Chicago, IL—November 14, 2018—The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, dedicated to exploring the art, architecture, and design of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, today announced plans for a new, annual series of exhibitions by contemporary artists—with an emphasis on artists of color. The series, titled A Tale of Today: New Artists at the Driehaus, will begin in March 2019 with an installation by Yinka Shonibare MBE, including several of the artist’s works responding to Victorian-era social and political issues. This will be followed by an exhibition featuring two emerging artists in the second year including Chicago’s own Nate Young, and a collaboration with artist Mark Dion in the third year. A Tale of Today will provide opportunities for audiences to see the history of the Gilded Age through different lenses, and explore the social, class, racial and economic issues that make that history relevant to society now. Each exhibition will also be supported by a diverse array of public programming that engages with the artistic and socio-economic issues raised by the works on view.

“When we look back at the great treasures of the Gilded Age, it is important to admire them as products of their time, while also exploring the underlying social issues from that period, many of which are so relevant today,” said Richard P. Townsend, the Museum’s director. “As a museum housed in one of Chicago’s greatest buildings of that period, we see it as both an opportunity and an obligation to create experiences that bring the Gilded Age and the contemporary together, and that highlight themes of diversity. Our new series, A Tale of Today, will put history into a different light, recognizing that great art can provide an avenue for understanding and addressing the socio-economic divisions in society, both past and present. And Yinka Shonibare, whose work has consistently explored social and political history through the lens of his own, cross-cultural life, is the perfect artist to inaugurate this new series.”

The Museum, which focuses in particular on the Gilded Age, is housed in the Nickerson Mansion, renowned as Gilded Age Chicago’s “Marble Palace” and located near the City’s famous Magnificent Mile. From 2003-2008, the building was restored with the support of philanthropist Richard H. Driehaus. In addition to its long-term, collection-based installations—drawing on its outstanding collection of decorative arts, particularly Tiffany glass—the Museum has a program of temporary exhibitions—and half of this annual exhibition schedule will now be dedicated to shows in the A Tale of Today series.

The inspiration for this series came in large part from the house itself. Samuel and Mathilda Nickerson had a purpose-built art gallery added to the house, where they hung their collection of European and American contemporary art. Ardent collectors, and founding trustees of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Nickersons often invited young art students to sketch in their gallery.

“Launching a program focused on the art of today, in this beautiful space, fits with the Nickersons’ intentions to serve as an incubator for creativity and contemporary expression,” said Townsend. The Museum’s new series takes its name from The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today, the 1873 book by Mark
Twain and Charles Dudley Warner that originally coined the phrase that subsequently became the name for this period in American history.

**A Tale of Today: Yinka Shonibare MBE**

March 2 – September 29, 2019

The first artist in the Driehaus’ new series, Yinka Shonibare MBE, draws on history, politics, and fashion influences to explore and critique our understanding of the past. The London-born and based artist, who was raised in Nigeria, has drawn on both his English and African history throughout his career, to create visually compelling art in a variety of media. The upcoming exhibition at the Driehaus—the artist’s first museum survey exhibition in Chicago—will feature four bodies of work, from his early series of photographs to his most recent sculptures and installation pieces. A through-line in his work has been an exploration of the intersection between the attitudes and trappings of the past periods in history, such as the Victorian Age, that the artist at first seems to celebrate—but which, upon closer inspection, it is clear he rejects.

The exhibition will include:

- The photography suite *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* (1998), in which Shonibare recreates the moments in the life of a “rake” in five different chromogenic images. Modelled on the British tradition of the anecdotal and moralizing pictorial series such as Hogarth’s *The Rake’s Progress* (1732-34), Shonibare upends this most British of artistic formats by placing himself, a man of color, front and center in unexpected social settings and in gilded environments.

- Shonibare’s suite of 12 photos, titled *Dorian Gray* (2001), in which the artist poses as Oscar Wilde’s legendary gentleman-cum-monster, adding a new dimension to our interpretation of the story.

- *Party Time*, Shonibare’s 2009 installation in which he uses his signature Dutch wax fabric to create High Victorian costumes that both complement a Gilded Age interior while also drawing attention to the class disparities being experienced both then and now. *Party Time* will be installed in the Driehaus Museum’s Nickerson Mansion Dining Room.

- An example from one of Shonibare’s most recent series, *The American Library Collection* (2015), will be installed in the luxurious glass fronted cabinets located in the Museum’s first floor Maher Gallery. These African trading cloth-wrapped volumes bear the embossed names of immigrants to the United States, among them famous and less-well-remembered writers and thinkers, elegantly emphasizing the significant contribution of immigrants to our country. Shonibare’s *Big Boy* (2002) will also be displayed in the center of the same gallery.

Throughout the run of the exhibition, the Driehaus will present a series of programs and events, for a wide range of audiences. As part of the exhibition’s opening weekend, the Museum will host a panel discussion with both art historians and artists, to discuss Shonibare’s work in the context of the African diaspora, his practice of creating works within historic sites or addressing historic themes, and where his work belongs within the scope of art history. Also featured will be a series of spoken word performances and podcasts in collaboration with Young Chicago Authors and its artistic director, Kevin Coval, who is also the founder of the Louder Than a Bomb poetry slam festival. These events will feature emerging Chicago poets of color. The Museum will also host a number of salon-style events, including: a lecture on the life and work of Oscar Wilde; a panel discussion on the role of outsiders in driving change within contemporary artistic practice; lectures and workshops by young
Chicago artists whose work is inspired by Shonibare and his distinctive use of materials; and a series of lectures about the history of fashion and fabrics, with a particular focus on the 19th century Dutch prints that have featured so strongly in many of Shonibare’s recent works. Programs for families and children will explore some of the art-making techniques behind Shonibare’s works, including classes and workshops on bookbinding, fabric-making, and the creation and design of narratives using static images.

A Tale of Today: Yinka Shonibare MBE at the Driehaus Museum is made possible in part by loans of important works by Shonibare, including from: Art Institute of Chicago; the James Cohan Gallery; the Collection Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman NY, courtesy FLAG Art Foundation; the Newark Museum; and the Collection of Amy and John Phelan.

The Museum’s contemporary art series will continue over the next three years, with variations on the program that explore new perspectives and feature new artists—all with an emphasis on engaging with underrepresented communities. In Spring 2020, the Driehaus will collaborate with two emerging artists, while the third iteration, in 2021, will be A Tale of Today: Mark Dion, presenting works by the American artist who is particularly known for exploring the history of knowledge and science in his artistic practice.

About The Richard H. Driehaus Museum
The Richard H. Driehaus Museum explores art, architecture, and design with an emphasis on the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Museum was founded by Richard H. Driehaus, who oversaw the restoration of its home, the Nickerson Mansion. Mr. Driehaus—who has a long history of funding projects in the arts and culture, including historic and contemporary art, and with an emphasis on projects engaging Chicago institutions—subsequently gave the Museum its collection. Once known as Chicago’s “Marble Palace” and located just steps from the Magnificent Mile, the collection of period decorative arts is presented in an immersive experience within the Mansion. Temporary exhibitions organized by the Driehaus and its partners place the Gilded Age in context, as do vibrant educational and cultural programs designed to appeal to diverse audiences and illuminate the history, culture, and urban fabric of Chicago.

Address: 40 East Erie Street, Chicago, IL 60611
Phone: (312) 482-8933
Website: driehausmuseum.org

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For more information, please contact:
Sascha Freudenheim
PAVE Communications & Consulting
sascha@paveconsult.com
917-544-6057
Liz Tillmanns
The Richard H. Driehaus Museum
LTillmanns@driehausmuseum.org
312-874-5909

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