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Moynihan, Ellen and Larry McShane. “‘Rumors of War’ statue makes Times Square debut, provides a response to Confederate monuments in its future home of Richmond, Va.” *New York Daily News*. September 27, 2019.

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Artist, Kehinde Wiley was in Times Square, Friday, to unveil his newest work of art, a statue called, “Rumors of War”, which will stay in Times Square until Dec. 1st. (Gregg Vigliotti/for New York Daily News)

It was a monumental day for artist Kehinde Wiley and Times Square.

Wiley’s sculpture “Rumors of War” was unveiled Friday with the aid of the Malcolm X Shabazz High School marching band and its dancers, with its creator noting the long-overdue statue was a product of this “beautiful and toxic time.”

The artwork was created as a response to the Richmond, Va., monument of Confederate Gen. J.E.B. Stuart, and it echoes the southern statue: A horse with a raised hoof and a lone rider looking back over his shoulder.

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But the horseman in the Crossroads of the World sports dreadlocks tied in a ponytail, jeans with the knees torn out and Nike high-top sneakers.

"There's moments when art has to step in," said Wiley, perhaps best known for a painting of President Obama that hangs in the National Portrait Gallery. "A call that says 'I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore.' This is my America too."

"Rumors of War," Wiley's largest sculpture, is a stunning 27 feet high and 16 feet wide. The statue will remain in Times Square through Dec. 1, when it will be permanently installed at the foot of the newly-renamed Arthur Ashe Boulevard in Richmond — the tennis Hall of Famer's hometown. The street intersects with Monument Ave., home to a number of statues honoring the Confederacy.

"We have 10 Confederate monuments in our city," said Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney, who attended the statue's Midtown unveiling. "Ten monuments to the 'Lost Cause.' I think that's 10 too many. We are moving forward, and we are not looking back."

Wiley said he first came up with the idea for his project in 2016, while in Virginia for the opening of his exhibit, "Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic." He said his statue was a response to the "dread and fear" that he felt walking past the Confederate totems.

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A year later, white nationalists gathered in Charlottesville, Va. to protest the planned removal of a Robert E. Lee statue there. The violent melee ended with the death of counter-protester Heather Heyer, 32, who was killed when a white nationalist drove his car into the crowd. Two state troopers also died in a helicopter crash while patrolling the protests.

Wiley said he redoubled his efforts to get “Rumors of War” finished in the wake of the tragedy.

“What does it feel like physically to walk a public space and have your state, your nation say, ‘This is what we stand by?’” said Wiley. “We want more. We demand more. And today we say yes to something that looks like us.”