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Cummings, Mike. "Newly acquired Wiley painting 'exudes power' from the canvas." *Yale News*, November 29, 2021.

## YaleNews

The artist Kehinde Wiley's work often reinvents portrait paintings by old masters, inserting Black subjects in place of white nobles, saints, and dignitaries. His "Portrait of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Jacob Morland of Capplethwaite," recently co-acquired by the Yale Center for British Art (YCBA) and Yale University Art Gallery (YUAG), is a case in point, featuring a Black woman in a setting traditionally reserved for white men.

The larger-than-life, full-length portrait depicts the British artist Lynette Yiadom-Boakye as a huntress confidently wielding a musket in a lush, bucolic landscape. Her quarry, five dead hares, lies at her feet.



*Kehinde Wiley's "Portrait of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Jacob Morland of Capplethwaite." (© Kehinde Wiley. Courtesy Sean Kelly, New York.)*

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The 2017 painting riffs on George Romney's 1763 portrait of Jacob Morland, now housed at the Tate Britain in London. Romney depicts a dapper young aristocrat in the same verdant setting standing beside a hound. He wears a tricorne hat and blue suit with gold buttons and trim. While Yiadom-Boakye carries her weapon in both hands, as if ready to raise it and take steady aim, Morland treats his gun like a walking stick or plaything — fingers on the muzzle, the stock planted on the ground.

“Wiley has taken the background from Romney's painting and transcribed it onto this portrait, but he's changed the way the figure is presented,” said Martina Droth, the YCBA's chief curator and deputy director. “Yiadom-Boakye exudes power from the canvas. That speaks to history. Obviously, Black subjects were rarely depicted in 18<sup>th</sup>-century British portraiture as if they had agency and power. Wiley is reclaiming the genre for our modern times.”

The portrait has been on view at the YCBA since October 2019, on loan from the Yale-trained Wiley '01 M.F.A and the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York. It augmented an exhibition of Yiadom-Boakye's work curated by Hilton Als, the Pulitzer Prize-winning cultural critic for *The New Yorker*. The acquisition marks the first joint purchase by Yale's art museums. It is the only painting by Wiley in either museum's collections.

“Kehinde Wiley has often talked about how the experience of seeing historical portraiture in museums inspired his ideas and practice,” Droth said. “As time passed, we realized that the painting speaks to the collections of both museums in a powerful way. It seemed to do so much for us that we began talking to each other about the possibility of acquiring it together.”

For YUAG's part, the painting presents a rich range of possibilities for display, including being on view alongside portraits by other prominent Yale-trained, Black American artists, such as Barkley Hendricks' '72 B.F.A./M.F.A. “APB's (Afro-Parisian Brothers),” said Keely Orgeman, the Seymour H. Knox, Jr. Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art.

“Or it can stand on its own,” Orgeman said.

Wiley made headlines nationwide in 2018 when his portrait of former President Barack Obama went on view in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. In September 2019, his “Rumors of War,” a bronze equestrian statue of a young Black man with dreadlocks pulled into a ponytail and high-top Nike sneakers, was unveiled in New York's Times Square and later installed on the grounds of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, offering a pointed response to the grand tributes to Confederate leaders that once lined that city's Monument Avenue.

“Portrait of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Jacob Morland of Capplethwaite” is part of Wiley's “Trickster” series, from 2017, which pays tribute to some of the most

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influential artists working today, including Wangechi Mutu '00 M.F.A., Mickalene Thomas '02 M.F.A., and Carrie Mae Weems, among others.

Apart from the portrait's historical references, it provides a striking example of one celebrated artist paying tribute to another, Orgeman noted. Yíadom-Boakye, best known for her portraits of fictional people, has been shortlisted for the Turner Prize, awarded annually to an artist living or born in Britain for an outstanding exhibition of their work, has won the Carnegie Prize — one of most prestigious awards in art — and received a solo exhibition at the Tate Britain in 2020, which is now touring internationally.

“Wiley is honoring his close friend, placing her in this position of power,” she said. “We hope that holds special significance to the artistic community at Yale and in New Haven.”

The portrait also demonstrates that the history of British art and 18<sup>th</sup>-century portraiture continues to inspire contemporary art, Droth said.

“Kehinde Wiley is such an important artist, and this painting shows that he is really thinking about, working through, and reinventing the works of George Romney and Thomas Gainsborough and other artists whose work is hanging in our galleries,” she said. “It proves that this isn't just dusty old stuff. It is alive. It inspires contemporary artists and informs our visual culture.”

The painting will remain on view at the YCBA through 2021. It will be displayed at YUAG beginning in February as part of the gallery's exhibition of new acquisitions. From there, the YCBA and YUAG will work together to share it in a manner that amplifies both museums' collections, according to Droth and Orgeman.