
Cristea Roberts Gallery

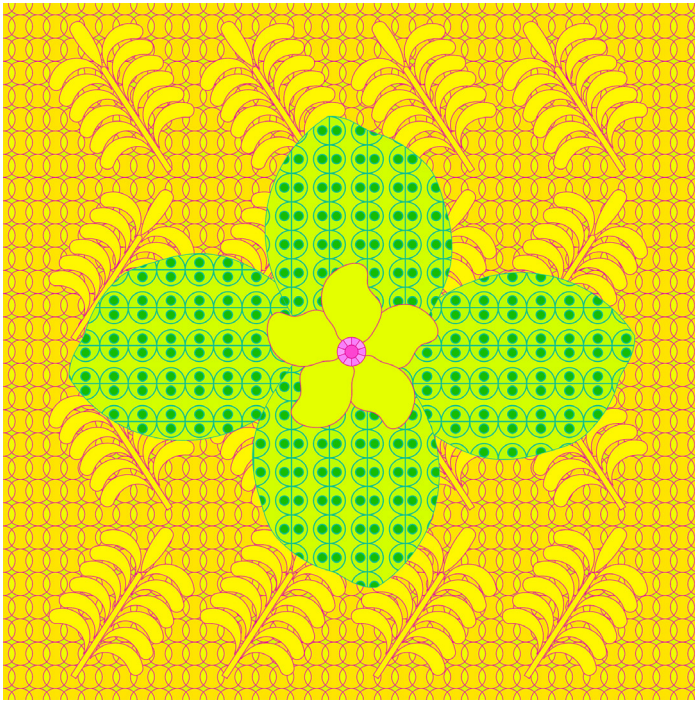
43 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5JG
+44 (0)20 7439 1866
info@cristearoberts.com
www.cristearoberts.com

Press Release

Press Contact:
Gemma Colgan
gemma.colgan@cristearoberts.com
+44 (0)20 7439 1866

Yinka Ilori: Joy Through Resistance He Who Laughs Last, Laughs Best

5 June - 11 July 2026



A Flower surrounded by Gold, 2026

Cristea Roberts Gallery is delighted to announce an exhibition of new work by Yinka Ilori MBE (b. 1987). This presentation marks the British Nigerian artist and designer's first solo gallery exhibition in his home city, London.

Over the past decade, Ilori has developed a truly multi-disciplinary practice, blending expertise in architecture, sculpture, furniture, and both interior and graphic design. Often utilising the city as a canvas, his murals, pavilions, and architectural interventions are celebrated for fostering a deep sense of community. Rooted in themes of joy and optimism, Ilori's work leverages the power of storytelling to bridge divides, fostering meaningful connections between individuals and the world around them.

Yinka Ilori: Joy Through Resistance represents Ilori's most personal presentation to date, featuring over 20 new and recent works across painting, print, sculpture, and an immersive sound installation. Inspired by his British Nigerian heritage and the vibrant energy of communal gatherings, the exhibition serves as a narrative of joy through resistance. By weaving together floral motifs, the cultural symbolism of lace, and the rhythmic presence of musical instruments, Ilori explores the defiance required to push back against racial discrimination

and societal barriers - ultimately celebrating the power of transforming hardship into communal strength and uplift.

New and recent prints and paintings are inspired by the universally recognised symbol of the flower. *Paradise for All, 2024*, a group of six screenprints is characterised by a use of bold, vivid colours and strong geometrical forms. Seen alongside a second group of flowers entitled, *An Abundance of Flowers blessed by us, for us, 2026*, this body of work draws on a shared global spirituality.

In a dialogue between his dual identities, Ilori depicts Nigeria's national flower, the *Costus spectabilis* (known as the yellow trumpet), alongside the common daffodil, native to the UK. He leans into the inherent paradox of the floral form - historically serving as both a decorative motif and a symbol of life's brevity. In a contemporary social context, he explores how flowers act as a universal vessel for emotion, offered with equal weight during moments of both profound joy and sadness.

The yellow trumpet flower blooms in clusters, illuminating the ground. Continuously generating new shoots and roots, this cheerful, resilient flower represents the enduring strength of community. The yellow daffodil, one of the most popular flowers in the UK, is believed to have originated in Ancient Rome, when daffodils were planted in memory of loved ones. The robust nature of the bud, much like the yellow trumpet, means the daffodil can blossom consistently for decades as bulbs naturalise and bigger displays are created over time.

Ilori depicts the flora layered over patterns taken from ornamental lace designs. He unites these symbols to weave together diverse stories from the global diaspora. In the West African diaspora and beyond, lace or Swiss voile is commonly used in ceremonial and church attire, an intrinsic element of personal style, identity, and pride, representing both refinement and resilience.

Ilori states "*This exhibition is my most personal to date - a reflection of my own story and the resilience of the diaspora. By layering the Nigerian yellow trumpet and the British daffodil over ornamental lace, I'm exploring how we transform hardship into strength.*

These works are about more than just beauty, they are about the 'quiet resistance' found in our traditions and our ability to blossom consistently, even in the face of struggle.

Cristea Roberts Gallery

43 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5JG
+44 (0)20 7439 1866
info@cristearoberts.com
www.cristearoberts.com

I am incredibly proud to debut this journey with Cristea Roberts Gallery in London and invite the community to experience this space of joy and power."

Through sculptural objects and a sound installation, visitors are invited into a space of worship where traditional instruments, including handmade congas, a vibrant custom-made shekere, and a drumkit, are enveloped in lace. The drum is deeply significant to Ilori. He learned to play it as a child in church, teaching himself percussion. Rooted in centuries-old traditions, drumming stands as a symbol of hope, peace, and joy, embodying a strength forged through resistance. A non-violent form of resistance, the beating of drums was also a powerful tool for communication, historically used by enslaved Africans to coordinate rebellions.

Persisting today in social movements and religious rituals and festivities, Ilori selects these instruments for their ability to both disrupt and foster unity. He is fascinated by the contradiction between the heavy, resonant pulse of drumming and the weightless fragility of the textile. By wrapping these instruments, he draws attention to the vulnerability of joy, recognising that the very celebrations these sounds represent are precious and can be threatened at any moment.

The sound installation, which features two new pieces of music, has been developed in response to Ilori's new work. Composer and musician Peter Adjaye has created a piece of music that unfolds in three parts, featuring horns and brass instruments. This soundwave, which rises and falls, oscillates between joy and resilience, celebration and warning.

The second piece of music by composer and producer James William Blades incorporates field recordings, Yoruba lullabies, church songs, and linguistic training records, alongside Nigerian blow horn samples. Rooting the composition in cultural memory, the music also explores the full spectrum of colour within Ilori's work.

Gallery director David Cleaton-Roberts, states *"It has been a pleasure working with Yinka over the past three years, and to be staging his first solo exhibition at the gallery. Yinka's ideas have found a consistent vehicle of expression through his unique large-scale projects and collaborations around the world.*

We are delighted to now champion the vitality and inventiveness of his important practice in the setting of our gallery space, and for audiences to engage and connect with this thought-provoking body of work."

Press Release

Press Contact:
Gemma Colgan
gemma.colgan@cristearoberts.com
+44 (0)20 7439 1866

Yinka Ilori: Joy Through Resistance, He Who Laughs Last, Laughs Best (5 June – 11 July 2026) is Ilori's first solo exhibition at Cristea Roberts Gallery since joining the gallery in 2023. This immersive site of storytelling invites the public to explore the intersection of resilience and joy through Ilori's unique artistic lens.

ENDS



About the artist

Yinka Ilori MBE (b. 1987) is a multi-disciplinary artist and designer who specialises in storytelling, fusing a bold visual language, and his British Nigerian heritage to convey new narratives through contemporary art and design. Ilori's work has been showcased globally through solo and group exhibitions, public commissions and set and exhibition design.

Recent commissions include Man of the Match Trophies, Africa Cup of Nationals Football Tournament (2025); *You Are An Artist: Words of Affirmation*, Tate Publishing (2025); *Walk with your Dreams*, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire (2025); *Cherish your Magic*, Bloomingdales, New York City (2025); *Transparent Happiness*, Lasipalatsi Square, Helsinki (2025); *Good Things Come to Those Who Wait*, Piccadilly Circus, London (2024); *Omi Okun*, Art on the Mart, Chicago (2024); *Reflection in Numbers*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2024).

Cristea Roberts Gallery

43 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5JG
+44 (0)20 7439 1866
info@cristearoberts.com
www.cristearoberts.com

Recent group exhibitions include Royal Academy of Arts, London; Hatton Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne (2026); Royal Academy of Arts, London; Mead Gallery, Warwick; Saatchi Gallery, London (2025); Arnolfini, Bristol; Royal Academy of Arts, London (2024). In 2023, The Design Museum, London staged a solo exhibition by the artist, featuring over 100 objects featuring artworks, photographs, and furniture. In 2022 Ilori presented *Listening to Joy*, a colourful, interactive playscape at the V&A Dundee.

The artist featured in a major touring exhibition exploring contemporary African design in 2015. The show toured from Vitra Design Museum, Basel to Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; Kunsthal Rotterdam; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Albuquerque Museum, New Mexico; and Blanton Museum of Art, Texas.

Born in Islington, North London, Ilori studied Art and Design, with a focus on furniture and product design at London Metropolitan University from 2006 to 2009. He lives and works in London.

About Cristea Roberts Gallery

Cristea Roberts Gallery is a leading international contemporary art gallery with a particular focus on original prints and works on paper. Since its inception, the gallery has commissioned a significant number editions by a wide range of artists, whilst also representing others for their unique works. The underlying ethos of the gallery has always been artist-led.

Acknowledged as one of the leading galleries in its field of specialty, the gallery's programme is dedicated to publishing, cataloguing, exhibiting and dealing in original prints and drawings by its roster of over 30 important international artists and Estates. It participates in all the major international art fairs and has a dynamic programme of exhibitions hosted in its bespoke space in Pall Mall, London.

The gallery works closely with international museums on acquisitions and loans, and examples of its editions are held in major public collections around the world including Tate, London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Press Release

Press Contact:
Gemma Colgan
gemma.colgan@cristearoberts.com
+44 (0)20 7439 1866

Visitor information

Tues - Fri 11am - 5.30pm
Sat 11am - 2pm
Closed on Mondays, Sundays and public holidays
Free admission

Travel: Piccadilly or Green Park underground station

+44 (0)20 7439 1866
info@cristearoberts.com
cristearoberts.com
@cristearoberts

yinkailori.com
@yinka_ilor

London Gallery Weekend 5 – 7 June 2026

The opening reception for *Yinka Ilori: Joy Through Resistance, He Who Laughs Last, Laughs Best*, will take place on the first evening of the London Gallery Weekend.

Opening reception: 6pm, Friday 5 June 2026

Extended exhibition opening hours:
Saturday 6 June 2026: 11 am - 6 pm
Sunday 7 June 2026: 12 - 5 pm

Images

A Flower surrounded by Gold
From: *An Abundance of Flowers blessed by us, for us, 2026*
A series of six pigment prints
Paper and Image: 75 x 75 cm
Edition of 15
Courtesy artist and Cristea Roberts Gallery, London
© Yinka Ilori

Portrait © Yinka Ilori, 2026. Photo: Kane Hulse