

## Yinka Shonibare unveils project focused on the Great Migration

The third iteration of the artist's 'Libraries' series will be permanently installed at the Rollins Museum of Art in Florida



Yinka Shonibare, *The American Library Collection (The Great Migration: Poets, Philosophers, Historians)*, 2022

Courtesy of The Rollins Museum of Art. Photo by Scott Cook

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23 February 2022

The British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare CBE (RA) will unveil a new work in his *Libraries* series this week honouring historical figures tied

to the Great Migration, the movement of six million Black Americans from the rural Southern US that occurred between the 1910s and 1970s.

The impactful commission, *The American Library Collection (The Great Migration: Poets, Philosophers, Historians)* (2022), will be installed this week at the [Rollins Museum of Art](#) in Winter Park, Florida. It comprises 600 hardcover books, bound in colourful Dutch wax fabric, with each spine embossed with the name of a poet, philosopher or historian with ancestral connections to the Great Migration, as well as the names of detractors who supported Jim Crow restrictions.

“I’m delighted that this influential collection of individuals [...] has found a permanent home at Rollins College,” Shonibare tells *The Art Newspaper*. “The important contributions that African Americans of the Great Migration brought to the communities of the northern states of the US remain to be fully appreciated, and this significant moment in American history continues to create, debate, illuminate and educate.”

The unveiling of the work, which includes some widely-known names like Langston Hughes, Angela Davis, Ralph Ellison and Elizabeth Alexander, as well as lesser-known figures, coincides with wider nationwide celebrations of Black History Month. It was created in collaboration with Rollins College staff and students, who researched figures who fled 17 Southern states.



Rollins College students research in collaboration with Yinka Shonibare: The American Library Collection (The Great Migration: Poets, Philosophers, Historians). *Courtesy of The Rollins Museum of Art. Photo: Scott Cook.*

“Even for those who are knowledgeable about the Great Migration and know many of the poets, philosophers and historians, this is an opportunity to open the door and learn more and to be aware of how the stories are relevant,” the installation's curator, Gisela Carbonell, said in a statement.

The artist's *Libraries* series, which aims to prompt viewers to consider the cultural contributions of both celebrated and lesser-known historical figures, began with [\*The British Library\*](#) (2014) at the Tate Modern in London, where the installation spanned more than 6,000 books, with around half printed in gold leaf with the names of first- and

second-generation immigrants to Britain and the names of political activists who have opposed immigration.

The first iteration of the series to focus on the US, presented in the inaugural edition of the [Front International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art](#), was titled *The American Library* (2018) and shown at the Cleveland Public Library as part of the city-wide exhibition.