244. The Swing (after Fragonard)
Yinka Shonibare. 2001 C.E. Mixed-media installation

- Article at Khan Academy
- a three-dimensional recreation of the Rococo painting after which it was titled, which itself offers testimony to the opulence and frivolity of pre-Revolutionary France
- contain some dark undertones.
  - To begin with, the beautiful young protagonist of Fragonard’s painting has somehow become headless. This is likely a reference to the use of the guillotine during the Reign of Terror in the 1790s, when members of the French aristocracy were publicly beheaded.
    - Drawing our attention to questions of excess, class and morality that were raised by revolutionaries two centuries ago, Shonibare invites us to also consider the increasing disparity between economic classes today, especially alongside the growing culture of paranoia, terror and xenophobia in global politics
- As a British-born Nigerian (male), raised between Lagos and London, Shonibare is especially perceptive to the ways in which issues of access, nationalism and belonging have their roots in modern European history, particularly with regards to the United Kingdom and its relationship to its former colonies. Here is where the specific fabrics that Shonibare utilizes become more relevant, as their symbolism is steeped in histories of cultural appropriation, imperialism and power
  - Though tailored in the fashion of eighteenth-century French aristocratic style, the costume that is modeled by Shonibare’s protagonist has been sewn from colorful and abstractly patterned fabrics with quite different origins: the bright golds, reds and blues arranged in geometric motifs across her ruffled skirt are typical of the ‘African’ Dutch wax fabrics that Shonibare has famously used to adorn his figural tableaux throughout his career
  - While these fabrics have come to signify African identity today, the patterns on Dutch Wax fabrics were originally based on motifs found in Indonesian batiks, and were manufactured in England and Holland in the nineteenth-century. Predictably, the European imitations did not prove lucrative when sold in South Asian markets, so Dutch manufacturers then marketed the textiles to their West African colonies, where they have since been appropriated and integrated into local visual culture.
  - As such, Dutch Wax fabrics as we know them today are the product of the complex economic and cultural entanglements that resulted from European imperialism
  - Shonibare uses the fabrics “as a tool to investigate the place of ethnicity and the stereotype in modernist representation. (...) The textile is neither Dutch nor African, therefore, the itinerary of ideas it circulates are never quite stable in their authority or meaning.”
  - the material is “both fake and authentic, both readymade and original,” not to mention indisputably cosmopolitan
- Shonibare wishes to forge connections between imperialism, the aristocracy, and the “colonized wealthy class.”
  - In The Swing (After Fragonard), which is loaded with references to the French Revolution, the Age of Enlightenment and colonial expansion into Africa, Shonibare asks us to consider how a simple act of leisure can be so controversial.
While the leisure pursuit might look frivolous (...) my depiction of it is a way of engaging in that power. It is actually an expression of something much more profoundly serious insofar as the accumulation of wealth and power that is personified in leisure was no doubt a product of exploiting people.