

TEMPLON



KEHINDE WILEY

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MFAH Opens Archeology of Science, Kehinde Wiley's Monumental Body of Work



The first African-American artist to paint an official US Presidential portrait for the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Kehinde Wiley (b. 1977) is best known for his paintings that render people of colour in the traditional settings of Old Master paintings. Bringing Black and Brown people in the context of the powerful, the majestic, and the sublime, Wiley recuperates their place in history and reorients (art) historical narratives towards issues that need to be urgently addressed.

Wiley's new, monumental body of work is currently on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), in the exhibition *Kehinde Wiley: An Archaeology of Silence*, featuring large-scale portraits and sculptures.



Kehinde Wiley - The Virgin Martyr Cecilia (Ndey Buri), 2021, bronze, courtesy of the artist and Galerie Templon © 2021 Kehinde Wiley

The Archaeology of Violence

The new works were created against the backdrop of the Covid pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and the global rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. Expanding on Kehinde Wiley's *Down* series from 2008, the exhibition meditates on the deaths of Black people slain around the world. The 26 pieces stand as elegies or monuments to the lost individuals, highlighting the systemic violence under which Black people are rendered visible.

"That is the archaeology I am unearthing: The specter of police violence and state control over the bodies of young Black and Brown people all over the world," stated the artist.



Kehinde Wiley - The Death of Hyacinth (Ndey Buri Mboup), 2022, courtesy of the artist and Galerie Templon © 2022 Kehinde Wiley

Inspired by Holbein

Wiley's series *Down* consisted of large-scale portraits of young Black men, inspired by Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1521–22). The painting inspired Wiley to embark on an investigation into the iconography of death and sacrifice in Western art. The present exhibition builds on this research with paintings and sculptures that confront the legacies of colonialism through the iconographic form of a fallen figure. The portrayed individuals are struck down, wounded, resting, or dead, depicted in bodily positions characteristic of fallen heroes, martyrs, or saints.

The exhibition features some of Wiley's largest pieces to date, as well as some of the smallest. The fallen figures reverse the dominant verticality of the artist's previous pieces that were primarily engaged with the ideas of elevation and grace, substituting them here with a bleak perspective of young lives cut short.

As the Covid pandemic narrowed the artist's reach, he predominantly worked with residents, staff, and friends of Black Rock, a residency program he established in 2019 in Dakar, Senegal. However, the works go beyond the local context and expand into metaphors for the many places where oppressed communities experience systemic violence.



Kehinde Wiley - Femme Piquée par un Serpent (Mamadou Gueye), 2022, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris © 2022 Kehinde Wiley

Kehinde Wiley at MFAH

"Kehinde Wiley's elegies, at once sublimely beautiful and deeply disturbing, are profoundly moving, even unforgettable. We are very proud to exhibit them at the Museum and participate in this national tour," commented Gary Tinterow, Director, the Margaret Alkek Williams Chair, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

The exhibition *Kehinde Wiley: An Archaeology of Silence* will be on view at [MFAH](#) in Houston until May 27th, 2024. The show was previously featured at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

Featured image: Kehinde Wiley - Christian Martyr Narcissus, 2022, bronze, private collection, courtesy of the artist and Galerie Templon © 2021 Kehinde Wiley