

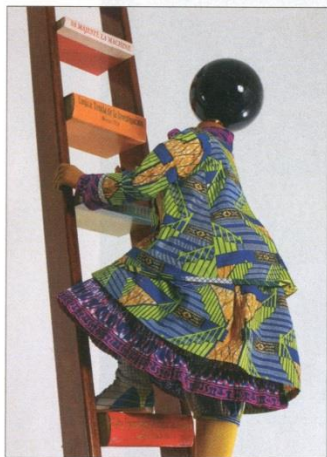
## reviews: national

### Yinka Shonibare

**Barnes Foundation  
Philadelphia**

When the Barnes Foundation moved into its new building two years ago, it announced its special-exhibitions program would include shows of contemporary art. But its first two exhibitions—one on the life of collector Albert C. Barnes, who established the foundation in 1922, and the other of work by Ellsworth Kelly—left some people wondering. "Yinka Shonibare MBE: Magic Ladders," however, demonstrated that the Barnes does intend to get serious about showing new art that complements its collection and the principles of its public programs. The exhibition squared both with Barnes's interest in African art, and—with its multiple references to knowledge and opportunity—his belief that lives could be transformed through art and education.

A British artist of Nigerian descent, Shonibare addresses cultural identity and the legacy of colonialism in his work. His installations often feature mannequins dressed in Western period costumes fashioned from sumptuous "African" textiles that are actually manufactured in the Netherlands. He is no stranger to Philadelphia, having been an artist-in-residence at the city's Fabric Workshop and Museum in 2002. His show for the



Yinka Shonibare, *Magic Ladder III*, 2013, mannequin, Dutch wax-printed cotton, leather, fiberglass, wooden ladder, paper-covered wooden books, globe head, and steel, 131½" x 31½" x 48". Barnes Foundation.

Barnes reflected a familiarity with Philadelphia's history and its early prominence as a center of education. The "magic ladders" scattered throughout the exhibition were library ladders, each supporting a sculpture of a child, frozen in mid-climb.

These mannequins were given world globes as heads, which seemed a clichéd comment on the natural curiosity of children. Other mannequins, these without heads, were posed at writing tables and school desks. (The artist has said that his figures are headless because he doesn't want them to be racially identifiable.) The references here, to literacy and learning, were likewise too obvious. Nevertheless, the sheer extravagance of pieces like Shonibare's 2003 *Scramble for Africa*, a sculpture of 14 headless power brokers—representing the 14 European leaders present at the Berlin Conference of 1884–85—seated around a table, compensated for Shonibare's occasionally heavy-handed symbolism. So too did the fact that his works for this show seemed perfectly in tune with their venue, its founder, and his city.

—Edith Newhall

### Anton Ginzburg

**Blaffer Art Museum  
Houston**

"Terra Corpus," Russian-born artist Anton Ginzburg's multimedia, multi-gallery installation, presented the first two parts of a trilogy begun in 2011. Centering on the artist's search for mythical or legendary landscapes and incorporating film, sculpture, painting, and photography, the works offered a disjointed narrative of exploration.

Part one of the trilogy, *At the Back of the North Wind* (2011), first shown at the 54th Venice Biennale, was a semi-fictional, semi-documentary account of Ginzburg's quest to find Hyperborea, a



Anton Ginzburg, from the "Hyperborea" series, 2011, archival ink-jet print, 20" x 26". Blaffer Art Museum.

mythical paradise that appeared in the writings of Hesiod, Homer, and Herodotus. Among the components of the installation were photos that led the viewer from the American Northwest to St. Petersburg to the ruins of Gulag prison camps on the White Sea; a huge sculpture that resembled a tornado of bones and tusks; a 96-inch, mixed-media-on-canvas tondo that was a swirl of delicate pastels; and a 45-minute video in which a camera panned along a lush forest floor, with appearances by a timber wolf and an owl.

Part two of the trilogy, *Walking the Sea* (2014), was equally complex. The subject here was the 26,000-square-mile Aral Sea, once one of the largest bodies of water on the planet but now almost dried up as the result of a Soviet irrigation project. The centerpiece was *Sea-harp* (2013), featuring a large white anchor made of plaster. The installation also included a series of gorgeously tapestried maps and an abundance of photographs of the exposed seabed, abandoned military bases, and scattered, rusting vessels.

Ginzburg is clearly an artist with ambition, ideas, and talent to burn, but as with so many installations that purport to take the visitor on a journey, a lot of wall text was required to make the trip. Bits and pieces were fascinating to contemplate and Ginzburg's facility with a range of media is impressive, but one was left with a slightly hollow sensation, like the muffled enthusiasm one might have for a friend's vacation photos.

—Ann Landi