



# Nefertiti (Black Power)

Erizku, Awol

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## On display

**Title/Description:** Nefertiti (Black Power)

**Artist/Maker:** Erizku, Awol

**Born:** 2018

**Materials:** Neon, Stainless Steel

**Measurements:** h. 1800 x w. 1306 x d. 130 mm

**Accession Number:** 50927

**Production Place:** China, Hong Kong

**Copyright:** © Awol Erizku, courtesy Ben Brown Fine Arts, London

**Credit Line:** Purchased with support from the Art Fund, 2024

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Erizku invokes Nefertiti as a powerful symbol of African American pride and empowerment. In this neon work, he weaves together African, East Asian and North American cultural references, bringing together an African queen with Chinese characters reading 'Black Power', to address issues of race, identity and politics. However, in combining such symbols, Erizku perhaps expresses uncertainty over their future power as they become increasingly globalised.

## TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Artist Awol Erizku depicts the 18th Dynasty Egyptian Queen, Nefertiti, in glowing neon. He adopts the image of the African Queen as a symbol of Black Power – which the Chinese characters in this work translate to. The neon suggests popular culture and advertising, in particular the Hong Kong skyline. *Nefertiti (Black Power)* was first made for Erizku's solo show 展览 *Slow Burn* at Ben Brown, Hong Kong in 2018.

Through engaging with global cultural references, Erizku says his work is an 'act of cultural reclamation by way of artefacts and repurposing them [...] interrogating all these subjects that have been conditioned through colonial and postcolonial lenses and now through globalisation.' [1]

Nefertiti appears in a number of works by Erizku, such as his disco ball-esque sculpture, *Nefertiti – Miles Davis* (2017) and in his photograph *Malcolm X Freestyle (Pharaoh's Dance)* (2019-20). Erizku is one of a number of contemporary artists who have referenced Nefertiti's image to engage with questions of race and colonial entitlement. [2] Very little is known about Nefertiti, and her racial

identity is often brought into question. Her image in the popular imagination is shaped by a bust by Thutmose that was discovered in the early twentieth century. The sculpture is currently housed in the Neues Museum, Berlin, though Egypt contest Germany's claim to it.

Awol Erizku (b.1988) is an Ethiopian-American multidisciplinary artist based in Los Angeles working in photography, film, sculpture and installation. His far-reaching references come from myriad sources including art history, hip-hop and spirituality. In 2017 he took the infamous Botticelli-esque photo of Beyoncé that she used to announce her pregnancy to twins, which at the time became the most liked photo ever on Instagram. His works are in the collections at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Norton Museum of Art, Palm Beach; The FLAG Art Foundation, New York; and Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara. *Nefertiti (Black Power)* is the first work by Erizku to be acquired by a UK museum.

Tania Moore, June 2023

[1] Awol Erizku on Yinka Shonibare, Sainsbury Centre Sharing Stories digital in-gallery tour, Smartify Arts + Culture app, May 2023

[2] Jordan Taliha McDonald, 'How Nefertiti Became a Powerful Symbol in Contemporary Art', *Artsy*, 16 February 2019,  
<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-depictions-nefertiti-way-society-views-gender-race>  
[accessed June 2023]

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