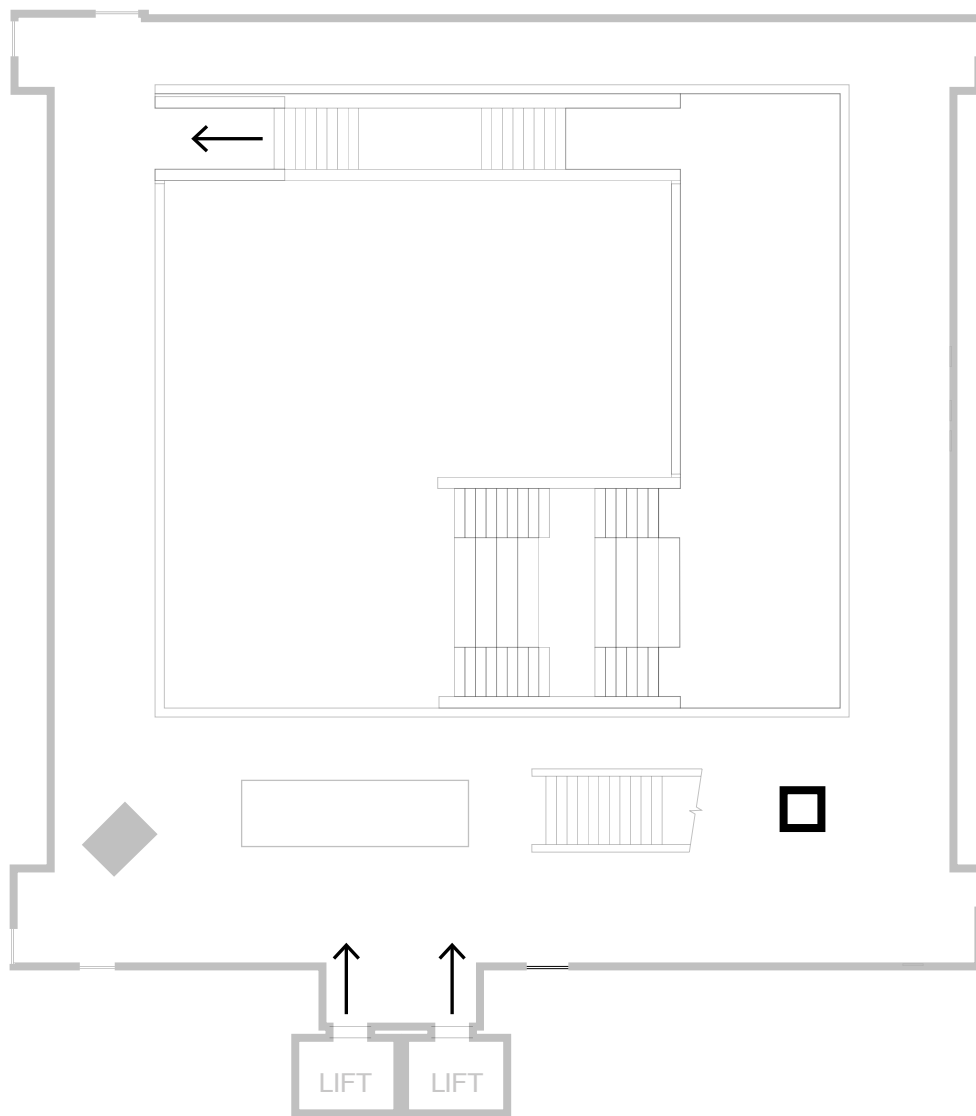
Yinka Ilori

Made by A.J Wells & Sons Ltd

2019

Vitreous enamel

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection



Congolese artist Bodys Isek Kingelez creates models of a utopian, fantastical future where cities are playful and inclusive – ideas that also resonate in Ilori’s work. Ilori selected this sculpture as an important new addition to the Design Museum’s collection.

Kinshasa Label

Bodys Isek Kingelez

1989

Cardboard, plastic, felt-tip pen, paper, graphite

Made possible with the support of the ACE/V&A

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Art Fund_

PLAY

Ilori's work demonstrates an appreciation for the value of play. He explains that spaces for play "are incredibly important in providing the freedom to be together, learn from each other, and build relationships and memories." Ilori is inspired by projects that encourage imagination and creativity through unconventional, often abstract structures.

This traditional Nigerian game is played on a carved wooden board using seeds from the Nigerian ayo plant. Each player tries to win the seeds from their opponent by moving them across the board. Ilori has painted this ayo board with colours and patterns.

Ayo board painted by Yinka Ilori

Yinka Ilori

Unknown date

Wood, ayo plant seeds

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori's personal collection

Working closely with residents, Ilori transformed this neglected park in Dagenham into a rich, revitalised playground. Drawing inspiration from the flamingos that once inhabited the park, Ilori designed bouncy spring rockers and a circular seating area alongside structures that encourage children's creativity.

Yinka Ilori x Create London: 'The Flamboyance of Flamingos'

By Create London

Duration: 4 minutes, 26 seconds

Film by Yvonne Shelling

Sound by Lysader Black

Commissioned by Create London in partnership with the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Children playing in 'The Flamboyance of Flamingos', Parsloes Park, Dagenham, London

Yinka Ilori in collaboration with Becontree Forever, The London Mural Company and setWorks, co-commissioned by Create London and the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

2022

Photographs by John Nguyen

Courtesy of PA Media

**Sketch of the playground equipment for ‘The
Flamboyance of Flamingos’, Parsloes Park,
Dagenham, London**

Yinka Ilori

2021

Pencil on paper

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori’s personal collection

Flamingo-shaped bench

Yinka Ilori

2022

Timber, lacquer paint

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori’s personal collection

**Basketball backboard from ‘The Flamboyance of Flamingos’,
Parsloes Park, Dagenham, London**

Yinka Ilori

2021

Courtesy of the Design Museum

**Basketball backboard from ‘Be The Best You Can Be’ basketball court,
Bank Street Park, Canary Wharf, London**

Yinka Ilori

2021

Courtesy of the Design Museum

Ilori’s ‘The Flamboyance of Flamingos’ playground in Dagenham includes a brightly coloured basketball court. A competition invited local school children to design a basketball for the court. The winner, eight-year-old Eve, had her exuberant design realised as a printed ball.

Eve Ellis basketball

Yinka Ilori

2021

Rubber

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori’s personal collection

Design for a basketball, ‘Let’s celebrate each other so we can all shine’

Eve Ellis

2021

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori’s personal collection/Eve Ellis

Basketball

Yinka Ilori

2021

Rubber

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori’s personal collection

Ilori’s vividly coloured basketball court aims to bring liveliness and activity to the housing estate next to the towering skyscrapers in Canary Wharf. The slogan ‘Be The Best You Can Be’ encourages everyone to take part, no matter their level or ability.

‘Be The Best You Can Be’ basketball court, Bank Street Park, Canary Wharf, London

Yinka Ilori, commissioned by Canary Wharf Group

2021

Photograph by Camilla Mcgregor

Courtesy of Canary Wharf Group

As well as the music itself, Ilori draws inspiration from the covers of his favourite albums. The bright colours and geometric design of this Fela Kuti album are a visible influence on Ilori's designs for play spaces.

Open and Close

Fela Kuti and The Africa '70

Designed by Mamuli Okotie-Eboh and Kayode Ademola

Produced by EMI (Nigeria) Ltd.

1971

Vinyl record

Design Museum Collection

Ilori's interest in imaginative playscapes drew him to this immersive installation by design collective Assemble and artist Simon Terill. The installation recreates Brutalist concrete playground structures out of foam, resulting in a humorous, unexpected take on an architectural style that is often presented as serious or formal.

'The Brutalist Playground' at The Edge gallery in Bath

Assemble and Simon Terill

2015

Photograph by Paul Blakemore

Courtesy of Paul Blakemore

'The Flying Saucer' at Churchill Gardens playground, Pimlico, London

Designed by Philip Powell and Hidalgo Moya

1956

Photograph by John Donat

©John Donat, RIBA Library Photographs Collection

Isamu Noguchi's abstract playgrounds are a source of inspiration for Ilori. Noguchi is particularly interested in the concept of non-directive play. In place of typical playground equipment, the structures actively invite interaction and use in creative ways.

Playground equipment for Ala Moana Park, Hawaii

Isamu Noguchi

1940

Photograph by F. S. Lincoln

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The playground on the Marquess Estate provided a childhood haven for Ilori and his friends. Ilori remembers its unique importance for him. "I held my playground so high in my heart," he says, "you would think all the objects were made out of gold."

The playground in the Marquess Estate, Islington, London

Darbourne & Darke

c.1976

Photograph by Joshua Abbott for Modernism in Metro-land project

Courtesy of Joshua Abbott

By furnishing this public square with sculptural forms that offer surfaces for skateboarding, Ilori reimagines an underutilised space as a place for play. The colourful, modular ‘skateable objects’, designed with Tony Hawk’s Skateboard Project, invite the local community to reanimate the square.

‘Block Cubes’, a limited-edition skatepark

Yinka Ilori, commissioned by Unique Design x Savannah
2021

Photographs by Boe Parries

Courtesy of Boe Parries

Ilori’s design process starts with pen and paper. He tends to sketch fluidly, exploring solutions and making mistakes along the way which help him to develop the design. He begins by sketching in pencil and adds colour later.

Sketch of the ‘skateable objects’ for ‘Block Cubes’ skatepark

Yinka Ilori

2021

Pencil on paper

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori’s personal collection

For this skatepark design in Roubaix, France, Ilori studied the way in which skateboarders move and flow between obstacles. He collaborated with the local skateboarding community to ensure that the design would be not only functional but fun.

‘COLORAMA’ skatepark

Yinka Ilori, commissioned by La Condition Publique,
Roubaix, France

2020

Photographs by Maxime Dufour

Courtesy of Yinka Ilori

**The Design Museum would like
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Images

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**Share your photos with us using
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