

SEANKELLY

Weber, Jasmine. "In Times Square, Kehinde Wiley Unveils a Massive Monument to Black Identity." *ARTnews*. September 27, 2019.

HYPERALLERGIC



Kehinde Wiley, "Rumors of War" (2019) (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

This afternoon, a heavily trafficked isle in Times Square, Manhattan became the site of a monumental unveiling. Standing 27 feet in the air and 16 feet wide, Kehinde Wiley's bronze statue, "Rumors of War" (2019), made its first public appearance.

Amidst the bustling streets and neon lights of 47th and Broadway, Wiley's subject — a young Black man with locks, ripped jeans, and a hooded sweatshirt — gazed confidently over the massive crowd, steering a horse.

SEANKELLY



The exhibition will be on view in Times Square until December 1.

Wiley, one of the most well-known working artists in the world, is highly recognizable for his massive and elaborately decorated portraits of Black men. His star launched after a residency at the influential Studio Museum in Harlem in 2001–2002; in 2018, he painted President Barack Obama’s official portrait.

Rumors of War is also the title of his 2005 painting series, which riffs on the masculinity, power, and historicity of equestrian portraiture and its affirmation of white masculinity. The sculpture currently at Times Square — Wiley’s first public work and largest three-dimensional artwork — was inspired by his time in Richmond, Virginia in 2016. At the time, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) was hosting a career retrospective, Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic. He was haunted by the city’s prominent displays of monuments to Confederate generals: 10 total along Richmond’s Monument Avenue. Three years later, he is contributing his own public monument to American history, presented by Times Square Arts, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and Sean Kelly Gallery. After this stint at Times Square, Wiley’s sculpture will be joining those bronze markers of the Confederacy’s desperate attempts to preserve the institution of slavery.

SEANKELLY



Dr. Monroe Harris, president of the VMFA's board of trustees, called the monument "the most important acquisition that this museum has ever made."

"I'm a Black man walking those streets," he told the crowd. "I'm looking up at those things that give me a sense of dread and fear."

"We need more, we demand more," he explained to the audience, impassioned and charismatic. "Today, we say yes to something that looks like us. [...] We say yes to broader notions of what it means to be an American. This is my America too."

Dr. Monroe Harris, president of the VMFA's board of trustees, called "Rumors of War," "the most important acquisition that this museum has ever made."

The splendid statue is "monumental in the message that it gives," he said: a reminder of the massive contributions descendants of enslaved Africans have made to this nation which has enacted centuries of violence, oppression, and discrimination against them.

SEANKELLY



The Malcolm X Shabazz High School marching band

There was a celebratory air at the prospect of this historic unveiling — the marching band and dance team from Malcolm X Shabazz High School in Newark, New Jersey, performed. The afternoon was a celebration of Black art's contributions to American culture in its many forms: musical, intellectual, and visual.

The exhibition will be on view in Times Square until December 1 — after which it will travel to Richmond, Virginia, and face bravely toward the Confederate generals on monument row as a resilient marker of a people that they could not destroy.