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Friedman, Rosie. "Kehinde Wiley Debuts Sculpture In Times Square Featuring An African American Warrior." *NPR*. October 4, 2019.



The statue, "Rumors of War," is artist Kehinde Wiley's first public work of art. It echoes statues of generals on horseback but this warrior is African American, in dreadlocks and Nike shoes.



TRANSCRIPT

MARY LOUISE KELLY, HOST:

Kehinde Wiley painted the official portrait of President Barack Obama that was unveiled last year. Wiley often shows African Americans in the heroic poses of old masters paintings. His latest work is a piece of public art, a sculpture. And it's sitting in New York City's Times Square before it head south to Richmond. We sent NPR's Rose Friedman to find out what people think about it.

ROSE FRIEDMAN, BYLINE: At first glance, the statue, called Rumors Of War, looks familiar - at least it does to Lawrence Breban and Lorena Roit, who are visiting from Belgium and Spain.

LAWRENCE BREBAN: Actually, you see these in a lot of cities because there was a lot of war going on in the old days.

FRIEDMAN: A man on a horse, a warrior.

BREBAN: Usually it's from 17...

LORENA ROIT: But the guy has a pullover and Nikes.

BREBAN: Nikes?

ROIT: Yeah.

BREBAN: Oh, yeah.

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FRIEDMAN: A pullover and Nikes - while Wiley's statue looks like one of those old monuments, this warrior is young, African American. He's wearing modern clothing. He has dreadlocks.

ADAM HONORE: We actually came to Times Square to see this because he's one of my favorite artists.

FRIEDMAN: Adam Honore is a freelance lighting designer for Broadway shows. He already knew about the bronze man on the horse, which Wiley's publicity says was made as a direct response to the, quote, "ubiquitous Confederate sculptures that populate the United States, particularly in the South," unquote.

HONORE: I'm really kind of taken aback by the way he's looking backwards because it actually is a reflection on how the Confederate statues were built.

FRIEDMAN: Wiley's statue was created for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. In December, it will move there to sit permanently at the museum's entrance. But for now, it's sitting against the flashing lights of Times Square.

TATIANA WALTZ: I mean, I guess Times Square does have cultural significance, but it just seems like an odd place, like it should be near a museum.

FRIEDMAN: Tatiana Waltz of Seattle was a little surprised to see it here. But Rob Tse, who lives in Brooklyn, thought it fit the setting.

ROB TSE: In Times Square, I quite like it because it's kind of subversive, like a silent commentary - right? - on monuments in America.

FRIEDMAN: And Vincent Bowen from Denver agrees.

VINCENT BOWEN: We've had statues that didn't necessarily serve the greater good. And thankfully, we're starting to address some of that.

FRIEDMAN: He noted the recent controversies over the removal of Confederate statues across the country. He thought this was a better solution.

BOWEN: Let's not answer violence with violence. There's something violent about tearing something down. Well, let's put something up so that we can give people the opportunity to be better and to understand, hey, wait a minute. Maybe this is the story we want to tell rather than that story.

FRIEDMAN: Rose Friedman, NPR News, New York.