
KEHINDE WILEY

About the Artist

KEHINDE WILEY HAS FIRMLY situated himself within art history's portrait painting tradition. As a contemporary descendant 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 black and brown people throughout the world.

Wiley's larger-than-life figures disturb and interrupt tropes of portrait painting. By applying the visual vocabulary of glorification, wealth, and prestige to the subject matter, he generates subjects that exist in an unexpected juxtaposition, forcing ambiguity and mystery to pervade his paintings and blurring the boundaries between traditional and contemporary modes of representation and the critical portrayal of physicality as it pertains to the view of black and brown young men and women.

Initially, Wiley's portraits were based on photographs taken of young men found on the streets of Harlem. As his practice grew, he was led to a more international investigation, including models found in both urban and rural landscapes throughout the world. While exploring Israel, China, Senegal, Brazil, and Jamaica, among others locations, Wiley has accumulated a vast body of work called *The World Stage*. The models, dressed in their everyday clothing, most of which is based on Western ideals of style, are asked to assume poses found in paintings or sculptures representative of their colonial history. This juxtaposition of the "old" inherited by the "new" immediately allows for a discourse that is at once visceral and cerebral in scope.

Without shying away from the complicated sociopolitical histories relevant to each specific location, Wiley's figurative paintings and sculptures quote historical sources and position young black men within the field of power. His heroic paintings evoke a contemporary charge, awakening complex issues that many would prefer remain mute.