

Kehinde Wiley, b 1977

Los Angeles native and New York-based visual artist Kehinde Wiley has firmly situated himself within art history's portrait painting tradition. As a contemporary descendent of a long line of portraitists--including Reynolds, Gainsborough, Titian, Ingres, and others--Wiley engages the signs and visual rhetoric of the heroic, powerful, majestic, and sublime in his representation of urban black and brown men found throughout the world.

By applying the visual vocabulary and conventions of glorification, wealth, prestige, and history to subject matter drawn from the urban fabric, Wiley makes his subjects and their stylistic references juxtaposed inversions of each other, forcing ambiguity and provocative perplexity to pervade his imagery. Wiley's larger-than-life figures disturb and interrupt tropes of portrait painting, often blurring the boundaries between traditional and contemporary modes of representation and the critical portrayal of masculinity and physicality as it pertains to the view of black and brown young men.

Initially, Wiley's portraits were based on photographs taken of young men found on the streets of Harlem. As his practice grew, his eye led him toward an international view, including models found in urban landscapes throughout the world--such as Senegal, Dakar and Rio de Janeiro, among others--accumulating to a vast body of work called, "The World Stage." The models, dressed in their everyday clothing--most of which are based on the notion of far-reaching Western ideals of style--are asked to assume poses found in paintings or sculptures representative of the history of their surroundings. This juxtaposition of the "old" inherited by the "new"--who often have no visual inheritance of which to speak--immediately provides a discourse that is at once visceral and cerebral in scope.

Without shying away from the complicated socio-political histories relevant to the world, Wiley's figurative paintings and sculptures "quote historical sources and position young black men within the field of power." His heroic paintings evoke a modern style instilling a unique and contemporary manner, awakening complex issues that many would prefer remain mute.

Kehinde Wiley received his MFA from Yale University in 2001. Shortly after, he became an Artist-in-Residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem. Wiley's work has been the subject of exhibitions worldwide and is in the permanent collections of numerous museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Studio Museum in Harlem; the Denver Art Museum; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the High Museum, Atlanta; the Columbus Museum of Art; the Phoenix Art Museum; the Milwaukee Art Museum; the Jewish

Museum, New York; and the Brooklyn Museum, New York. Wiley will be the subject of a solo exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in New York in 2015.

Please visit the artist's website at www.kehindewiley.com

National Portrait Gallery

<http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/recognize/paintings.html>

For most of Kehinde Wiley's very successful career, he has created large, vibrant, highly patterned paintings of young African American men wearing the latest in hip hop street fashion. The theatrical poses and objects in the portraits are based on well-known images of powerful figures drawn from seventeenth- through nineteenth-century Western art. Pictorially, Wiley gives the authority of those historical sitters to his twenty-first-century subjects. In 2005, VH1 commissioned Wiley to paint portraits of the honorees for that year's Hip Hop Honors program. Turning his aesthetic on end, he used his trademark references to older portraits to add legitimacy to paintings of this generation's already powerful musical talents. In Wiley's hands, Ice T channels Napoleon, and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five take on a seventeenth-century Dutch civic guard company.

Arist's Statement: Kehinde Wiley

Kehinde Wiley's portraits of African American men collate modern culture with the influence of Old Masters. Incorporating a range of vernaculars culled from art historical references, Wiley's work melds a fluid concept of modern culture, ranging from French Rococo to today's urban landscape. By collapsing history and style into a unique contemporary vision, Wiley interrogates the notion of master painter, "making it at once critical and complicit." Vividly colorful and often adorned with ornate gilded frames, Wiley's large-scale figurative paintings, which are illuminated with a barrage of baroque or rococo decorative patterns, posit young black men, fashioned in urban attire, within the field of power reminiscent of Renaissance artists such as Tiepolo and Titian.

For "RECOGNIZE!" Wiley has included paintings from his body of work, Hip Hop Honors, depicting some of the foot soldiers of the hip hop movement. The artists chose poses—taken from Wiley's personal art book collection—that best suited the performative and personal aspects of their character. The coalition of the anonymous subject with the allure of personality allows this body of work to engage celebrity and status directly.

Value, in all its meanings, has always played a role in culture. Unlike its precursors—classical, jazz, rock—which have since been canonized and given an art-historical time frame and construct, hip hop continues to be seen merely as entertainment; a cultural hindrance. This series of Wiley's portraits speaks specifically to that juxtaposition and the retooling of importance and to whom and when it is deemed.

MIA Label

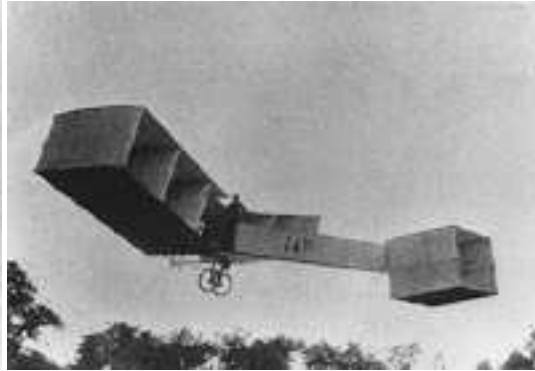
Kehinde Wiley, Santos Dumont - The Father of Aviation II, 2009

North America, United States
Oil on canvas, 2010.99



Kehinde Wiley is best known for his large-scale portraits of black men depicted in poses that cast them as kings, prophets, and saints in the tradition of "old master" canvases, reminiscent especially of Renaissance and Baroque painting. Wiley's paintings transpose black bodies into the context of traditional European portraiture, challenging the racial marginalization of art history and questioning issues related to identity and self on a global scale. Santos-Dumont is part of a larger body of work by Wiley called "The World Stage." For this series, the artist traveled to diverse locations around the globe, including Africa, China, India, and Brazil, where he created portraits that explore the international phenomenon of urban youth culture. Wiley met the two young men featured in this painting in a favela, or slum, in Rio de Janeiro. The subjects chose to position themselves as the two "fallen heroes" in a well-known public monument dedicated to one of Brazil's pioneer aviators, Alberto Santos-Dumont. By depicting these black men as the pioneers of Brazilian aviation, Wiley instills his anonymous subjects with a powerful and heroic identity, essentially immortalizing them in oil paint.

Alberto Santos Dumont



Alberto Santos Dumont was a very important pioneer in aviation history. There of course is lots of controversy between Santos and the Wright Brothers in whom made the first flight successfully. According to Europe and the rest of the world excluding the United States believe it was Santos Dumont. This is because he was awarded and seen by thousands to have flown an aircraft under its own power in Paris. The Wright Brothers where seen by a few people and needed a sort of catapult system to get their aircraft airborne.

Santos Dumont born in Brazil, had immigrated to France in 1891 with his parents that owned a coffee plantation. His career began when he worked on motorized tricycles before turning to ballooning. He was greatly noticed when in 1901 he piloted an airship around the Eiffel Tower winning him 100,000 francs which he later gave to his mechanics.

Photos of monument: <http://www.aerosteles.net/fiche.php?code=riodejaneiro-monusantos&lang=en>



Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

