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Di Liscia, Valentina. "Bronze Public Sculpture by Kehinde Wiley Heads to St. Louis." *Hyperallergic*, March 2, 2022.

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The piece will be installed at the new campus of Doorways, a nonprofit that helps individuals living with HIV/AIDS.



Kehinde Wiley, "Rumors of War" (2019) (courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery)

At first glance, Kehinde Wiley's sculpture "*Rumors of War*" (2019) resembles the archetypal commemorative bronze found in cities across the United States: A male figure on horseback gazing out heroically, his posture an expression of valor and confidence. But unlike most of those ubiquitous statues, the protagonist of this work is Black. His hair is in dreadlocks and he wears a hooded sweatshirt and high-top sneakers. And for many residents of St. Louis's North Side, it will be one of the few monuments in the area that might resemble them.

This summer, Wiley's piece will be installed at the new campus of Doorways, a local nonprofit that provides affordable housing to individuals living with HIV/AIDS, in the primarily Black neighborhood of Jeff-Vander-Lou. The work is a long-term loan to the organization from the Gateway Foundation, also based in St. Louis.



A large-scale edition of "Rumors of War" was produced for Times Square in New York City (photo by Jasmine Weber for Hyperallergic)

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Wiley created the bronze as a critical response to a statue of Confederate General JEB Stuart that stood on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia until it was removed in the summer of 2020 amid the Black Lives Matter protests. Measuring about five feet high, the sculpture heading to Missouri is one of nine smaller editions of “*Rumors of War*” he produced after a large-scale version for New York City’s Times Square in 2019. That monumental piece later traveled to Richmond, where it was placed on Monument Avenue amid the very symbols of white supremacy and racist violence it seeks to dismantle.

“I’m a Black man walking those streets,” the artist told a crowd during the unveiling event at Times Square. “I’m looking up at those things that give me a sense of dread and fear.”

Wiley is known to many as the artist of President Barack Obama’s official portrait and numerous other vibrant, elaborately rendered paintings of Black men. *Rumors of War* is also the title of his 2005 painting series, which explores the history of equestrian depictions alongside themes of power dynamics and white masculinity.

The loan of “*Rumors of War*” to Doorways represents its presence in an area where “public sculpture of any kind, let alone heroic equestrian pieces featuring Black men, is unknown,” a press release from the organization says. The new campus is also close to the site of the racially segregated Pruitt-Igoe housing development, notoriously demolished by the city in the 1970s after two decades of mismanagement and neglect. Opal Jones, CEO of Doorways, told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch that Wiley’s sculpture evokes “empowerment in the face of adversity.”

The nonprofit still hopes to raise an additional \$3 to \$4 million for the new \$35 million campus, according to the Dispatch’s report, funds that will enable the construction of additional housing units for people with mental health or substance abuse conditions.



Detail of Kehinde Wiley's "Rumors of War" (2019) (courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery)

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“The Doorways campus is in a part of St. Louis that has not often had public sculpture, and not of this monumental scale and important content,” Lisa Melandri, executive director of the Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis and a board member at Gateway Foundation, told Hyperallergic. “It is truly ‘Public Art,’ truly accessible, and it will allow a whole new array of audiences to experience it. We feel so lucky to be able to have the work here.”