

Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS | Art Education

Explore Kehinde Wiley's work through the lens of VMFA's encyclopedic permanent collection!

No. 1



Drug Jar, 1662-1722, Chinese, porcelain with underglaze. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. John A. Pope. © 2016 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **Two Heroic Sisters of the Grassland**, 2011, Oil on canvas. Hort Family Collection. © Kehinde Wiley

Fantastic patterns often take the place of more traditional settings in the background of Wiley's portraits. Intricately designed textiles, wallpaper, and decorative objects such as ceramics are sources of inspiration for the artist. Compare Wiley's background in *Two Heroic Sisters of the Grassland* to the 17th-century Chinese blue-and-white porcelain *Drug Jar*. These types of jars were used to store herbs and other natural remedies including one called *Diacarth*, a medicinal paste used to calm an upset stomach.

No. 2



The Assumption of the Virgin with St. Thomas and Two Donors (Ser Palamedes and His Son Matthew), ca. 1390s, Andrea di Bartolo (Italian, 1360-1428), tempera on wood. Adolph D. Wilkins C. Williams Fund. © 2016 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **Saint Gregory Palamas**, 2014, 22-karat gold leaf and oil on wood panel. Collection of Edward Tyler Nahem, New York, Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York. © Kehinde Wiley

Radiant gold and architectural frames surround these two images. The Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the Christian faith, is shown in Andrea di Bartolo's painting as large and majestic, ascending into heaven surrounded by a group of angels. The opposite work shows a bare-chested, tattooed gentleman holding an art history book, the cover of which features none other than Mary holding her child, Jesus Christ. Wiley's subject gives the sign of a benediction or blessing with his other hand.

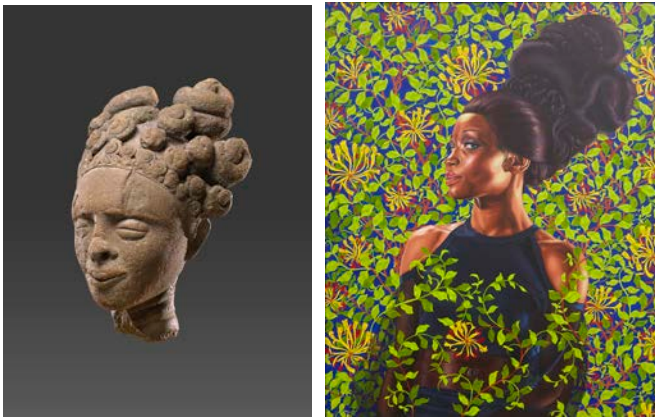
No. 3



A Dutch Gentleman, ca. 1640, Gerard Ter Borch (Dutch, 1617-1681), oil on copper. Adolph D. Wilkins C. Williams Fund. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **Willem van Heythuysen**, 2008, oil and enamel on canvas. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Both of these gentleman proudly present themselves with one foot forward and look right at the viewer. One comes from the 17th-century Netherlands and, conforming to modest standards of the time, wears a black suit with lace ruff, boots, and hat. The other comes from Harlem, New York, and wears a trendy Sean John designer sportswear and Timberland boots. If these paintings were displayed side by side, you would immediately be struck by the difference in size. Dutch painter Gerard Ter Borch specialized in simple yet sophisticated portraits, while Kehinde Wiley produces most of his paintings on a massive, more grandiose scale.

No. 4



Commemorative Portrait Head, 16th-18th Century Akan Culture (Ghana), terracotta with traces of polychrome. Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **Shantavia Beale II**, 2012, oil and enamel on canvas. Collection of Ana and Lenny Gravier © Kehinde Wiley.

These portraits differ in time, place, and material, but have some striking similarities. The sculpture is a portrait of an Akan royal family member in West Africa, most likely a queen mother or other royal woman. Her elaborate hairstyle and rising curls are echoed in Wiley's portrait, *Shantavia Beale II*. This contemporary woman's updo is fabulously large! The human head is seen by many African cultures as the seat of an individual's power, spirit, and intelligence.

No. 5



Ibejis, 19th-20th Century, Yoruba Culture (Nigeria, Republic of Benin), wood, shells, fabric, metal. Gift of Barbara and Richard Priebe © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **Dogon Couple**, 2008, oil on canvas. Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, Florida; Museum purchase, funds provided by the David A. Cofrin Acquisition Endowment and Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Fund, 2008.50 © Kehinde Wiley.

"Two are better than one," according to the Yoruba of West Africa, who have a twin birth rate almost four times greater than other populations. Twins are said to share one soul. The two *ere ibeji* sculptures, or twin statuettes, are memorial figures carved to house the soul of a twin who died. Wiley often addresses the theme of duality or "twoness" in his works. *Dogon Couple*, seen here, is based on a West African sculpture that depicts a male/female couple. Wiley, of Nigerian descent, was born the second of twins, and the name Kehinde means "the last to come." His slightly older brother's name—Taiwo—means "the firstborn."

No. 6



Sisters (Susan and Toni), Barkley L. Hendricks (American, born 1945), Oil and acrylic on canvas. Funds contributed by Mary and Donald Shockey, Jr. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **The Two Sisters**, 2012, Oil on linen. Collection of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr. Funds contributed by Mary and Donald Shockey, Jr. © Kehinde Wiley.

Calm, cool, and collected, these women stand confidently as they meet our gaze. American realist painter Barkley Hendricks, known for his portraits of everyday people, celebrates two stylish women he met in Boston. The rich color and texture of their clothes pop off the canvas, while their elegant jewelry shimmers with light. Wiley also approached his subjects randomly on the streets of Harlem. Instead of wearing street clothes, Wiley's figures wear specially designed gowns by Riccardo Tisci for Givenchy.

No. 7



Pensive (La Songeuse) 1875, Pierre Auguste Renoir (French, 1841-1919), Oil on paper on canvas. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **Mrs. Siddons**, 2012, Oil on canvas. Collection of Rita and Herbert Krauss. © Kehinde Wiley.

Have we interrupted something? Both Renoir's and Wiley's sitters stare off into the distance rather than at the viewer. Perhaps the world beyond has caught their attention. *Pensive*, the title Renoir gave to his painting, may suggest the subject is in deep thought. In Wiley's *Mrs. Siddons*, is the subject also pensive? Whatever the case, both women seem to be uninterested in our presence. An abstract sea of color and floral design occupies the backgrounds in these paintings. Renoir, an Impressionist painter, used short, rapid brushstrokes that can be perceived on the canvas. Wiley's work, on the other hand, has been called hyperrealistic, and his brushstrokes are often smooth and not very visible.

No. 8



Richard Singleton, ca. 1835, Edward Troye (American, 1808-1874), Oil on Canvas. Paul Mellon Collection. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps**, 2005, Oil on canvas. Collection of Suzi and Andrew B. Cohen. © Kehinde Wiley.

Edward Troye and Kehinde Wiley represent two vastly different scenes of African Americans with horses. Troye, America's leading painter of horses before the Civil War, depicts these men engaged in a seemingly privileged, skilled labor. Contrary to Troye's portrayal, the benefits of horse racing were off limits to these men. On occasion enslaved men could win their freedom or earn money for their services, ultimately, they were working for their masters or patrons rather than enjoying the sport for themselves. Troye's men are relegated to the margins of the painting while the horse takes center stage. Wiley's subject, however, is positioned front and center, gallantly sitting astride a reared-back horse. He emphasizes his role as a leader by gesturing to his followers with his outstretched hand— "follow me!"

No. 9



Roll of Wallpaper, 19th Century, William Morris (English, 1834-1896), woodblock on paper. Gift of William B. O'Neal. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **Mrs. Waldorf Astor**, 2012, Oil on linen. Private Collection, Los Angeles, courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York. © Kehinde Wiley.

Flowers twist and turn with complex rhythm and movement in both of these works. The hand-printed wallpaper by British designer William Morris was influenced by nature, especially English gardens. Wiley has used Morris's wallpaper as a source of inspiration more than once. In *Mrs. Waldorf Astor*, the American-born English socialite for whom the painting is named, is replaced by a modern-day beauty from Brooklyn. As in many of Wiley's paintings, the background gently extends to embrace the subject.

No. 10



Portrait of Muhammad Safdar 'Ali Khan of Rampur, 1863-64, Babu Mangal Sen (Indian, dates unknown), opaque watercolor on paper. Friends of Indian Art. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **The White Slave**, 2010, Oil on canvas. Private Collection. © Kehinde Wiley.

Sitting with crossed legs in ornate architectural settings, these men from India look directly at us. Notice the objects of luxury that surround them. How are these gentleman similar? How are they different? Wiley's young man makes a gesture of teaching—called a mudra—with his right hand. Both Kehinde Wiley and Babu Mangal Sen include visual imagery from different cultures in their portraits.

No. 11



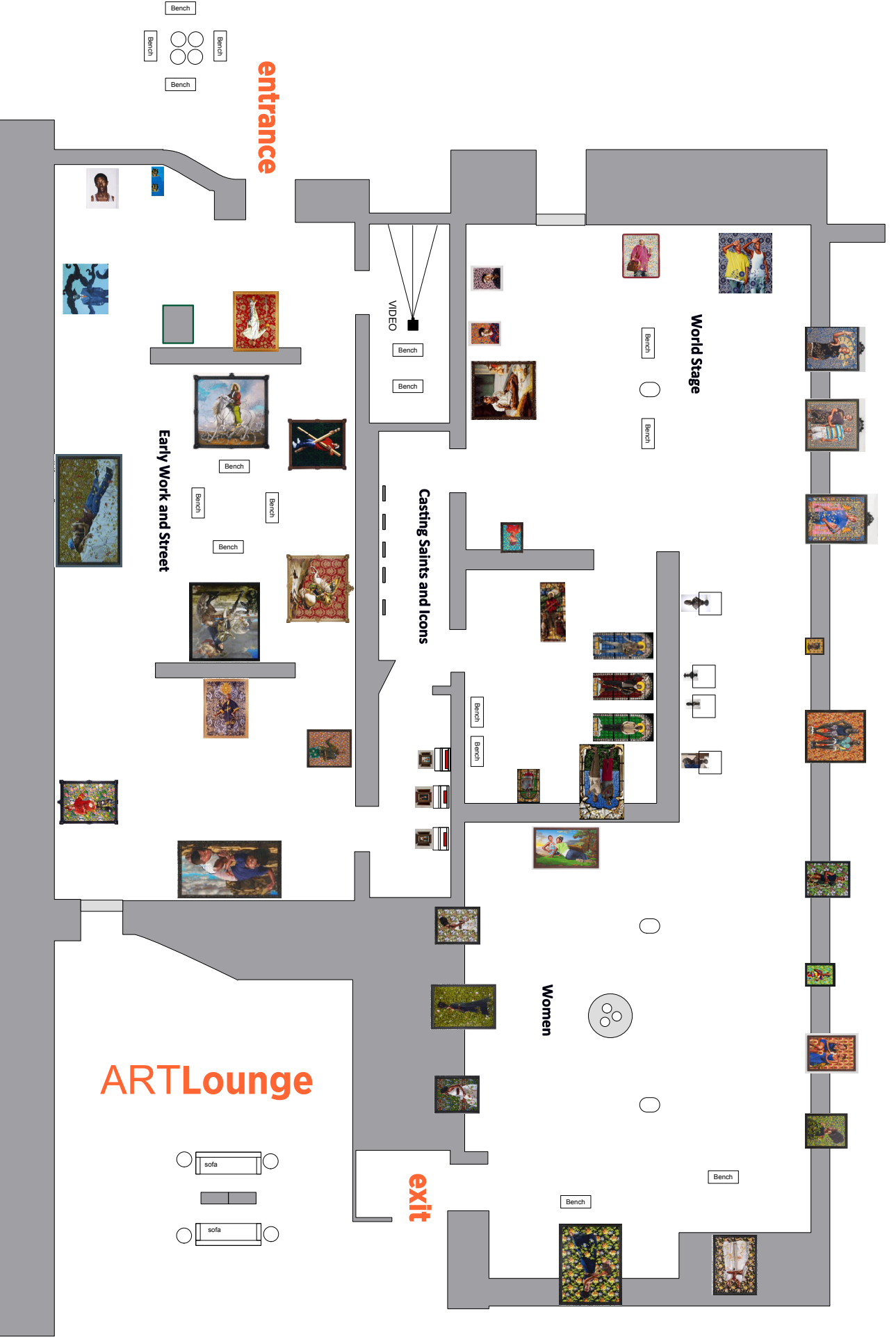
Mrs. Albert Vickers (Edith Foster), 1884 John Singer Sargent (American, 1856-1925), oil on canvas. Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **Princess Victoire of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha**, 2012, Oil on linen. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Sean McCarthy. © Kehinde Wiley.

Having your portrait painted has always been an important occasion. The women in these paintings—in collaboration with the artists—had special gowns designed, their hair done and had other preparations made for this special moment. They are both featured prominently and shown full length. Sargent's *Mrs. Vickers* delicately holds a large magnolia flower, a traditional symbol for purity or virtue, while Wiley's *Princess Victoire of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha* is surrounded by pops of abstract floral designs. Mysteriously, Wiley's subject turns her back to us, but the lovely gloss on her skin—from her shoulder to elongated neckline—calls us to follow her into the painting. Who is this enigmatic woman?

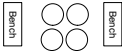


The art of stained glass goes back over a thousand years and is most familiar in medieval and Renaissance cathedrals and churches. Panels of colored glass, with rays of light shining through, come together to create an image, often telling a story or sending a message. At the turn of the 20th century, Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company was well known for its production of art glass and regularly received commissions from American churches to produce windows like *Christ Resurrection Window*. Wiley has been fascinated with this art form for the last ten years, and here we see his representation of 5th-century bishop, *Saint Remi*. What similarities do you see between the figures?

Christ Resurrection Window (for All Saints Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia), 1900, Fredrick Wilson (Irish, active in United States, 1858-1923), Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company (American, New York, 1892-1900), leaded glass and paint. Gift of All Saints Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977), **Saint Remi**, 2014, Stained glass, Courtesy of Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris. © Kehinde Wiley.



Bench



Bench

entrance

VIDEO

Bench

Bench

World Stage

Bench

Bench

Bench

Early Work and Street

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Bench

Bench

Bench

Casting Saints and Icons

Bench

Bench

Women



ARTLounge

sofa



sofa

exit

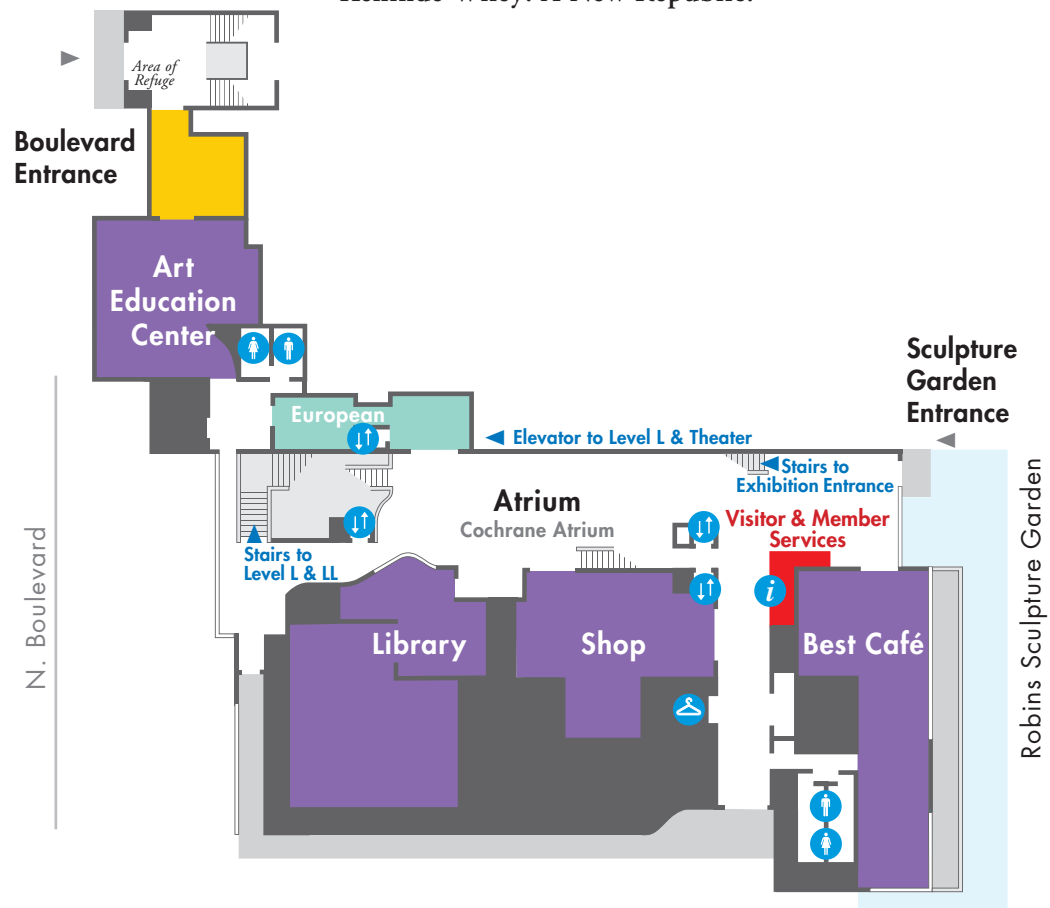
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Explore

Connect Kehinde Wiley to VMFA!

Follow the numbers to see works of art from VMFA's permanent collection that connect to works featured in Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic.



▲ Group Entrance

▲ Main Entrance
McGlothlin Wing

COLLECTIONS

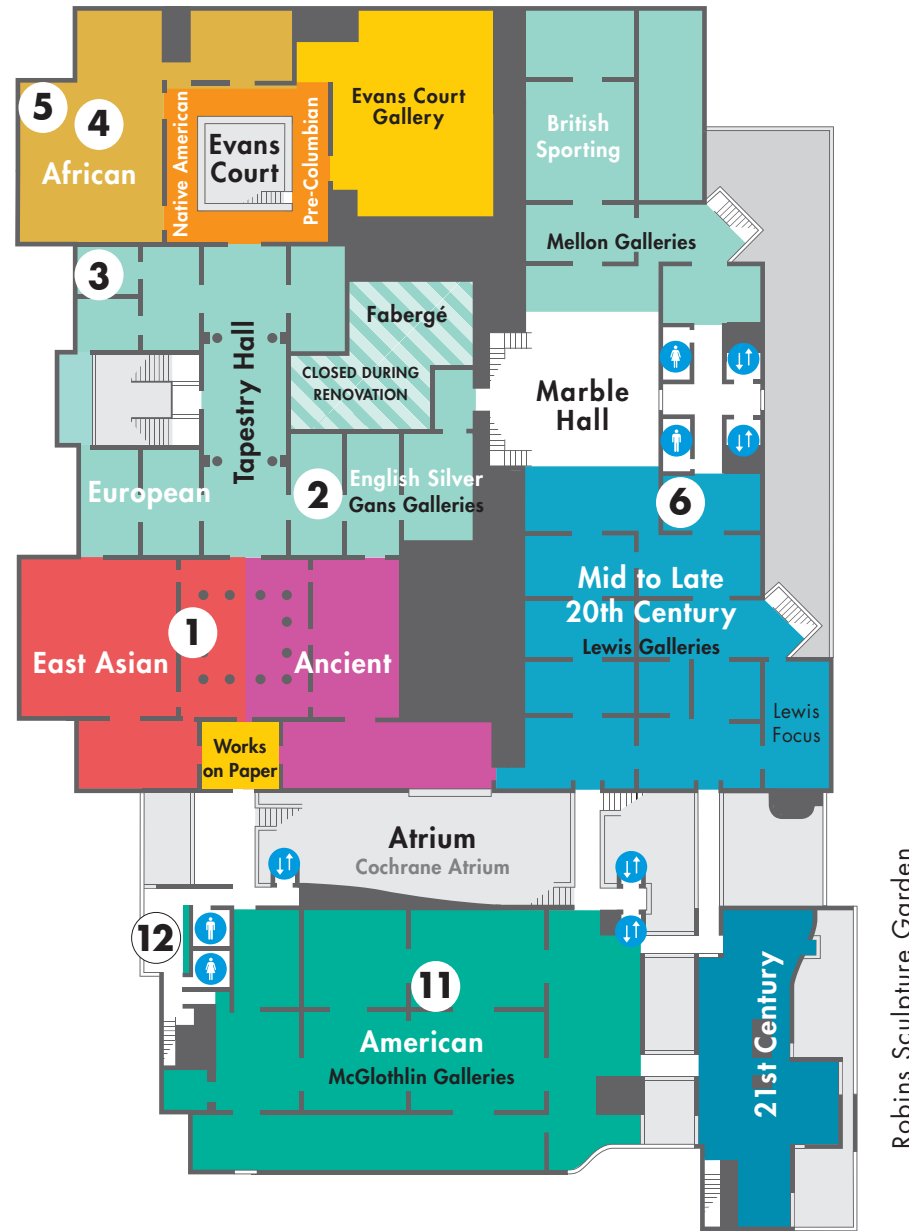
European German Expressionism | French Modernism

LEVEL

2

COLLECTIONS

- Mid to Late 20th Century
- 21st Century
- African
- American
- Ancient Egyptian | Greek | Roman | Etrurian
- East Asian Chinese | Japanese | Korean
- European Byzantine | Medieval | Renaissance Baroque | 18th Century | 19th Century English Silver | Fabergé | British Sporting
- Pre-Columbian | Native American

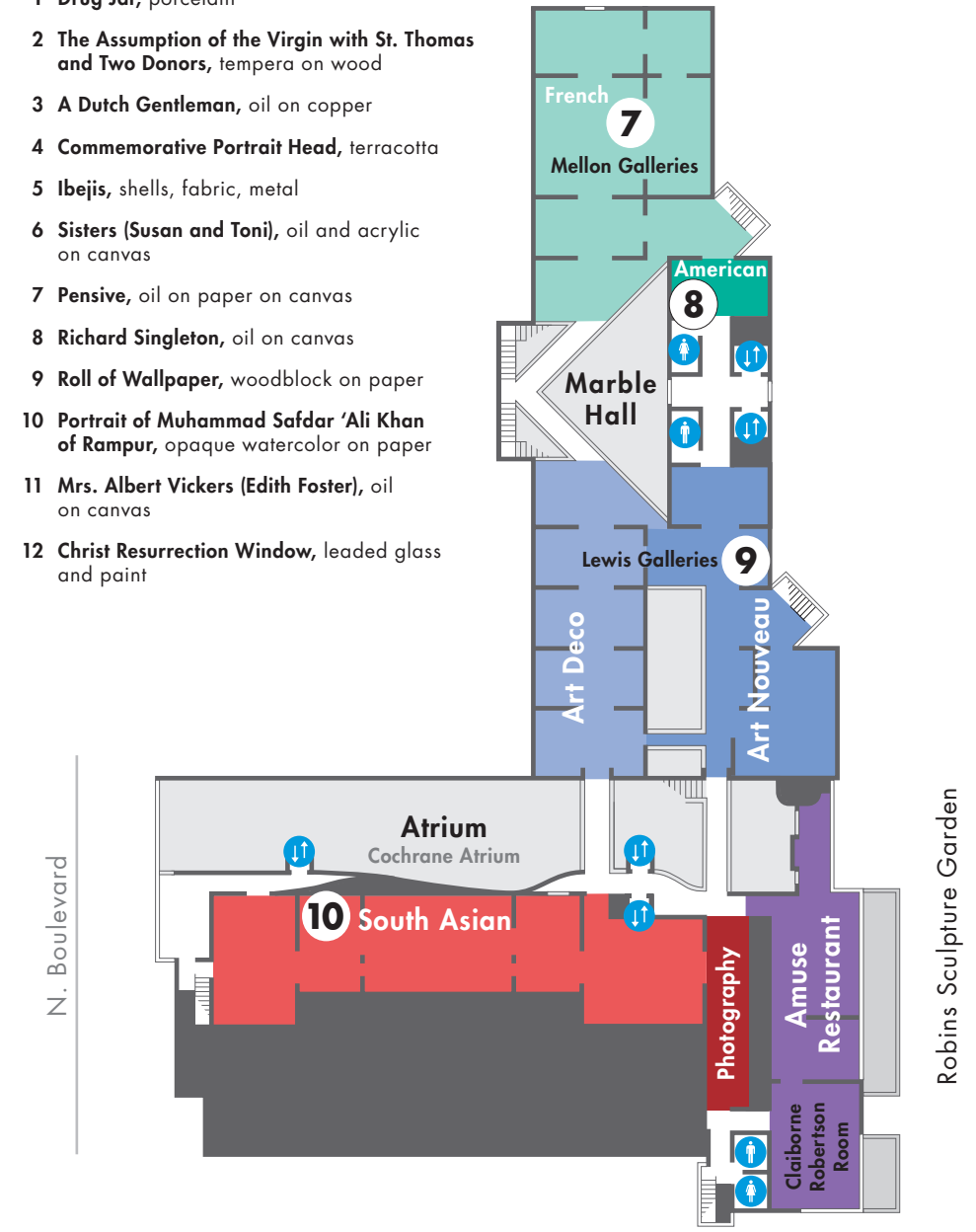


LEVEL

3

Connect Kehinde Wiley to VMFA's collection!

- 1 Drug Jar, porcelain
- 2 The Assumption of the Virgin with St. Thomas and Two Donors, tempera on wood
- 3 A Dutch Gentleman, oil on copper
- 4 Commemorative Portrait Head, terracotta
- 5 Ibejis, shells, fabric, metal
- 6 Sisters (Susan and Toni), oil and acrylic on canvas
- 7 Pensive, oil on paper on canvas
- 8 Richard Singleton, oil on canvas
- 9 Roll of Wallpaper, woodblock on paper
- 10 Portrait of Muhammad Safdar 'Ali Khan of Rampur, opaque watercolor on paper
- 11 Mrs. Albert Vickers (Edith Foster), oil on canvas
- 12 Christ Resurrection Window, leaded glass and paint



COLLECTIONS

- American
- Art Deco
- Art Nouveau
- European French | French Impressionism
- South Asian Indian | Nepalese | Tibetan
- Photography