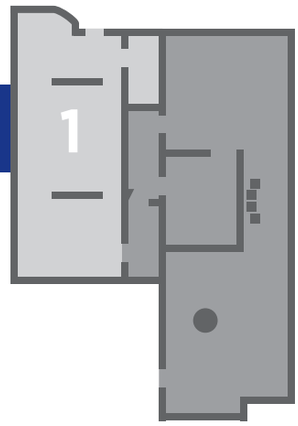
GALLERY **Guide**

1 Early Work and Street Casting



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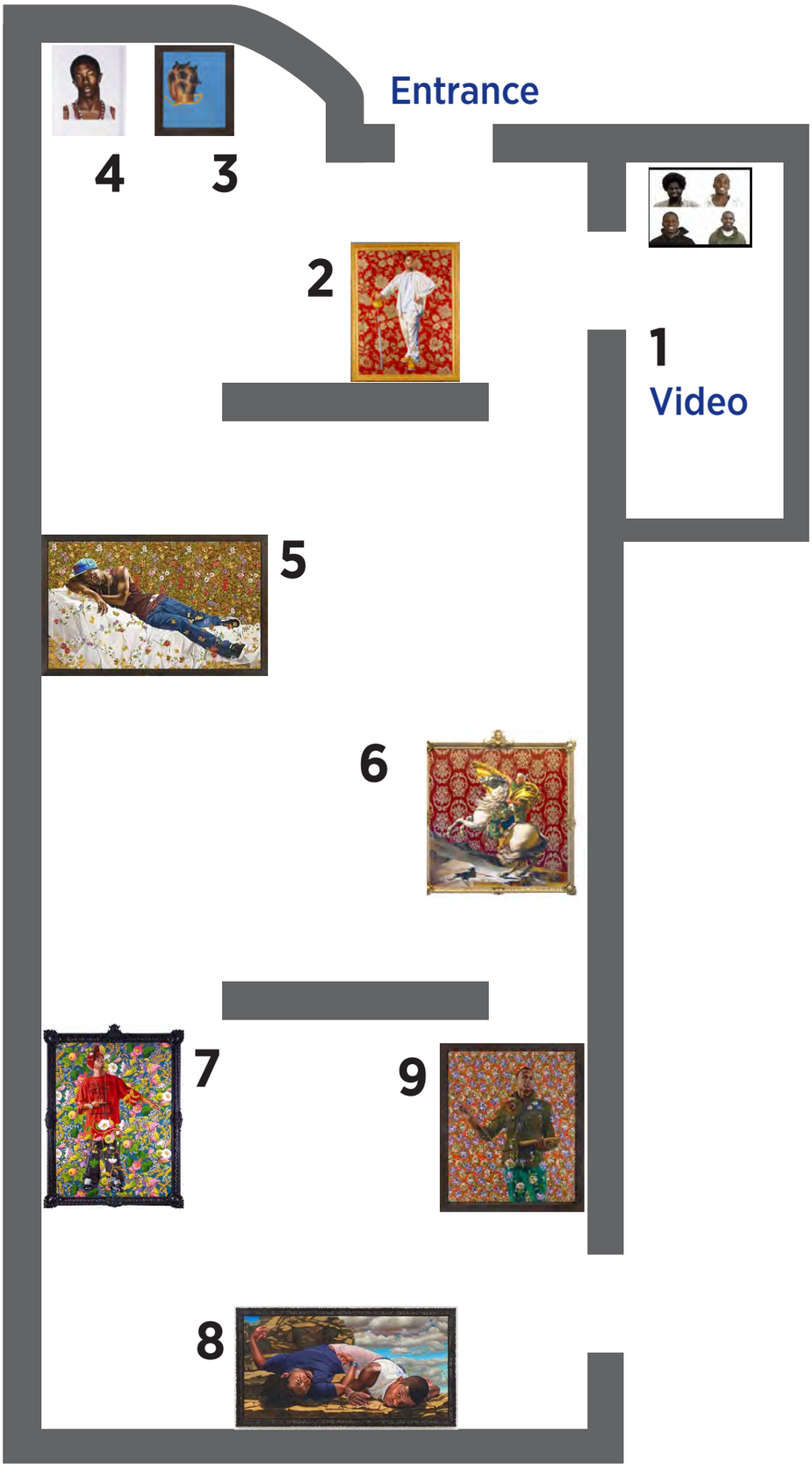

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Early Work and Street Casting

How do you look at a young black man in American society? It is a very important question, especially at this moment in our culture.

—Kehinde Wiley

As an artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2001–2, Wiley developed a technique he called "street casting," a collaborative process he still uses that enables the artist and subject to create a portrait together. Initially Wiley approached young black men on the street and invited them to his studio to select a historical work from a reproduction in an art book. The model would strike the pose of the subject in the picture, which Wiley would photograph and then transform that image into a large-scale painting. This process—which Wiley has since adapted to include women and young people in other countries—was used to produce many of the works in this exhibition.

SMILE 2001
Digital video; 1 hr. 30 min., looped
Courtesy of Roberts & Tilton, Culver City, California

"We wear the mask that grins and lies," lamented the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar in 1895, in words that could serve as a description of *Smile*. A contorted grin of obligatory happiness typified the blackface minstrel shows of Dunbar's era, and that smile has been burned into the American unconscious.

The seventeen sitters in Wiley's video alternate in taking up, and taking apart, their mask; they grin until they can no longer bear it. And when they cannot, they disappear, startlingly. Why are the men disappeared before their smiles are allowed to falter? In the afterimage of each disappearance, which is instantly filled by another face, we are left with questions about the costs extracted from black men by the requirements of cool, equipoise, and/or friendliness. In a post-Trayvon America, the hoodies that a few of these sitters wear carry resonance, reminding viewers of the profiling that black boys and men must grin and bear.

—Tavia Nyong'o,
Associate Professor of Performance Studies,
Tisch School of the Arts, New York University

WILLEM VAN HEYTHUYSEN 2006

Oil and enamel on canvas

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2006.14

Consider Kehinde Wiley and the model in the studio, poring over art history books together to choose an image that will serve as the source for a new painting, in which the model will replace some long-departed exemplar of European privilege and power. The model was previously unknown to the artist, but struck him—perhaps by the strong cut of his jaw, perhaps by his leonine confidence—as a fitting candidate for the elaborate and sophisticated impersonation in which he was hired to participate.

The model, who remains unnamed, is from Harlem (New York City), as was the original subject, Willem van Heythuysen, a Dutch wool merchant from Haarlem (the Netherlands), whose portrait was painted by Frans Hals in 1625 (see illustration). As Hals's bravura portraits defined the Golden Age of Holland, Wiley's painting—at once parody and tribute—gives image to our own age's conflicted relationship to privilege, power, and the past.

—John B. Ravenal,
Executive Director, deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts

Frans Hals (Dutch, 1581/85–1666). *Willem van Heythuysen*, circa 1625. Oil on canvas, 80½ × 53 in. (204.5 × 134.5 cm). Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich. (Photo: bpk, Berlin / Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen / Art Resource, NY)

MUGSHOT PROFILE IN BLUE 2002

Oil on canvas

Collection of Danny First, Los Angeles

Being so of the moment, Wiley's standing figures and sitters are, in effect, us, a collective us, in our shared contemporaneity, living and walking in the cities of the world, yesterday, today, and tomorrow. While he has done his fair share of portraits of celebrities and the rich—as befits such a gifted painter—the majority of his portraits are of everyday people. And finding beauty in the everyday is part of the poetic richness of Kehinde Wiley's work.

—Franklin Sirmans,
Terri and Michael Smooke Department Head and Curator of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

MUGSHOT STUDY 2006
Oil on canvas
The Sender Collection, New York

Sometimes I wonder if there's an agency somewhere, let's call it The Agency, with a multibillion-dollar budget and a 24–7 imperative to damage the image of the black American male and remind you he's a fearsome beast: the criminalblackman. They carefully cultivate him, like a strange fruit, because he's valuable for sowing fear. Why see an individual when you can see them all?

Kehinde Wiley insisted on seeing things differently. He saw a wanted poster in Harlem and saw not a criminal but a cherub. Now everyone knows black boys and innocence are as different as apples and spaceships, but damn if the boy in *Mugshot Study* doesn't look soft and vulnerable and wounded and still growing.

Maybe if others had seen this boy as innocent, as a boy of potential, as someone who wasn't a problem—maybe if he'd lived a life filled with people seeing him generously—he wouldn't be on this wanted poster. It's revolutionary work Kehinde is doing, but the real revolution is not happening with his brushes but within his mind, where he sees us as beautiful and then gets the world to see that.

—Touré,
Author and co-host of *The Cycle* on MSNBC

MORPHEUS 2008

From the series *Down*
Oil on canvas
Collection of Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, 21c Museum Hotels

The tragedy of the black image in Western art history was not that it got degraded as "other," but that black humanity came to be cruelly imprisoned by its own beauty as a result of a controlling gaze that constantly equivocated between love and hate. Against this background, Kehinde Wiley's figures open new possibilities for the representation of black male identities. It is significant that Wiley chose to rework a sculpture by Jean-Antoine Houdon called *Morpheus* (see illustration), a god of dreams, for in sleep everyone gets a glimpse of the potential for human identities to morph out of history and into new future possibilities.

—Kobena Mercer,Professor of Art History
and African American Studies, Yale University

Jean-Antoine Houdon (French, 1741–1828). *Morpheus*, 1777.
Marble, 14⅜ × 27 × 14 in. (36.9 × 70.5 × 35.8 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris, Inv. 1063.
(Photo: Gérard Blot, ©RMN–Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY)

NAPOLEON LEADING THE ARMY OVER THE ALPS 2005

From the series *Rumors of War*
Oil on canvas
Collection of Suzi and Andrew B. Cohen

In this painting, Kehinde Wiley boldly recasts Napoleon as a contemporary black warrior. In his reference to Jacques-Louis David's painting *Napoleon Bonaparte Crossing the Alps at Great St. Bernard Pass* (see illustration), Wiley creates a tension with traditional art history and its neglect of black subjects. His portrait symbolically reassigns value to the sitter, asking us to recall remarkable black leaders such as Toussaint L'Ouverture from Haiti, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela, whose images appear far less frequently, if at all, in histories of art.

—Tumelo Mosaka,
Independent curator

Jacques-Louis David (French, 1748–1825). *Napoleon Bonaparte Crossing the Alps at Great St. Bernard Pass,* 1801. Oil on canvas, 102 × 87 in. (261 × 221 cm). Châteaux de Malmaison et Bois-Préau, Rueil-Malmaison, France. (Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY)

PORTRAIT OF A VENETIAN AMBASSADOR AGED 59, II 2006
From the series *Columbus*
Oil on canvas
Collection of Dan and Jeanne Fauci, Pacific Palisades, California

Wiley masterfully soars over constraints and expectations placed upon him by others to create a world in which he might live. A world of surprising men. Polyglot men. Men who assume the position of so-called femininity without sacrificing the art or accoutrements of swagger. Strong, vulnerable men. Men who refuse to be bound. If we were to shorthand, Wiley's representation of masculinity is obviously postmodern, but we might add postgender to this description, too, because when a man trips through flowers with dignity, power, and presence—that is to say, without emasculation—we are in a world in which old signifiers of gender do not apply.

—Rebecca Walker,
Author of *Black, White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self* and other works

SANTOS DUMONT—THE FATHER OF AVIATION II 2009
From the series *The World Stage: Brazil*
Oil on canvas
Minneapolis Institute of Arts; Gift of funds from two anonymous donors, 2010.99

Two young black men lie on a craggy ledge of rocks, against a dramatic backdrop of cloud-filled sky. Larger than life, they confront the viewer head-on. The darkening sky and their stunned looks suggest a sense of foreboding. Hauntingly, the gaze of each man, whether dead or just dazed, looks out into the eyes of the viewer.

The painting is based on a monument to the Brazilian innovator of aviation, Alberto Santos Dumont (1873–1932), that greets visitors arriving at the airport in Rio de Janeiro (see illustration). The mythical Greek figure Icarus stands atop the monument ready to fulfill his ill-fated dream of flight, while two young men along the bottom of the sculpture lie dashed on the rocks, a reference to those who attempt to fly but do not succeed.

—Elizabeth Armstrong,
Curator of Contemporary Art, Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Amedeo Zani (Brazilian, 1869–1944). *To Santos Dumont, the Pioneer of Aviation, Brazil* (detail), 1942. Bronze. Santos Dumont Airport, Rio de Janeiro. (Photo: Ain Cocke, courtesy of Kehinde Wiley and Roberts & Tilton, Culver City, California)

ANTHONY OF PADUA 2013

Oil on canvas

Seattle Art Museum; Gift of the Contemporary Collectors Forum, 2013.8

In its design, *Anthony of Padua* is based on Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's stained-glass window of Saint Anthony at the Chapelle St-Ferdinand in Paris (see illustration). In Ingres's window, the Franciscan saint holds a lily, the infant Jesus, and a Bible to symbolize his purity, his theological scholarship, and his gift as a preacher in dedication to Christ.

In Wiley's take on the portrait, a young black man wears a military-style jacket, including a Black Panther patch, and the stylistic clash prompts a conversation about portraiture as a vehicle for representations of power. Unlike Ingres's Saint Anthony, meant to convey a Franciscan commitment to poverty and humility, Wiley's portrait is infused with worldly seduction: his Anthony's skin is flawless, his lips are pink, and his gaze, looking down at us, is seductive and empowered. The floral tapestry that engulfs him no longer tells of virtues; it functions rather as a lush garden of delights. Even the colony of yellow beetles frolicking among the flora is brimming with sexual innuendo.

—Catharina Manchanda,
Jon and Mary Shirley Curator
of Contemporary Art, Seattle Art Museum

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (French, 1780–1867). *Saint Anthony of Padua*, 1843–44. Stained-glass window fabricated from the artist's design, 86⅝ × 36⅜ in. (210 × 92 cm). Chapelle St-Ferdinand, Porte des Ternes, Paris. (Photo: © Philippe Bedin)

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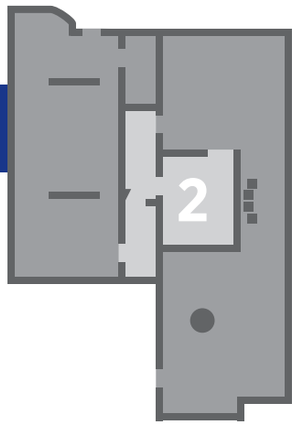
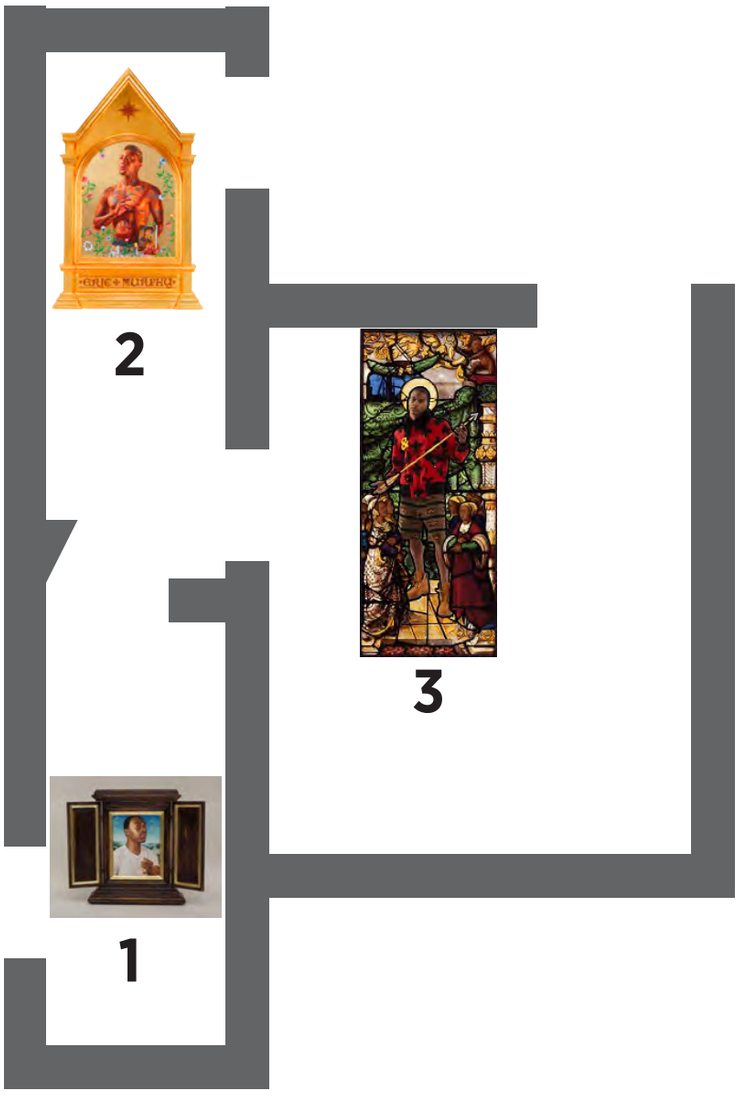


2 Saints and Icons

This gallery guide contains extended information on selected works of art in this room.

For more information see the Exhibition Catalogue.



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Saints and Icons

For the last ten years I have been obsessed with stained glass. What I wanted to do was create a body of work in which empathy and the language of the religious and the rapturous all collide into the same space.

— Kehinde Wiley

In recent years, Wiley has been expanding the range of art historical genres he explores, moving beyond the secular 17th- and 18th-century portraits of European aristocracy to include saints and church patrons typically portrayed in stained glass and icon paintings. In these images Wiley replaces obvious symbols of power, such as swords and rearing horses, with the iconography of transcendence and transformation. Depicted with glowing halos or painted with gold leaf, these contemporary subjects have been elevated to another realm.

AFTER MEMLING'S PORTRAIT OF MAN WITH A COIN OF THE EMPEROR NERO 2013

From the series *Memling*
Oil on wood panel in artist-designed hand-fabricated frame with 22k gold-leaf gilding

Phoenix Art Museum; Museum purchase with funds provided by The Marshall Bequest, Contemporary Forum, Dr. Eric Jungerman, Ann and Michael Wall, Mr. and Mrs. James G. Bazlen, BMO Private Bank, Dr. and Mrs. Marshall Block, Iris Cashdan-Fishman, Mr. and Mrs. Richard N. Goldsmith, Clark Olson and Nick Butler, Norman McLash, Mr. and Mrs. Charles G. Watts and others, 2013.526

The intimate paintings in this group draw their inspiration from a number of portraits by the 15th-century Flemish master Hans Memling (see illustration). The choice of Memling as exemplar is inspired. At a time when portraits of individuals were rare, Memling was part of a generation that defined the genre and painted those who were neither royalty nor clergy. These individuals were the rich and increasingly influential and mobile merchant and intellectual classes—a new breed in Western history and its art at the time.

For the first time, Wiley includes the names of his individual sitters, here subtly inscribed in the dark wood of the triptych doors. Appropriately—and in contrast to his previous works, which dominate the viewer by their imperious scale—the Memling-inspired series is intimate. The paintings' modest size requires close inspection and engagement. The viewer is eye to eye with the sitters. We are conscious of looking at individuals.

—Sara Cochran,
Associate Director, Curator, and Educator,
Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art,
Arizona

Hans Memling (Flemish, born Germany, 1433–1494). *Man with a Roman Coin*, 1471–74. Oil on panel, $12\frac{1}{16} \times 9\frac{1}{8}$ in. (30.7 × 23.2 cm). Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, Inv. 5. (Photo: © Lukas-Art in Flanders VZW. Dominique Provost)

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS 2014
From the series *Iconic*
22k gold leaf and oil on wood panel
Collection of Edward Tyler Nahem, New York

In works like this one, Kehinde Wiley draws on 15th-century Byzantine icons depicting venerable religious figures. Maintaining the gestures and visual language of the original works, the portraits present a new vision of saintly grace. Each portrait is titled after the figure in the original source, with the name of the contemporary sitter written on the gilded architectural frame, which in this case is inscribed ERIC MURPHY.

Wiley's re-creation of Saint Gregory Palamas, a Greek monk and theologian of the Eastern Orthodox Church, maintains some of the characteristic attributes of the saint: his right hand is raised in benediction while his left hand holds a book. Rather than a book of the Gospel, though, Murphy carries an art history book, a bookmarked copy of *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church*. And rather than vested as a bishop, he is bare-chested and tattooed, the angels flanking his left shoulder inscribed upon his skin.

—Adrianne Koteen,
Research Assistant, Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum

SAINT URSULA AND THE VIRGIN MARTYRS
2014

Stained glass

Courtesy of Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris

Wiley's foray into stained glass evokes the contemplative and atmospheric nature of the medium. Drawing from stained-glass windows in European churches, he reimagines contemporary black and brown men as heroes, saints, and, perhaps tellingly, martyrs.

In *Saint Ursula and the Virgin Martyrs* he creates a composite of old and new (see illustration). Carrying an arrow, the instrument of her martyrdom, Wiley's Saint Ursula is a man standing in slight *contrapposto*, his head cocked to the side. Losing her voluminous robes, he retains her glowing halo, steely gaze, and retinue of attendants: the eleven thousand virgins said to have been martyred alongside Ursula for her refusal to marry a pagan prince.

In Wiley's rendering, Ursula's entourage looks like him. It is the simplest of swaps—brown glass for white—yet the more notable for its simplicity. Ursula's difference is immediately apparent, but it takes longer to register the brown faces of the attendants, clad in Renaissance garb. They encircle and support him, creating a defensive cordon against whatever arrows may come.

—Rujeko Hockley, Assistant Curator,
Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum

Unidentified artist, Lower Rhine, Germany. *Saint Ursula and the Virgin Martyrs*, 1535. Panel of clear and colored glass with painted details and yellow (silver) stain, $61\,^{9}/_{16}$ x $27\,^{3}/_{16}$ in. (156.3 x 69.1 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Given by J. Pierpont Morgan, Jr., V&A C.73–1919. (Photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum)

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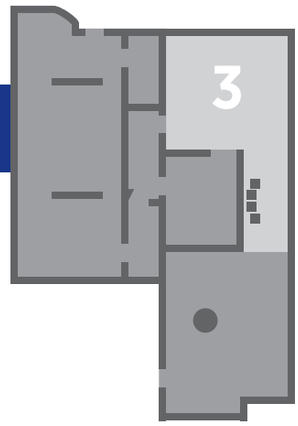

3 World Stage

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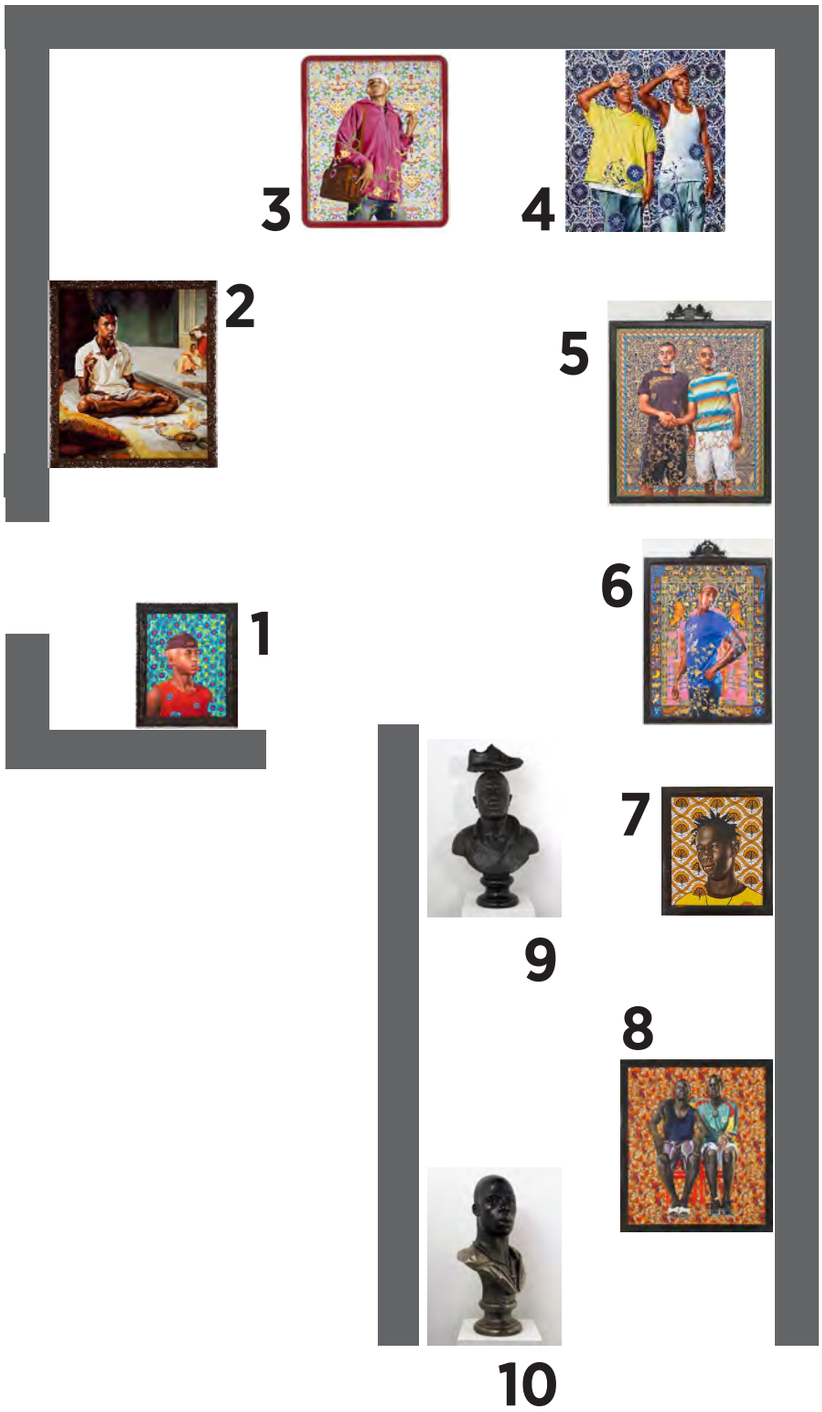

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World Stage

I am standing on the shoulders of all of those artists who came before me, but here there is a space for a new way of seeing black and brown bodies all over the world.

—Kehinde Wiley

In 2007, Wiley expanded his cultural focus from the streets of New York to cities around the world, beginning with Beijing, China, where he still maintains a studio. The next year he visited Senegal and Nigeria, followed by trips to Morocco, Tunisia, Gabon, Congo, Cameroon and, more recently, Haiti and Cuba. Often staying for weeks at a time, Wiley employs his street-casting process, albeit with the assistance of translators.

He incorporates elements from the artistic legacy of these countries; for example, using a pose from an African sculpture, such as *Dogon Couple,* rather than a European painting. These explorations of other cultures have remained a vital and ongoing part of his practice, amplifying his vision on a global scale.

RANDERSON ROMUALDO CORDEIRO 2008

From the series *The World Stage: Brazil*

Oil on canvas

Collection of Dale and Richard Newberg, Golden Beach, Florida

Cast from the streets of Morro do Vidigal, Brazil, Randerson Romualdo Cordeiro sat in the studio as himself, a teenager. Unlike the other subjects in Wiley's paintings from Brazil, Cordeiro did not assume a pose drawn from Rio de Janeiro's historical monuments, but his stance is majestic nonetheless.

His image belongs to an alternative national narrative. It has been said that in Brazil, Carnival and *futebol* amount to national institutions. They offer an alternative to the destiny the world reserves for the urban poor like Cordeiro; these festive public events allow people to cast themselves as subjects in their own story and act on their own behalf, thus inverting, for a time, the world order. Cordeiro's painted image—and its circulation as an Official Art Print for the 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil—actualizes this transformation. The studio is the site from which the sitter arises a new heroic self.

—Claire Tancons,
Independent curator, writer, and researcher

THE WHITE SLAVE 2010

From the series *The World Stage: India–Sri Lanka*

Oil on canvas

Private collection

This canvas is based on *The White Slave*, a painting by the 19th-century French Orientalist Jean Lecomte du Noüy of a concubine luxuriating in a harem (see illustration). Wiley faithfully re-creates the setting down to the smallest details but replaces the concubine with a young man sitting cross-legged in lotus position, defiantly staring out at the viewer.

A subtle, and sacred, hand gesture, or mudra, commonly seen in Hindu and Buddhist sculptures, is substituted for the pompous body language of power and prestige, derived from Western portraiture, appropriated in Wiley's other works. The young man here exudes a quiet dignity. His simple strength of presence reduces the Orientalist imagination to a mere hand-painted backdrop, like those commonly used in local photography studios throughout the subcontinent—a perverse screen fantasy against which the postcolonial subject freely asserts his independence.

—Murtaza Vali,
Independent critic, curator, and editor, and a Visiting Instructor at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn

Jean Lecomte du Noüy (French, 1842–1923). *The White Slave*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 57 × 46 in. (146 × 118 cm). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, France, Inv. 1063. (Photo: Gérard Blot, © RMN–Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY)

SUPPORT THE RURAL POPULATION AND SERVE 500 MILLION PEASANTS 2007

From the series *The World Stage: China*

Oil and enamel on canvas

Collection of Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson, 21c Museum Hotels

This painting extends the artist's practice of juxtaposing contemporary African American culture with image production from other places and times, in this case propaganda posters from China's Cultural Revolution of 1966–76. This reference is revealed by the figure's pose and old medical bag, suggesting the era's "barefoot doctors"—peasants and young intellectuals who acted as physicians after short, non-professional medical training and who performed both farm work and simple medical treatments (see illustration).

Yet at the same time, the young black male, dressed in a casual outfit influenced by hip-hop culture, speaks an accessible, contemporary visual language, familiar to many in present-day China. No longer the hero of some distant Maoist utopia yet to come, he remains among the viewers, in the present.

—Venus Lau,
Independent curator and writer

Li Mubai and Jin Xuechen. *The Health Worker at the Head of the Field*, 1965. Poster. International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam

TWO HEROIC SISTERS OF THE GRASSLAND 2011

From the series *The World Stage: China*

Oil on canvas

Hort Family Collection

Two Heroic Sisters of the Grassland, printed 1965. Poster, 30 x 21 in. (77 x 53 cm).
Collection of Pierre-Loïc Lavigne

ABED AL ASHE AND CHALED EL AWARI 2011

From the series *The World Stage: Israel*
Oil and gold enamel on canvas
Collection of Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris

The dichotomy of Palestinian versus Jew is a constant theme of Israel on the world stage—even though there are Arab Israelis and, prior to 1948, Palestinian Jews, some of whom continue to self-subscribe as such. In a world context, what are these two men with right hands clasped?

At the top of the carved frame of this painting of the Arab Israelis Abed Al Ashe and Chaled El Awari stand the lions of Judah. The lions face a message in Hebrew: “What would make it possible for us to live together?” Or, to use a phrase more familiar in the U.S. context, “Can we all get along?”

—Lewis R. Gordon,
Professor of Philosophy and African American Studies, with affiliation in Judaic Studies, University of Connecticut, Storrs

ALIOS ITZHAK 2011

From the series *The World Stage: Israel*
Oil and gold enamel on canvas
The Jewish Museum, New York; Purchase: Gift of Lisa and Steven Tananbaum Family Foundation; Gift in honor of Joan Rosenbaum, Director of The Jewish Museum from 1981–2011, by the Contemporary Judaica, Fine Arts, Photography, and Traditional Judaica Acquisitions Committee Funds, 2011–31

The background of *Alios Itzhak* refers to a 19th-century Mizrah that Wiley saw in the collection of the Jewish Museum, New York, made by the Ukrainian artist Israel Dov Rosenbaum (see illustration). A Mizrah (Hebrew for "east") is a decorative plaque used to indicate the direction of worship, toward Jerusalem, in Jewish homes and synagogues.

Rosenbaum's intricate design is laden with spiritual symbolism, including mythical beasts and an inscription, on the four corners, of the Hebrew phrase "from this side the spirit of life," the first letters of which create an acronym of the word Mizrah. Here, as in so many of Wiley's works, the decorative natural tendrils entwine with the foreground, complicating the notion of the figure in space while giving prominence to the natural world.

—Adrianne Koteen,
Research Assistant, Contemporary Art,
Brooklyn Museum

Israel Dov Rosenbaum (Ukrainian, fl. 1877). Mizrah, 1877. Paint, ink, and pencil on cutout paper, 30¼ × 20⅛ in. (76.8 × 52.7 cm). The Jewish Museum, New York; Gift of Helen W. Finkel in memory of Israel Dov Rosenbaum, Bessie Rosenbaum Finkel, and Sidney Finkel, 1987–136. (Photo: John Parnell, courtesy of The Jewish Museum, New York / Art Resource, NY)

IBRAHIMA SACKO 2008

From the series *The World Stage: Africa, Lagos–Dakar*
Oil on canvas
Collection of Shaill Jhaveri

Ibrahima Sacko stands before us in front of a brightly colored, patterned background strongly reminiscent of wax-resist-dyed (or "Dutch wax") textiles. These fabrics are now increasingly understood in the global art world as questionable badges of cultural "authenticity," because of their historical 19th-century origin as Dutch copies of Indonesian batiks, later simply dumped on the West African market. However, in a contemporary West African context, such colorful and well-printed cloths remain part of the background of everyday life, alongside the Western clothes worn by this young man.

—Kevin D. Dumouchelle,
Associate Curator, Arts of Africa and the Pacific Islands,
Brooklyn Museum

DOGON COUPLE 2008

From the series *The World Stage: Africa, Lagos–Dakar*

Oil on canvas

The Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, Gainesville; Museum purchase, funds provided by the David A. Cofrin Acquisition Endowment and Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Fund, 2008.50

In both its title and its arrangement, *Dogon Couple* makes obvious reference to the famed seated couple by an unidentified 18th- or 19th-century Dogon artist (see illustration). The sculpture is celebrated for its (largely) harmonious depiction of male/female complementarity. Elongated and balanced figures unite through the encircling gesture of the man—extending from the woman's breast to his own genitals—which suggests the couple's different but equally essential roles in procreation and nurturing.

The biggest difference between Wiley's painting and its Dogon source is the substitution of two young men for a male/female couple. Wiley opens this pair to a homoerotic reading, suggesting a similar level of sexual intimacy between the two men. But at the same time, the friendly and easygoing gesture itself also reflects an entirely typical level of public camaraderie and intimacy found in West Africa, outwardly devoid of sexual intention. *Dogon Couple* offers several readings, simultaneously.

—Kevin D. Dumouchelle,
Associate Curator, Arts of Africa
and the Pacific Islands, Brooklyn Museum

Illustration: Unidentified artist, Mali. *Seated Couple*, 18th–early 19th century. Wood, metal, 28 × 9 5/16 in. (73 × 23.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1997.394.15.
(Photo: www.metmuseum.org)

CAMEROON STUDY 2010

Bronze

Collection of Suzanne and Howard Feldman

The country of Cameroon, in the western region of Central Africa, gained independence from France in 1960. Wiley presents us with a young man of Cameroon wearing a simple, striped shirt, with what appear to be the straps of a backpack over his shoulders. His bronze features are strikingly reminiscent of the 19th-century French sculptor Charles Cordier's lush renderings of Africans.

Wiley, however, doesn't stop there: on the young man's head is an athletic shoe. It perches there like a bird, like a weight—or like a finger pointing at the globalization of fashion and the pressure of commoditization. Corporations like Nike claim a U.S. identity, but manufacture their shoes under exploitive conditions in Asia; use primarily African American athletes to advertise them; and sell the shoes to people around the world who often can least afford them. With this bronze, Wiley exposes the coloniality of global markets, and he slaps us in the face with an "object" lesson in multiple signification.

—Kirsten Pai Buick,
Associate Professor of Art History,
University of New Mexico, Albuquerque

Charles Cordier (French, 1827–1905). *African Venus*, 1851. Bronze, partially gilt, 31 × 16 × 10 in. (80 × 41.9 × 26.7 cm). Collection of Lynda and Stewart Resnick

**Jean-Antoine Houdon
(French, 1741–1828)

HOUDON PAUL-LOUIS 2011

Bronze with polished stone base

Brooklyn Museum; Frank L. Babbott Fund and A. Augustus Healy Fund, 2012.51

Though Kehinde Wiley is best known for his painted portraits, here he shifts from painting to sculpture. In both the lift and turn of the young man's head and the open V of his zippered collar, this bronze refers to an 18th-century marble bust by Jean-Antoine Houdon.

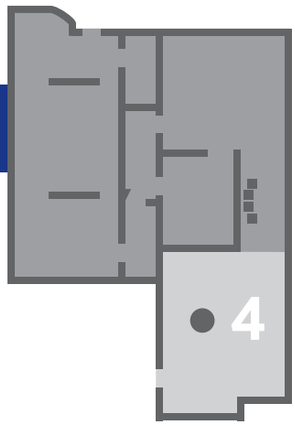
Yet in many other ways, Wiley's work could hardly be more different: in substituting male for female, black for white, and present for past, he upends the earlier sculpture even as he quotes it. His radical reinterpretation encourages us to examine the stereotypes that can be found in portraiture.

—Rujeko Hockley,
Assistant Curator, Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum

**Jean-Antoine Houdon (French, 1741–1828). *Anne-Germaine Larrivée, Madame Paul-Louis Girardot de Vermenoux*, 1777. Marble, 39 in. (99.1 cm) high, with self-base. Huntington Art Collections, San Marino, California. (Photo: © Huntington Art Collections)

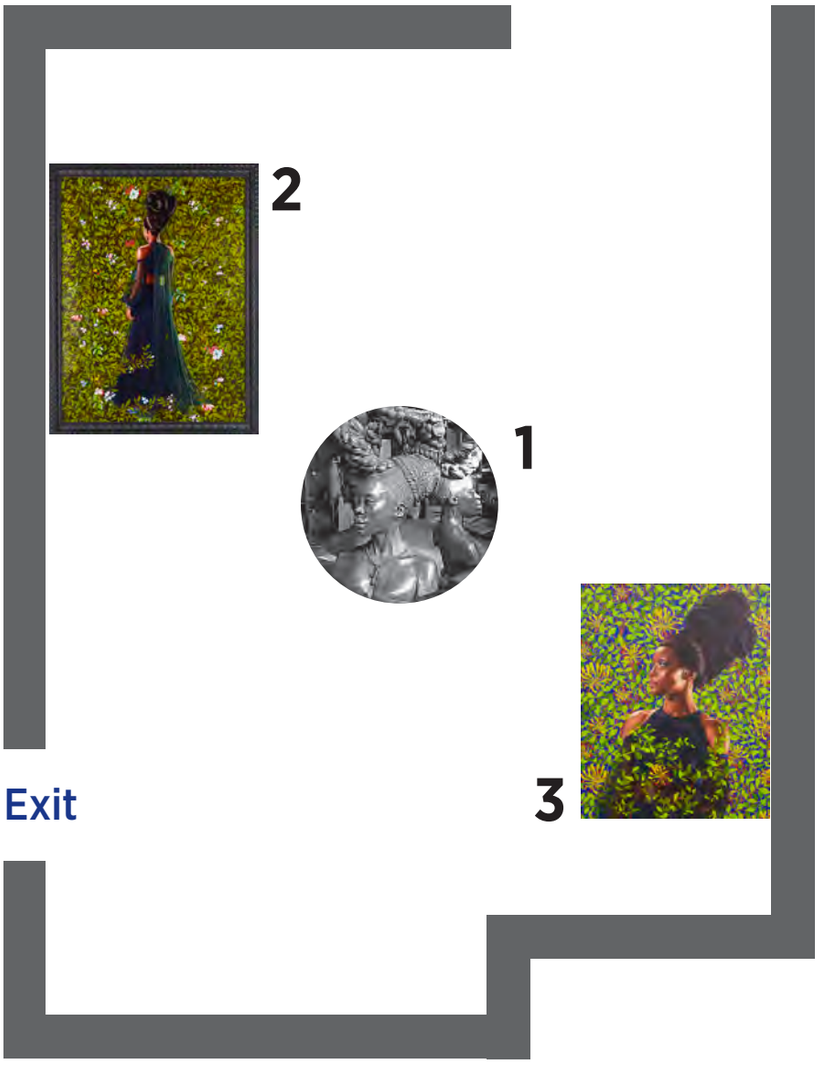
GALLERY **Guide**

4 Women



This gallery guide contains extended information on selected works of art in this room.

For more information see the Exhibition Catalogue.



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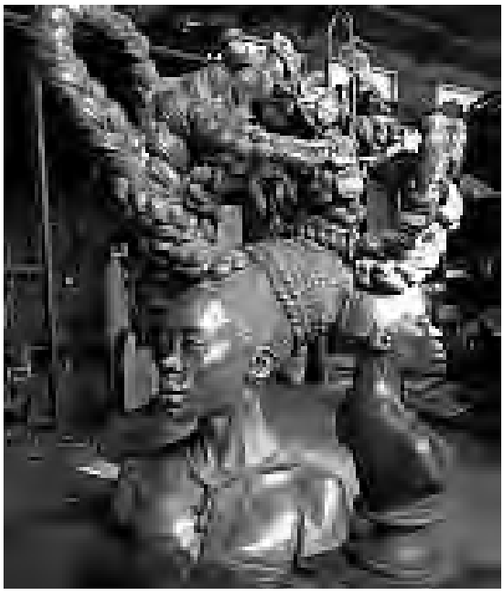
Women

You see so many portraits where the male figure stands dominant in the forefront of the painting and women, children, and land are seen in equal measure as possessions. In my own work the women are strident, they take the front. But there is also a sense of mystery; we don't really know who these women are.

—Kehinde Wiley

Wiley began using women as subjects in 2012, this time chosen from the streets of the Bronx and Queens. Inspired by 18th- and 19th-century society portraits at the Louvre in Paris—in which women often wore clothing specifically commissioned for the sitting—Wiley worked with Riccardo Tisci of Givenchy to design gowns for his 21st-century models. Since showing this series of paintings, titled *An Economy of Grace,* Wiley began incorporating female subjects into his *World Stage* series as well.



BOUND 2014
Bronze
Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York

In this, Kehinde Wiley's first sculpture of women, the artist continues his ongoing investigation of style, representation, and spectacle. The women's voluminous hairstyles serve as markers of power and autonomy, rich in symbolic value. The artist has remarked that *Bound* "looks at the presence of black women, all of those women that raised me, the graceful women who've been in my life over the years, but also the ways in which black American women adorn themselves as both a type of communication act and armor. And hair is principal within that. You see hair going outside itself, becoming so fabulous, so extraordinarily large that it folds in under its own weight. It's beauty that becomes decay. It's a place in which the imagination starts to happen."

—Adrianne Koteen,
Research Assistant, Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum

PRINCESS VICTOIRE OF SAXE-COBURG-GOTHA 2012

From the series *An Economy of Grace*
Oil on linen
Collection of Seán and Tamara McCarthy

Princess Victoire of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha is from the first series by Kehinde Wiley entirely dedicated to the female figure, featuring women clothed in specially designed gowns by Riccardo Tisci. The series is as transglobal as it is timely; as saturated with true beauty and glamour as it is postured and theatrical. It is realness with a twist.

Though Wiley's work is often defined as a clever appropriation, I wonder if the obvious references create a blind spot. Here, he borrows a work by the 19th-century British artist Sir Edwin Landseer (see illustration). But Wiley's innovation is less appropriation and more a calling out of the shifting meanings that the black body—hyper-visible and yet often invisible—can represent. If anything, the view of the model's lovely back in Wiley's *Princess Victoire* is the most revelatory, as the woman stands, facing the future, leaving us spectators behind her, in the wake of history.

—Naomi Beckwith
Marilyn and Larry Fields Curator,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

Sir Edwin Landseer (British, 1803–1873). *Princess Victoire of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1822–1857),* 1839. Oil sketch on canvas, 16 × 13⅞ in. (41.9 × 35.2 cm). The Royal Collection Trust, London; Acquired by Queen Victoria in 1839. (Photo: © 2014 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II)

SHANTAVIA BEALE II 2012
From the series *An Economy of Grace*
Oil on canvas
Collection of Ana and Lenny Gravier, New York

The field of flowers surrounding the figure in Wiley's *Shantavia Beale II* is drawn from a wallpaper design produced for the decorative arts company Morris & Co. (see illustration). The company's founder, William Morris (British, 1834–1896), was an artist, writer, entrepreneur, socialist, and one of the leaders of the English Arts and Crafts Movement, which emerged during the late Victorian period.

Wiley connects his use of such decorative, natural designs in the background (which sometimes slip into the foreground to partially cover the figure) with an idea of reclaiming space. As he describes it: "You see so many portraits where the male figure stands dominant at the forefront, and women and children and land are seen as possessions [in the background]. . . . For me . . . Nature is the woman. Nature is the black, the brown, the other. . . . That's one of the reasons why in so many of the paintings the decorative is competing with the body . . . and demanding presence."

—Adrianne Koteen,
Research Assistant, Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum

Morris & Co. (England, 1875–1940). Wallpaper sample; Honeysuckle, pattern #263, before 1917. Printed paper, 21½ x 14½ in. (54.6 x 36.8 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Purchased with funds given by Mr. and Mrs. Carl L. Selden and Designated Purchase Fund, 71.151.1