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Daniels, Karu F. "In Yo' Face Like a Can of Mace: Kehinde Wiley Unveils Black Male Monument in Times Square." *The Root*. September 19, 2019.

THE ROOT



Visual artist Kehinde Wiley during the unveiling his first monumental public sculpture "Rumors of War" in New York City on Sept. 27, 2019.

Finally, something we can look up to—literally.

A powerful image of a black man has been immortalized as a monument—in New York City's Times Square, of all places.

Acclaimed artist Kehinde Wiley unveiled his biggest work to date on Friday night, a massive bronze statue of a young black man in urban regalia sitting astride a galloping horse like the king warrior he was meant to be.

Called "Rumors of War," the towering bronze monument—standing at 27 feet high and 16 feet wide—is the antithesis to the racist structures of Confederate generals and slave owners that the public has been forced to look at for years.

But I digress. Let's keep it copacetic.

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Wiley, as you should know, gained international renown in 2017 when he was commissioned to paint a portrait for Forever President Barack Hussein Obama for the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery.

The Nigerian-American Los Angeles native was already revered for his reimagined, highly naturalistic artworks of young black people—notably of young black men from disenfranchised communities, which blur the lines of traditional and contemporary representation.

Wiley, 42, described his latest work as a call to arms for inclusivity, telling the Associated Press after the unveiling he hoped young people would see it and “see a sense of radical possibility—this, too, is America.”

Seeing the monument of Confederate Gen. J.E.B. Stuart’s monument in Richmond, Va., alongside the city’s string of Confederate memorials along Monument Avenue was Wiley’s inspiration for “Rumors of War.”

“I’m a black man walking those streets. I’m looking up at those things that give me a sense of dread and fear. What does that feel like, physically, to walk a public space and to have your state, your country, your nation say, ‘This is what we stand by.’ No. We want more. We demand more,” the former Artist-in-Residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem said. “Today we say ‘yes’ to something that looks like us.”



Rumors of War by artist Kehinde Wiley will be exhibited in New York City’s Times Square through December 1.

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The horse-riding figure, adorned with up-swept braids or locs (a la O.D.B.), a hoodie, and ripped jeans, stands out on the Broadway Plaza between 46th and 47th streets.

“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,” Wiley said in a statement. “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.”

Rumors of War will display in Times Square until Dec. 1. Times Square Arts is sponsoring a team of 15 rotating Public Art Ambassadors who will be stationed by the work every day from 2-8 p.m. “to host critical conversations, engage with, and act as docents for the hundreds of thousands of visitors and local New Yorkers who will encounter Rumors of War each day,” according to a release. The piece will then make its permanent home at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts on Arthur Ashe Boulevard in Richmond.