

Cross, Una-Kariim A. "Kehinde Wiley Paints Brooklyn Red," *EBONY*, February 23, 2015.

## EBONY

# Kehinde Wiley Paints Brooklyn Red [PHOTOS]

WITH KEHINDE WILEY: A NEW REPUBLIC, THE CELEBRATED PORTRAIT PAINTER DEBUTS HIS LATEST RETROSPECTIVE AT NYC'S BROOKLYN MUSEUM



**Kehinde Wiley is a global** art world megastar. What's made him the distinguished artist he is comes from a synergy of exemplary practice, research and exhibition. Wiley's success came from the fusion of his talent plus the dynamic interplay of public response, art world reception and the market.

While many visual artists have achieved the status of becoming household names, few contemporary Black artists since Jean-Michel Basquiat have achieved commercial success while occupying the position of artist-as-celebrity. In fact, Kehinde Wiley may just be the postmillennial prototype.

**Wiley's laudable career** recently earned him a U.S. Department of State Medal of Arts as well as his first breathtaking museum retrospective, *Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic*, currently on view at the Brooklyn Museum in New York City. In tandem with these current achievements, his signature paintings of young, beautiful Black men in the forefront of ornate and colorful backgrounds are now seen almost weekly on the FOX hit series, *Empire*.

At 37, Kehinde Wiley has set a precedent for being one of the most highly visible, global and masterful artists of our time. His ascendance through the ranks of the art world have taken him from and through a residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem, to a solo show with Jeffrey Deitch, to Yale, and beyond. His success over time has afforded him the opportunity to maintain two international studios and one in New York. But Wiley's celebrity status shouldn't dim his meticulous research, study and practice, nor his own humanity.

**In tandem with the scale** of his work, the depth of content and concept lie within his astute attention to detail—the subtle eroticism and sensuality in the twisting of a model's hips; the delicate placement of a hand; the cultural references in the backgrounds on the paintings; and most importantly, his interactions in the communities where he finds his models.

The Brooklyn Museum is the first to debut two new works: his first-ever female sculpture, titled *Bound* (which "just arrived from his studio in Beijing," according to managing curator Dr. Eugenie Tsai), and his larger-than-life stained-glass paintings, his most grand work to date.

**Additionally, there are paintings** from *The World Stage* series, where he street-cast men from India, Sri Lanka, India, Jamaica and Nigeria for his sittings, as well as his 2012 series *An Economy of Grace*, when

he began painting women. While the poses and gestures of the models reference various art historical sculptures (which can be seen on the wall text), they tell their own stories.

“This is someone who is always looking at sources,” says Eugenie Tsai. “He is looking very carefully at art history and different art historical traditions, and you can see that in the Asian motifs that appear in *World Stage China*.”

**Referencing art historical** sculptures, Wiley positions his models/sitters for portraits, which in European Renaissance art served as symbols of class and status. He works strategically to elevate and reposition globally marginalized people, specifically Black men, beyond places of invisibility and stereotype (from skin color to sexual preference) to places of dignity and distinction. He allows his models to be seen as individuals, as humans first.

Wiley’s paintings are large enough to view from afar, yet they invite viewers in for a closer look, at times challenging notions that we’ve either chosen to ignore or assume we understand. His work calls for viewers to (re)consider notions of power, humanity, masculinity, femininity, culture, sexuality and art.

“That’s the thing about Kehinde,” says comedian Mr. Gandy. “You are going to learn something. Sure, it’s glamorous. But when you look into the details of the work and the history, you will get much more,” he concludes.

***Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic* is on view from February 20–May 24, 2015 at the Brooklyn Museum’s Morris A. and Meyer Schapiro Wing and Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Gallery.**







