

PRESS RELEASE

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KEHINDE WILEY: A NEW REPUBLIC ARRIVES NEXT SPRING AT THE SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

Wide-ranging exhibition of leading contemporary American artist includes renowned large-scale portraiture mashups

February 11–May 8, 2016

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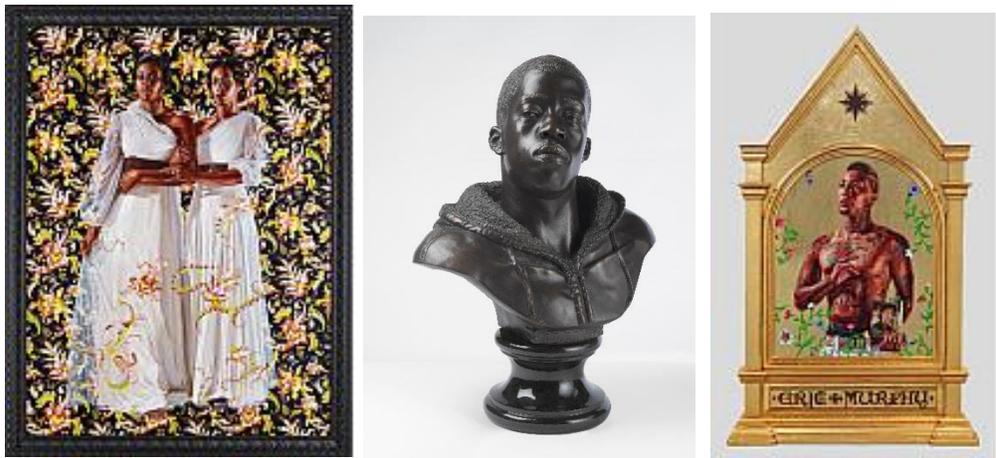


SEATTLE, WA – Next spring, the Seattle Art Museum presents *Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic*, showcasing the powerful and poignant work of one of America’s leading contemporary artists. Composed of approximately 60 works—including paintings, sculptures, videos, and stained glass windows—the exhibition provides an overview of Wiley’s prolific 14-year career, prominently featuring his signature figurative canvases of black men in which he ingeniously reworks the grand portraiture traditions of Western culture.

During a residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem in the early 2000s, Wiley found inspiration in the assertive and self-empowered young men of the neighborhood. He engaged subjects for portraits, asking them to pick a pose and dress themselves as they would like to be seen. Wiley then recast these photographic studies in the style of traditional history painting. Like the mashup or remix in hip hop, Wiley combined details from diverse sources—aristocratic portraits of 18th-century Europe, bucolic 19th-century wallpapers, electric contemporary colors, and the presence of his contemporary subjects—to present something provocatively new. This process allows him to reenter the established history and power structure, reaching back in time to imagine a different future – a new republic.

“Kehinde Wiley’s work is absolutely gorgeous and fascinating,” says Kimerly Rorschach, SAM’s Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO. “Moreover, it engages with timely issues in a very compelling way. The Brooklyn Museum has been a wonderful partner in organizing this exhibition, and I’m thrilled to bring these vibrant and necessary works to Seattle. Prepare to be wowed.”





Kehinde Wiley shows the artist's progression as he began to work in various mediums and deepened his explorations of race, gender, sexual innuendo, and the politics of representation. The exhibition includes a selection from Wiley's ongoing *World Stage* project, which he initiated in 2006 by establishing a satellite studio in Beijing followed by cities in other countries including Nigeria, Brazil, India, Israel, Jamaica, and Haiti. The series touches on the commonalities found across nations and cultures with a history of colonialism and diverse populations.

Several altarpieces from the *Memling* series will also be on view. Reflecting the works of 15th-century Flemish painter Hans Memling, who depicted not royalty or clergy but rich, influential men from the merchant class, these paintings depict young black men in contemporary street styles (including neck tattoos), directly confronting the question of who owns the symbolic imagery of power. These works are smaller in scale, creating a direct and intimate experience with the viewer.

Wiley turned his attention to black women in his *An Economy of Grace* series, in which he employed his same process (street casting, photographic studies), but with a significant difference: rather than selecting from their own clothes, the women were adorned in gowns inspired by Old Master paintings but reimagined by Givenchy's Ricardo Tisci in a close collaboration with the artist. The process was documented in a video, which will be on view. The resulting glamorous images touch on the importance of adornment, the possibilities of transformation, and the shifting meanings of the black body in representation.

Also included in the exhibition will be an installation showcasing Wiley's stained glass pieces. Inspiring contemplation and reverence, stained glass is also an atmospheric visual reminder of the church's power. His contemporary subjects become heroes, saints, and martyrs—a lyrical and awe-inspiring summation of the artist's explorations of power and transformation.

Originally from Los Angeles, Wiley was influenced by the city's theatricality and by visits to the Old Master-filled Huntington Art Collections. At twelve, he visited Russia on an arts fellowship. He honed his artistic craft earning his MFA at Yale in the 1990s, where he was steeped in the current discussions concerning identity politics. He brings these varied experiences to the multi-faceted, layered processes and themes of his work.

"These works are incredibly commanding – they bowl you over with their fabulousness and beauty," says Catharina Manchanda, SAM's Jon & Mary Shirley Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art. "They're also deeply relevant; if this show had taken place six or seven years ago, it might have registered differently. But there is so much possibility in this moment. It's my hope that this exhibition will not just engage viewers in an important conversation, but actually create a galvanizing experience that will last long after they leave the galleries."

The artist will travel to Seattle for the grand opening celebration on Thursday, February 11, 2016.

The exhibition is organized by the Brooklyn Museum.

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Image credits: *Shantavia Beale II*, 2012, Kehinde Wiley, American, b. 1977, oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in. Collection of Ana and Lenny Gravier. Courtesy Sean Kelly, New York. © Kehinde Wiley. Photo: Jason Wyche. *Colonel Platoff on His Charger*, 2007–8, Kehinde Wiley, American, b. 1977, oil on canvas, 122 x 122 in. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Gift of the Director's Council and Museum purchase, 2008. © Kehinde Wiley. *The Two Sisters*, 2012, Kehinde Wiley, American, b. 1977, oil on linen, 96 x 72 in. Collection of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr. Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York. © Kehinde Wiley. Photo: Jason Wyche. *Houdon Paul-Louis*, 2011, Kehinde Wiley, American, b. 1977, bronze with polished stone base, 34 x 26 x 19 in. Brooklyn Museum, Frank L. Babbott Fund and A. Augustus Healy Fund, 2012.51. Photo: Sarah DeSantis, Brooklyn Museum. *Saint Gregory Palamas*, 2014, Kehinde Wiley, American, b. 1977, 22k gold leaf and oil on wood panel, 40 x 24 x 2 in. Collection of Edward Tyler Nahem, New York, courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York. © Kehinde Wiley. Photo: Max Yawney.

ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Robert Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and reopened as the Asian Art Museum. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a "museum without walls," free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of more than 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures and time periods.