

SEANKELLY

Kehinde Wiley, *A Portrait of a Young Gentleman* (2021)



At center, Kehinde Wiley, *A Portrait of a Young Gentleman*, 2021, flanked by (left) Joshua Reynolds, *Diana (Sackville), Viscountess Crosbie*, 1777, and (right) Thomas Gainsborough, *Elizabeth (Jenks) Beaufoy, later Elizabeth Pycroft*, ca. 1780.

Thomas Gainsborough's 18th-century painting *Blue Boy* is so iconic that the Huntington museum in San Marino, California, where it is housed, sells Christmas ornaments in the titular boy's image. And why wouldn't they? The blushing child, wearing bows on his satin shoes, is positively angelic. Those shoes, and the boy's impeccable outfit, telegraph his privileged status—heir to a fortune. Museum founders Henry and Arabella Huntington acquired the painting a hundred years ago, and the museum wisely decided to pay homage to that moment by giving it a contemporary counterpart. They ended up choosing Kehinde Wiley for the job. Wiley, the official portraitist to Barack Obama, posed a young Black man in the exact same manner as Gainsborough's boy, and outfitted him in vibrant streetwear. The two paintings were installed such that they faced one another. Wiley told NPR, "Here, I'm trying to allow for even the presentation of the painting to take on the nature of its meaning." —Sarah Douglas