

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Kehinde Wiley
Fragments from the treasure house of darkness

5–6 Cork Street
London
W1S 3LQ

Thursday 3 October –
Saturday 9 November 2024

Gallery hours:
Tuesday–Friday, 10am–6pm
Saturday 11am–5pm



Stephen Friedman Gallery presents *Fragments from the treasure house of darkness*, Kehinde Wiley's first solo exhibition in London in three years following *The Prelude* at The National Gallery.

Wiley is known for his vibrant and highly naturalistic paintings of contemporary African American and African Diasporic men and women, reconstructing hierarchies and conventions of classical portraiture. Marking a new direction in his practice, the artist has created two multi-part paintings for the exhibition alongside a series of 60 paintings inspired by historic miniature portraits that first appeared in European royal courts in the sixteenth century. These deeply personal objects were used throughout centuries to symbolise love, and to commemorate births and deaths.

The exhibition takes its cues from scale and the way it is used as a force within the medium of painting. Whether it be the imposing compositions of early religious and historic painters like Michelangelo and Jacques Louis David or the “performative” oversized creations of abstract expressionists Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko, Wiley considers the way scale is deployed in art to demonstrate dominance and reinforce ideas of power.

In this new series, Wiley turns this idea on its head and instead harnesses the majesty of the monumental paintings for which he is known and employs it on a miniature scale, encouraging the viewer to question their preconceptions of the correlation between size and power in art history. Traditionally small is often viewed as meek, but here the artist demonstrates power in a decreased scale, simultaneously imploding the norms of gender and racial hierarchies.

In this exhibition, Wiley extracts “a sense of the heroic” from Nigeria, where the artist met each of his subjects on the same day at the University of Lagos. From sitters donning streetwear to those in traditional West African dress, Wiley's meticulous new paintings capture a diverse cross-section of young people. The lavishly detailed, floral backgrounds used in each of these works are typical of Wiley's practice. The artist has always been inspired by an ongoing interest in textiles and a fusion of period styles, including French Rococo and Dutch wax prints. Vibrant botanical patterns entangle Wiley's subjects and exude the grandeur of Old Master paintings through their facial expressions and poses. The artist directs the viewer's gaze in these miniature paintings by using oversized oval and rectangular frames, a visual style that was extremely popular in the eighteenth century – particularly among portraits.

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Wiley's work continues to bring art history to the forefront of contemporary culture, challenging and reinterpreting its narratives and celebrating people of colour and in this new series spotlighting the beauty, self-invention and magic of being young and hip on the streets of West Africa.

Notes to editors

Kehinde Wiley

Kehinde Wiley was born in 1977 in Los Angeles, USA. He lives and works in New York, USA; Dakar, Senegal and Lagos, Nigeria.

A solo presentation by the artist 'An Archaeology of Silence' was on view at la Fondazione Giorgio Cini on the occasion of the 59th Venice Biennale and travelled to the de Young Museum, San Francisco and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. An exhibition of new work by Wiley opened at The National Gallery, London in December 2021; the artist's first collaboration with a major UK gallery. This follows his solo exhibitions at The Box, Plymouth in September 2020 and at William Morris Gallery, London in February 2020. Wiley had his first major survey exhibition in France in July 2020 at Centre d'art La Malmaison, Cannes.

From 2015-2017 Wiley had a major ongoing touring exhibition titled 'Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic' which visited Brooklyn Museum, New York; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas; Seattle Art Museum, Washington; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Virginia; Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona; Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio; and Oklahoma City Museum of Art, Oklahoma. Exhibitions of Wiley's vast and celebrated body of work 'The World Stage', have taken place in numerous galleries between 2007 and 2014. For this project, Wiley temporarily relocated to different countries and opened satellite studio to familiarise himself with the area's culture and history before creating portraits of the local people.

Wiley received his MFA from Yale University in 2001. Shortly after, he became an Artist-in-Residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York. In 2015 he was awarded the US State Department Medal of Arts. In 2018 he received the W.E.B. Du Bois Medal at Harvard University, Massachusetts. In June 2019 he was honoured by The Gordon Parks Foundation, New York and in 2021 he was awarded Artist of the Year at Apollo Awards, London. In 2024, Yale University honoured Wiley with a second degree, Doctor of Fine Arts. Wiley is the Founder and President of Black Rock Senegal, a non-profit artist in residence program located in Dakar, Senegal.

Notable recent solo exhibitions include: 'A maze of power', Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France (2023); 'The Prelude', Sunley Room, National Gallery, London, England (2021); 'Ship of Fools', Levinsky Gallery, The Box, Plymouth, England (2020); 'Painter of the Epic', Centre d'art La Malmaison, Cannes, France (2020); 'The Yellow Wallpaper', William Morris Gallery, London, England (2020); 'Jacques-Louis David Meets Kehinde Wiley', Musée national du château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison, France (2019), travelling to Brooklyn Museum, New York (2020) and 'Equestrian Portrait of Prince Tommaso of Savoy-Carignan' Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California (2019).

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Stephen Friedman Gallery is a contemporary art gallery that was founded in 1995 with a focus on representing exceptional artists from around the world. Since its inauguration, the gallery has been based in Mayfair, London. In October 2023, the gallery expanded and relocated to Cork Street. In November 2023, the gallery opened its first location outside the UK at 54 Franklin Street in Tribeca, New York.

Images: Kehinde Wiley, 'Portrait of Jouifsoif Esther Itoremikesi II', 2024. Oil on panel, 35.5 x 28.1cm (14 x 11in) Framed: 63.8 x 56cm (25 1/8 x 22in). Copyright Kehinde Wiley. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Todd-White Art Photography.