

SEANKELLY

Sayej, Nadja. "Kehinde Wiley Tries His Hand at Design with a New Artist Residency in Senegal." *Architectural Digest*. April 22, 2019.



An exterior view of Black Rock Senegal. Photo by Ian D Warren. © 2019 Kehinde Wiley. Used by permission

These days, Kehinde Wiley is doing more than just painting in his Brooklyn studio. The famed Barack Obama portraitist is establishing an art studio in Lagos, Nigeria, an artist residency in Dakar, Senegal, and a solo exhibit in Paris. Wiley is known for fusing the past with present by painting African Americans in the style of Old Masters paintings. Having grown up in a poor neighborhood of South Central L.A., going to art school in Russia as a preteen, and studying art at Yale University, he broke into the art scene in the early 2000s with his “Hip Hop Honors” series, which consists of paintings of rappers like the Notorious B.I.G. and Ice-T.

Despite painting the Māhū community in Tahiti for an upcoming solo exhibition at Galerie Templon in Paris, his own relationship to the tropics goes beyond the canvas. “New York City is frenetic, hectic,” he says. “I’m planning to head back to Senegal and start working from there instead of New York, at this point.” Wiley first visited Senegal when he was 19 years old, as he was visiting Nigeria in search of his estranged birth father. He returned to paint African youth in 2008. “I was invited there years ago and fell in love with the small simplicity of it, its coastal feel,” he says. “It has more of a manageable bite-sized quality to it. It’s my first stab at doing something in West Africa. It’s almost a training ground.”

SEANKELLY



The entryway to Black Rock Compound, whose doors are made of Cameroonian Amazakoue wood. Ian D Warren. © 2019 Kehinde Wiley. Used by permission.



Details of an apartment for visiting artists. Ian D Warren. © 2019 Kehinde Wiley. Used by permission.

SEANKELLY

Dakar is now his part-time home, a part of the city overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. He won't be alone, as his new Black Rock Senegal residency, opening in June, invites a handful of artists for three-month stints to make artwork on the volcanic coast of Western Africa. Abib Djenne, the Senegalese architect who designed Black Rock Senegal, says the starting point was the surrounding Yoff Virage village, a cliffside overlooking Yoff Bay. "The concept for Black Rock is based on nature, the visual and sensory environment, namely the Ngor seaside setting with its black volcanic rocks," says Djenne. "The architecture is minimal because it is dominated by the environment, which is very strong. I had to be very discreet."

The front doors on the sleek, black buildings are made from Cameroonian Amazakoue wood, which, Djenne says, faces away from "the gate of the departure where the slaves of Gorée left to the Americas," he says. Wiley's studio is 4,000 square feet, while the residency is a 2,000-square-foot space. The living/work space will have artists create with art but also with gastronomy. There will be a kitchen where chefs can blur the lines between art and cuisine.



A chef's kitchen, which will blend art and gastronomy. Ian D Warren. © 2019 Kehinde Wiley. Used by permission.

These luxury villas are separated by a tropical garden, a fountain, a koi pond, and an infinity pool. Inside, the interior design is co-created by Wiley, Senegalese designer Aissa Dione, and Fatiya Djenne (the architect's daughter). There are artworks featured by local artists, such as Ngimbi Luve and Solly Cissé. There is a glass table designed by Ousmane Gueye, who used black volcanic rocks for its base.

SEANKELLY

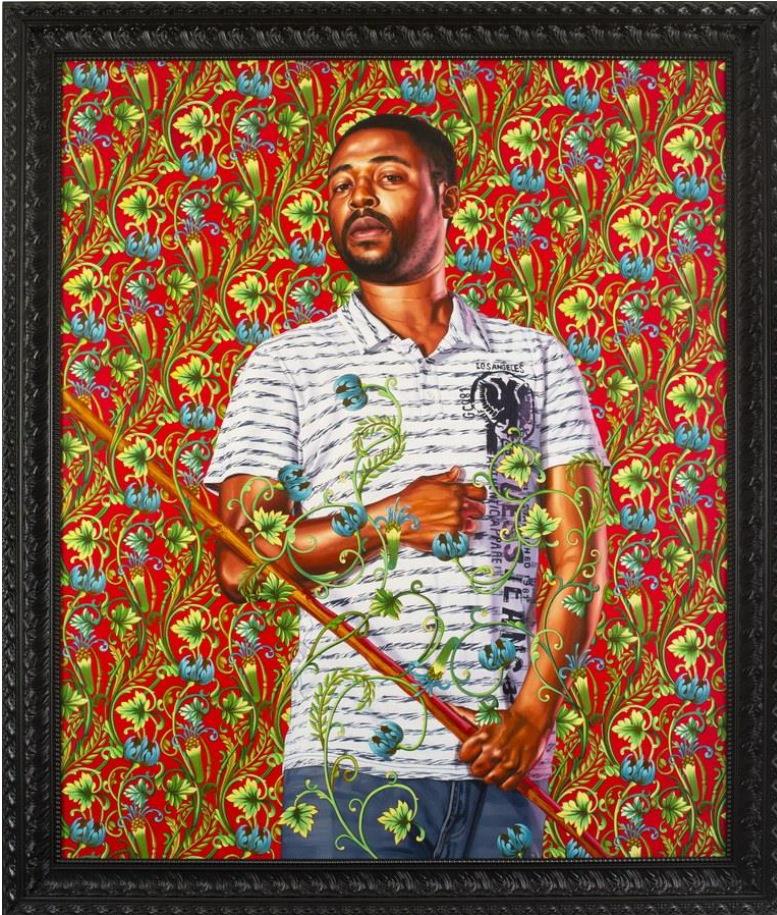
For his forthcoming studio in Lagos, the same city where his estranged father is from, Wiley is working with Ghanaian British architect David Adjaye on the design. “I always wanted to have a space in Lagos,” says Wiley. “I had a site visit with the architect who is going to be putting together something really special in Lagos, I hope.”



Studio space for visiting artists. © 2019 Kehinde Wiley. Used by permission.

Wiley is staying busy with other ventures, too. On May 18, the artist is opening *Tahiti*, a solo exhibition opening at Galerie Templon in Paris, where he'll be showing paintings of a community in Tahiti who consider themselves the third gender between male and female. “It’s following the story of the Māhū trans community there,” he says. “Their history is shot through the rubric of Paul Gauguin and his troubling way of looking at women there. It’s trans portraits à la Kehinde, history, and Gauguin madness.”

SEANKELLY



Portrait of Jazon Ralph, 2018. Oil on canvas. 72 x 60 inches. Photo by B. Huet/Tutti. Courtesy Templon, Brussels and Paris. © 2018 Kehinde Wiley.

The Māhū community of Tahiti are Polynesian people who were highly respected, Wiley explains, until they were banned by Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the 19th century. For this series, the artist has portrayed portraits of trans Tahiti women, in opposition to Gauguin's paintings, which Wiley deems "fraught with historical undertones of colonialism and sexual objectification."

"I am interested in transformation and artifice," Wiley says. "My newest exhibition will engage with the history of France and its outward-facing relationship to black and brown bodies, specifically relating to sexual proclivity." Looking at this Tahitian community through the lens of post-Gauguin and #MeToo was a starting point for paintings and a video installation, which will debut in the exhibition alongside paintings of the residents of Ferguson, Missouri, he created for an exhibit this winter at the St. Louis Art Museum.

"Gauguin features heavily in the imagination of France and her global interface—with that comes an entire history of complicated gazing," he says. "I interrogate, subsume, and participate in discourse about Māhū, about France, and about the invention of gender."