



Portrait of Kehinde Wiley, 2018. Photographer: Brad Ogbonna.

Artist Kehinde Wiley to unveil monumental public sculpture in Times Square, New York, to be permanently installed at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Kehinde Wiley: *Rumors of War*
September 27 – December 2019

THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 2019 (embargoed until 12 p.m. EST)—Times Square Arts, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) and Sean Kelly, New York announce today the forthcoming unveiling of artist Kehinde Wiley's first monumental public sculpture *Rumors of War* in Times Square, New York. This large-scale work will be installed this fall on the Broadway Plaza between 46th and 47th Streets.

Following its presentation in Times Square, *Rumors of War* will be permanently installed on historic Arthur Ashe Boulevard in Richmond at the entrance to the VMFA, a recent acquisition to the museum's world-class collection.



Presented by Times Square Arts, an opening ceremony will be held on September 27, featuring remarks from the artist and partners. Additionally, a ribbon-cutting ceremony will take place at the VMFA in December.

Kehinde Wiley is a world-renowned visual artist, best known for his vibrant portrayals of contemporary African-American and African-Diasporic individuals that subvert the hierarchies and conventions of European and American portraiture. *Rumors of War*, his largest work to date, continues Wiley's career-long investigation of the politics of representation, race, gender, and power. With this new sculpture, Wiley returns to equestrian portraiture to engage its complicated visual rhetoric of warfare and heroism on an epic scale.

Mounted proudly on its large stone pedestal, Wiley's monumental bronze sculpture, *Rumors of War*, is the artist's direct response to the ubiquitous Confederate sculptures that populate the United States, particularly in the South. Sitting astride a massive horse in a striking pose, Wiley's young, African-American subject is dressed in urban streetwear.

Kehinde Wiley states, "The inspiration for *Rumors of War* is war—is an engagement with violence. Art and violence have for an eternity held a strong narrative grip with each other. *Rumors of War* attempts to use the language of equestrian portraiture to both embrace and subsume the fetishization of state violence. New York and Times Square in particular sit at the crossroads of human movement on a global scale. To have the *Rumors of War* sculpture presented in such a context lays bare the scope and scale of the project in its conceit to expose the beautiful and terrible potentiality of art to sculpt the language of domination."

Standing as a statue to the violence afflicted against bodies every day, Wiley's work presents a powerful visual repositioning of young black men in our public consciousness while directly engaging the national conversation around controversial monuments and their role in perpetuating incomplete narratives and contemporary inequities. In recent years, the discourse and actions around these monuments have included efforts to better contextualize them and have resulted in both the addition and removal of monuments in more than 30 states and New York City. Premiering *Rumors of War* in Times Square situates Wiley's work at a global crossroads of civic engagement – where the black body of Wiley's subject can become itself the battleground for evoking change and where the epicenter of Manhattan can become a space for citizens of the city, the country, and the world to come together to discuss the most important issues of our time.



Times Square Alliance President Tim Tompkins states "We are incredibly excited to be working with Wiley, one of the most celebrated and important artists of our time, and one uniquely equipped to challenge how we use our public space, to ask the critical question of "who matters?", and to speak to the power of monuments to reflect and reinforce our values, and ultimately, reimagine our world. We are honored to be premiering this historic work, and to join the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in supporting Wiley's contribution to this important national conversation."

The project originated when the artist encountered the equestrian monument to Confederate States Army general James Ewell Brown "J.E.B." Stuart while visiting Richmond, Virginia for the opening of *Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic* at the VMFA in June 2016. A few blocks away from the museum is Monument Avenue, a nationally landmarked boulevard lined with Confederate statues, including monuments to Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and Stonewall Jackson. These monuments have a particular resonance because they function to continually commemorate the Confederacy.

The state of Virginia has more memorials to the Confederacy than any other state in the country. As with many Confederate monuments, erected in the aftermath of Reconstruction, their function was meant to not only memorialize the dead, but also to reestablish a social order. This also accounts for the relatively few monuments that recognize women and people of color, making the VMFA a powerful place to site Wiley's historic work.

VMFA Director Alex Nyerges states, "The installation of *Rumors of War* at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts later this year will be a historic moment for our museum and for the city of Richmond. We hope that the sculpture will encourage public engagement and civic discussion about who is memorialized in our nation and the significance of monuments in the context of American history. We are especially pleased that through the acquisition of this work, the monuments in Richmond will further reflect the incredible diversity of its population."

Wiley's career has focused on addressing and remedying the absence of black and brown men and women in our dominant visual, historical, and cultural narratives. Wiley's subjects have ranged from street-cast individuals the artist encountered while traveling around the world to many of the most important and well-renowned African American figures of our generation, including The Notorious B.I.G., LL Cool J, Carrie Mae Weems, Nick Cave, and President Barack Obama.



In the early 2000s, the artist created a series of paintings entitled *Rumors of War*, which explored the iconography of wealth and warfare in historical paintings, drawing upon the visual language of glorification, heroism, and violence. True to his practice, these large-format paintings, inspired by the history of equestrian portraiture, anachronistically replaced the white, aristocratic subjects typical of the genre with young, African-American men in street clothes.

At that time, these works were developed out of a reaction to the Gulf War and the Iraq Conflict. Nearly two decades later, Wiley's new public sculpture at once serves as an important reminder that violence continues every day on our streets while simultaneously offering an exquisite example of how to imagine and enact a more complete and inclusive American story.

Sean Kelly states, "Kehinde's work has always sought to address the historical imbalance of the representation and depiction of the black body in art historical and cultural contexts. *Rumors of War* extends that investigation into the sculptural realm with his largest three-dimensional work to date. The work deals head-on with the history of racially divisive and provocative Confederate monuments which venerate the American Civil War."

For additional information on Kehinde Wiley please visit skny.com

For information on Times Square Arts please visit TSq.org/Arts

For information about the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts please visit vmfa.museum

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About the Artist

Kehinde Wiley holds a BFA from San Francisco Art Institute, an MFA from Yale University and an honorary doctorate from Rhode Island School of Design. In 2002, he became an Artist-in-Residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem.



Wiley's work has been the subject of exhibitions worldwide and is in the permanent collections of numerous museums, including the National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C.; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Studio Museum in Harlem; the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; the Denver Art Museum; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the High Museum, Atlanta; the Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH; the Phoenix Art Museum; the Milwaukee Art Museum; the Jewish Museum, New York; and the Brooklyn Museum. The U.S. Department of State honored Wiley in 2015 with the Medal of Arts, celebrating his commitment to cultural diplomacy through the visual arts. In February 2018, Wiley's portrait of Barack Obama was added to the permanent installation of presidential portraits in the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. In October of the same year, Kehinde was honored with a W.E.B. Du Bois medal for his significant contributions to African and African-American history in culture and his advocacy for intercultural understanding and human rights.

About Times Square Arts

Times Square Arts, the public art program of the Times Square Alliance, collaborates with contemporary artists to experiment and engage with one of the world's most iconic urban places.

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. The museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass nearly 40,000 artworks spanning more than 6,000 years and since 2015 the museum has spent 28% of private funds on increasing its African American art holdings. The permanent collection features the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris, and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver, and French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting, and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan, and African art. VMFA is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission.

About Sean Kelly, New York



SEANKELLY

Since its inception in 1991, Sean Kelly Gallery has been internationally regarded for its diverse, intellectually driven program and highly regarded roster of artists. The Gallery has garnered worldwide attention for its collaborations with renowned cultural institutions, coordinating hundreds of exhibitions on behalf of its artists at an array of prestigious museums. In October 2012, Sean Kelly opened in its current location, a 22,000 square foot space at 475 Tenth Avenue in an historic 1914 building in Hudson Yards. Over the course of more than twenty-five years, the Gallery has become a symbol for high quality, thought provoking contemporary art and conversation, most recently with the launch of Collect Wisely in May 2018. Collect Wisely is an overarching advertising, podcast, social media, and event driven campaign aimed at refocusing the discourse around collecting to return to the heart of the matter: discussing art, artists, and a passion for collecting and connoisseurship. In January 2019 the gallery opened Sean Kelly Asia a project space in Taipei, Taiwan. With this space the gallery will bring its important international program to greater prominence in Asia's dynamic art scene.