

SEAN KELLY

"Kehinde Wiley's echoes of masterworks," *CBS News*, November 1, 2015.

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Kehinde Wiley's echoes of masterworks



For a different perspective on the proverbial Man in the Street ... you need only look at the works of painter Kehinde Wiley, as our Rita Braver has been doing:

"If you look at the paintings that I love in art history, these are the paintings where great, powerful men are being celebrated on the big walls of museums throughout the world," said Kehinde Wiley. "What feels really strange is not to be able to see a reflection of myself in that world."

So the New York-based Kehinde Wiley set out to create a new paradigm. Men of color in street dress painted in classical styles, often echoing masterworks. The images are considered so hip they've even been used as a backdrop in the Fox series, "Empire."

And with paintings selling for as much as \$400,000, the work is considered important enough that, though he is only 38, a survey of his career is now on view at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, after opening at the Brooklyn Museum.

"His work has a broad appeal, to high art culture mavens as well as to people who don't know anything about art but [who] are taken by his references to hip hop and to street culture," said Eugenie Tsai of the Brooklyn Museum, who curated the exhibit.

She says that beyond their social statements, the paintings have undeniable artistic merit, as in Wiley's version of the frequently-painted martyr, St. Andrew.

"I think one of the hallmarks of great art is a little bit of ambiguity, where things aren't spelled out for you," said Tsai. "There's room for interpretation on the part of the viewer."

With his over-the-top persona, Wiley has been compared to Andy Warhol -- and like Warhol, he's a celebrity magnet. Michael Jackson commissioned a portrait. VH1 ordered up a whole series featuring rap stars.

But it's been a hard road to fame. He was raised in Los Angeles where his mom ran a second-hand goods store to support the family.

"My mother sent me to art classes at the age of 11," Wiley said. "I began to have kids around me say, 'Will you make drawings for me? Will you make a painting for me?' And it really clicked."

He was good enough to earn a Masters of Fine Arts from Yale, and in 2002 a prestigious Artist-in-Residence slot at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

It was in Harlem that he found a mug shot on the street:

"It crystallized something that I'd been thinking about for a very long time, which is that black men have been given very little in this world, and that I as an artist have the power and the potential and the will to do something about it."

So he and a team of helpers began pounding the pavements of New York asking young black men if they'd like to be photographed and painted in classical style.



Wiley reinterpreted Jacques-Louis David's 1801 painting, "Napoleon Bonaparte Crossing the Alps at Great St. Bernard Pass," with a black warrior. CBS NEWS/© KEHINDE WILEY