

SEANKELLY

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TIME

KEHINDE WILEY

by LL Cool J



Micaiah Carter for TIME

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Kehinde Wiley is a classically, formally trained artist who is transforming the way African Americans are seen—going against the grain of what the world is accustomed to. Some consider him irreverent; I see an iconoclast. Some of his subjects come from hip-hop culture, but he’s not a hip-hop painter. To put it simply, he does dope sh-t.

Kehinde has an MFA from Yale, but instead of using his art to assimilate into mainstream society, he goes minorstream, creating major works that outpace that of the majority of his contemporaries. When you see a Kehinde Wiley painting, you recognize it. He has created a visual brand that remains artistically fresh. And his many paintings in the Smithsonian—including one of me and one of former President Obama—speak to his creative genius.

LL Cool J, an actor and Grammy-winning musician, recently received a Kennedy Center Honor