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#KehindeWiley

# Kehinde Wiley

A NEW REPUBLIC

**EDUCATOR  
RESOURCE GUIDE**

**SAM** SEATTLE  
ART  
MUSEUM

# OVERVIEW

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Organized by the Brooklyn Museum, this exhibition brings together over 50 of Kehinde Wiley's portraits in large-scale paintings, bronze sculptures, and **stained glass** from the last fifteen years. Wiley is one of the leading contemporary American artists, reworking the grand portraiture traditions of Western culture. Wiley began his first series of portraits in the early 2000s during a residency at the Studio Museum in **Harlem**. He set out to recast young African American men from the neighborhood in the style and manner of traditional history painting. Since then he has also painted pop culture stars, although his primary focus remains ordinary people in their own clothes and style. Trained at Yale in the 1990s, Wiley brings a strong understanding of traditional painting techniques to an interest in contemporary issues of identity and power.

Wiley's portraits recreate the poses of European aristocrats, contrasting elaborate and ornate backgrounds with contemporary subjects in their own clothes. These choices draw attention to the lack of images of people of color in historical and contemporary works. SAM's Educator Resource Guide highlights three works from the exhibition and explores ideas about how these works examine personal and cultural identities.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

**“Going to the museums [in Los Angeles] and increasingly throughout the world as an adult, you start to realize that those images of people of color just don't exist. And there's something to be said about simply being visible.”**

Kehinde Wiley, CBC radio interview for Q, February 20, 2014

Born in Los Angeles in 1977, Kehinde Wiley began attending art classes on the weekend with his brother when he was eleven. His work takes this early love of museums and classical painting and melds it with the **hip hop** culture that surrounded him in South Central Los Angeles in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Trained at Yale University, Wiley won an artist in residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2001. Now based in New York, Wiley is most known for his large-scale portrait paintings that present men and women of color in poses taken from classical European aristocratic works.

In 2006, Wiley began to travel and create works by “street casting” locals through a series of works called *The World Stage*. From China, Nigeria and Senegal, India and Sri Lanka, Israel and Brazil, to Jamaica and Haiti, Wiley set everyday people as the subjects of the works of art from their own culture, from the poses to the decorative patterns.

He broadened his work to highlight African American women in the 2012 series *An Economy of Grace*, dressing these women in gowns designed for the series by designer Riccardo Tisci of **Givenchy**. His paintings depict contemporary subjects with flawless technique, rich oil works by an artist well-versed in the compositions of the great European portraits.

Wiley has also created bronze **busts**, wood panel paintings in the style of Flemish master **Hans Memling**, and stained glass. Whatever the medium, Wiley continues to insert contemporary African American culture in unexpected places, reimagining a narrative of Western art history that celebrates the power of the underrepresented and challenging us all to think about power and representation.

# ABOUT THE WORK

## ANTHONY OF PADUA

**“Wiley’s play with source materials is multilateral. It resembles the attitude of a rapper, sampling and recycling from myriad sources.”**

Catharina Manchanda, SAM’s Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, talking about *Anthony of Padua* in *Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic*, p. 141.

Kehinde Wiley’s *Anthony of Padua*, part of SAM’s permanent collection, borrows the pose from a nineteenth-century French stained glass window of **Saint Anthony of Padua**. While the original includes props designed to indicate the saint’s piety, purity, and scholarship, Wiley’s recreation tells the story of a powerful young African American man. From his military style jacket with its black panther patch (a symbol of the 66th Infantry Division of the US Army during World War II later adopted by the **Black Panther Party**) to his large silver octopus necklace, the model portrays a sense of individualism and authority. Yet the portrait plays on historical themes, with the book and staff often found in classical European portraits, along with the elaborate floral background. In the background creeping into the foreground, viewers see another of Wiley’s hallmarks—his detailed floral patterns. Adapted from historical wallpapers and patterns, or in the case of his *World Stage* series from cultural references, these designs add a richness of texture and depth to these luxurious portraits. Like any good hip hop artist, Wiley samples from these well known themes, mashing them up with his own take on what power can look like in our contemporary world to create a compelling work that tells its own unique story.



*Anthony of Padua*, 2013, Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, oil on canvas.

# ABOUT THE WORK



*Anthony of Padua*, 2013, Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, oil on canvas.



*Saint Anthony of Padua*, ca. 1843–1844, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, French, 1780–1867, stained glass window fabricated from the artist's design.

## LOOKING QUESTIONS

*Anthony of Padua* by Kehinde Wiley

### Younger Students

- What is going on in this image?  
What do you see that makes you say that?
- What does the painting make you wonder?
- Describe the person you see.  
What is he wearing? How would you describe his expression?
- What is the mood of this painting?  
How does it make you feel? Why?
- How is this painted portrait different than a photograph of you or your family?
- Imagine that you are having your portrait painted. What would you be wearing and/or holding? Why?

### Additional Questions for Older Students

- Who do you think this man is? What are some characteristics that define who he is? Do you see people like this in mainstream media? Why or why not?
- Compare Kehinde Wiley's *Anthony of Padua* to the original stained-glass window. What did Wiley change? Leave the same? Why do you think the artist made the choices he did?
- How does the background work with the rest of the painting? Would the story change if the sitter was moved to a different setting?
- Describe the man's clothes. How do his clothes help tell us who he is?
- What do you think the artist is trying to say with this painting? How may he be challenging the viewer's assumptions?

# ABOUT THE WORK

## THE TWO SISTERS

**“[My work] explores the middle space where people aren’t being celebrated; tipping scales in favor of those who are typically overlooked and unheard, and then juxtaposing that against the state of grace and strength that royalty occupies.”**

Kehinde Wiley, *Vanity Fair* interview, August 4, 2014

In 2012, Kehinde Wiley moved from painting primarily men, to look at the portrayal of African American women in his series *An Economy of Grace*. Where his early works showed men in their own clothes, this series dressed women Wiley “street casted” in New York in specially designed gowns by Riccardo Tisci of Givenchy and elaborate hairstyles. Like his previous series, Wiley had these **sitters** recreate poses from classical European portraits. High fashion gowns helped Wiley echo the elaborate costumes often designed for the original works of art, as well as the historical relationship between high fashion and portraiture.

*The Two Sisters* gives the sitters a tender and self-assured appearance. The women stand with linked arms looking directly at the viewer. Throughout the work, he plays with light, highlighting the sheen of their ornate hairstyles, the deep luster of their skin, and the translucency of their flowing gowns. He continues to amplify the feminine aspects with the elaborate floral background which seems to spring to life in places like a growing plant, overlapping part of their dresses.



*The Two Sisters*, 2012, Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, oil on linen.

## LOOKING QUESTIONS

*The Two Sisters* by Kehinde Wiley

### Younger Students

- What is going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What does the painting make you wonder?
- What words would you use to describe these women? What do you think their story is?
- Describe the clothing and appearance of these women. How would different clothing change this painting?
- Describe the background. Why do you think the artist chose this background? How would the painting be different if there was a different background?
- How do you feel when you stand next to a sibling or a close family member or friend? What would your painting look like?

### Additional Questions for Older Students

- Why do you think Wiley had a fashion designer create the gowns these women wore? How does this compare to women’s dress in traditional European portraiture? What might the artist be trying to say?
- How are African American women commonly shown in the media? How does this compare to this portrait?

# ABOUT THE WORK

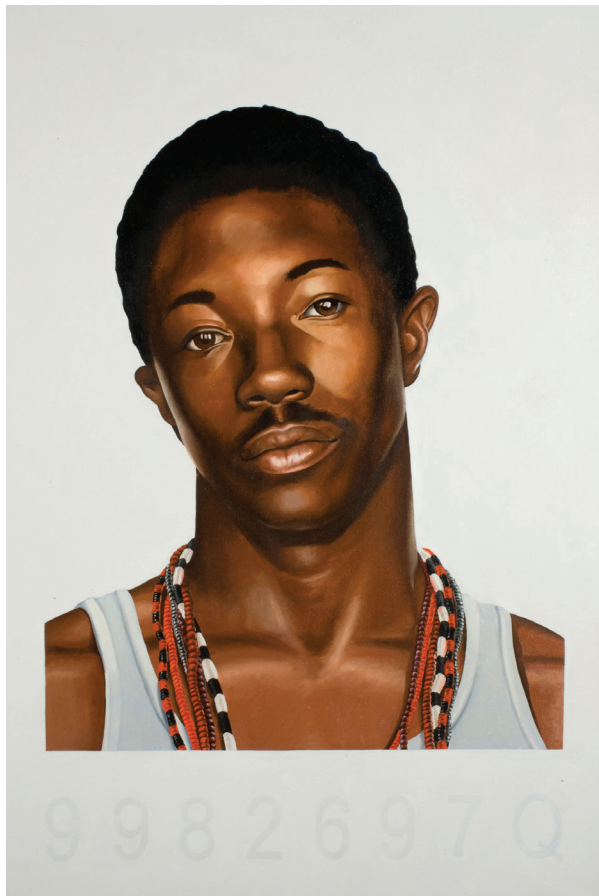
## MUGSHOT STUDY

**“It’s a rebuke of the mugshot, it’s an ability to say ‘I will be seen the way I choose to be seen.’”**

Kehinde Wiley, NPR Interview May 22, 2015, speaking about *Mugshot Study*

In 2001, Wiley found a **mugshot** of a young man, issued by the New York Police Department, while walking down the street near the Studio Museum in Harlem. The mugshot led him to think about how African American men were being portrayed in contemporary society. He pinned this sheet to the wall of his studio, and it helped fuel his work inserting African American men he meets on the street, in their own clothes, into reimagined versions of traditional European portraits.

*Mugshot Study* is smaller than most of Wiley’s work, only 36 inches by 24 inches. In the work, Wiley paints the same young man he found on the police mugshot, in his white tank top with beaded necklaces. The work removes all of the identifying information that was originally on the sheet Wiley found, except for the New York State ID number at the bottom of the painting. What remains is a meticulously painted portrait of the individual, helping the viewer to question their own assumptions and see the man beyond the crime sheet.



*Mugshot Study*, 2006, Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, oil on canvas.

## LOOKING QUESTIONS

*Mugshot Study* by Kehinde Wiley

*This may be an extremely emotional issue for students to talk about if they have a family member or loved one in prison. For tips on how to talk to students about this, see Sydney Gurewitz Clemens’ tips for teachers at [http://eceteacher.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/children\\_with\\_parents\\_in\\_prison.pdf](http://eceteacher.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/children_with_parents_in_prison.pdf).*

### Younger Students

- What is going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What does the painting make you wonder?
- Think about the artist’s choices—how do you think he wants us to see the person in this portrait? Why?

### Additional Questions for Older Students

- Describe the choices the artist makes, in terms of colors and shadows. How do these decisions impact the tone of the work?
- What do you think the number means? Why do you think Wiley chose to include it in his painting?
- Do you think the artist interrupts stereotypes through his artwork? Why or why not?

# ART ACTIVITY

## DESCRIPTION

All three of Kehinde Wiley's works ask us to think about how people of color are represented in art and the world around us. The art activity below will have students think critically about positive images of themselves and the power of seeing yourself through someone else's eyes.

## MATERIALS

Pencil

8.5" x 11" white paper

Photocopies of 5-10 portraits—either from newspapers, magazines, online, or from a yearbook

Paint, water soluble oil pastels, markers, or colored pencils

## STEPS

### One

Start with a discussion through close looking by using the questions provided in this document.

### Two

Ask students to brainstorm on two different topics: first, have them think about someone they find beautiful and then, as a class, come up with a list of terms to describe a beautiful person; second, ask students to share words that they would use to describe themselves. As a class, compare these two lists. What is the same? Different? Why do they think these words might be different? Encourage students to see themselves as beautiful, talking about how they can see negative terms they might use to describe themselves in a more positive light.

### Three

Ask students to choose five of the beautiful words the class just came up with and write them across the top of a piece of paper. Under each of the five words, have them sketch either a part of themselves or an object that they would use to fit the word. Alternatively, have older students take pictures of themselves with their phones with a pose and objects that fit their beautiful words.

### Four

Have students pair up and share their five beautiful words and sketches. Then give each pair copies of the portraits you prepared. Have the pair swap beautiful lists and sketches, then each person will pick a portrait that fits their partner's list/drawings.

### Five

Using colored pencils, markers, water soluble wax pastels, and/or paints, have students recreate the portraits, inserting their partner into the work, highlighting the ideas from the beautiful sketches.

### Six

Share the final work with the class and ask students to think about their portrait:

- What do you think of your portrait?
- How does it make you feel to see yourself in a portrait?
- How did your partner's artistic choices impact your portrait? Name one choice the artist might have made differently—how does this change the work?

## ACTIVITY EXTENSIONS

Stained glass is created by juxtaposing shapes made out of glass to create a work of art. Have students create a stained glass portrait. After completing the activity above, have students create a background using stencils, shapes, or tracers to make patterns (outline in crayon first and paint over with watercolors to make a water color resist). Then cut out their portraits and glue them onto their “stained glass” backgrounds.

## FOR OLDER STUDENTS

- Have students find positive and negative images of a group of people or person in the news today (for example, a celebrity or people from a specific culture). Talk about how these images create a certain tone—what choices did the photographer make that set a tone? Ask students to create their own drawing of this person/persons. Have a class discussion about the choices they made. How might their portraits change how people feel about the person/persons?
- Kehinde Wiley borrows or “samples” not just from portrait painting, but also the decorative patterns that make up the background of his works. Ask students to write a poem about themselves, incorporating the beautiful words they identified earlier, and sampling from a song or story. Students can be encouraged to pick a contemporary work, or borrow ideas from a classical or historical work. Have students share their poems with the class and talk about how sampling from another source impacted their work. How does this change their work?



# GLOSSARY

## **Black Panther Party**

Founded in 1966 in Oakland, California, an organization dedicated to black power. Chapters in major cities across the country were dedicated to helping urban black communities. Active into the early 1970s, the party combined community service with armed patrols that followed the police through black neighborhoods.

## **Bust**

Usually a sculpture, a work of art depicting the head, neck, and upper chest.

## **Givenchy**

An elite fashion house established by Hubert de Givenchy in 1952. Givenchy retired in 1988, passing the line to well-known designers like Alexander McQueen, John Galliano, and Riccardo Tisci. The line was a favorite of Audrey Hepburn and Jacqueline Kennedy and is known for a classical style that highlights a woman's femininity.

## **Hans Memling (active 1465–1494)**

Born in Germany, but active in Bruges in present-day Belgium, Memling was known for his devotional portraits of the wealthy merchant class, often for altars. His works uses precise technique to create an unembellished but approachable work.

## **Harlem**

A neighborhood of New York City on the island of Manhattan, known historically for its thriving African American community.

## **Hip hop**

Begun in the mid-1970s in the South Bronx part of New York City, a style of music and fashion centered in live performance in clubs and parties. By the early 1980s, hip hop became a movement across America, leading to the explosion of rap and hip hop culture in the 1990s. Centered in urban black culture, hip hop encompasses music, art, literature, fashion, and politics.

## **Mugshot**

A photograph of a person's face, used by law enforcement to track or apprehend suspects.

## **Saint Anthony of Padua (1195–1231)**

Originally from Lisbon, Portugal from a wealthy family, Anthony travelled to Morocco as a member of the Franciscan order, a Catholic order known for social works. Eventually settling in Padua in present-day northern Italy, he was made a saint for his work teaching Catholic theology.

## **Sitter**

The subject of a portrait, who poses or "sits" for the work of art.

## **Stained glass**

Colored glass with a leaded frame that is used like a mosaic to create a work of art, often in church windows.

# STANDARDS

## WASHINGTON STATE EDUCATION STANDARDS

### THE ARTS

#### Arts 1

The student understands and applies arts knowledge and skills.

#### Arts 2

The student demonstrates thinking skills using artistic processes.

#### Arts 4

The student makes connections within and across the arts to other disciplines, life, cultures, and work.

### COMMUNICATION

#### Communication 3

The student uses communication skills and strategies to present ideas and one's self in a variety of situations.

### WRITING

#### Writing 2

The student writes in a variety of forms for different audiences and purposes.

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

#### Anchor Standards for Reading

##### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

##### Production and Distribution of Writing 4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

##### Comprehension and Collaboration 1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

##### Comprehension and Collaboration 2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

# STANDARDS

## MATH STANDARDS

### Anchor Standards for Geometry

#### Identify and Describe Shapes

K.G.A.1. Describe objects in the environment using names of shapes, and describe the relative positions of these objects using terms such as above, below, beside, in front of, behind, and next to.

#### Analyze, Compare, Create, and Compose Shapes

K.G.B.5. Model shapes in the world by building shapes from components (e.g., sticks and clay balls) and drawing shapes.

## NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

### CREATING

#### Anchor Standard 1

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

#### Anchor Standard 2

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

### RESPONDING

#### Anchor Standard 7

Perceive and analyze artistic work.

#### Anchor Standard 8

Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

### CONNECTING

#### Anchor Standard 10

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

#### Anchor Standard 11

Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.



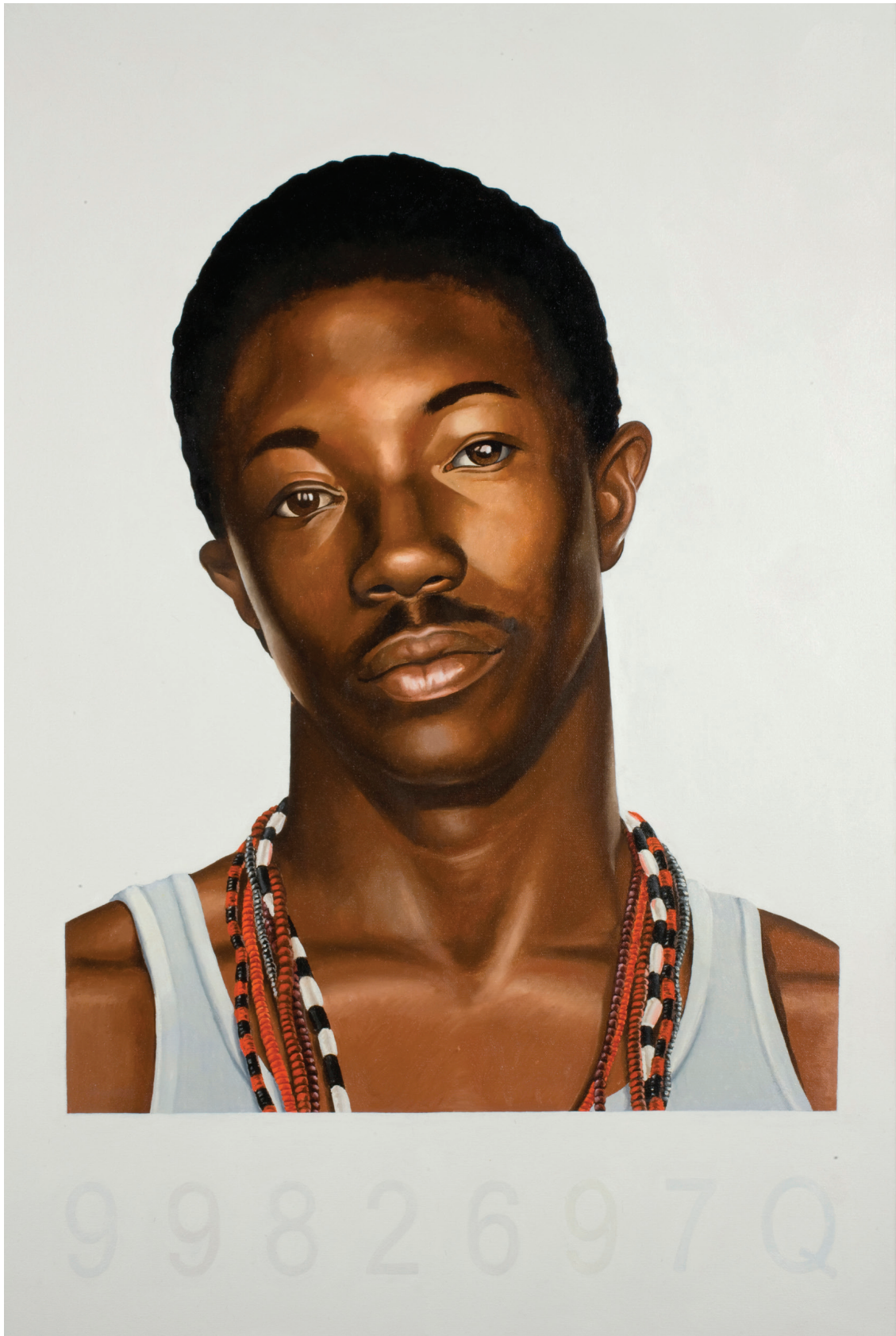
*Anthony of Padua*, 2013, Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in., Seattle Art Museum, Gift of the Contemporary Collectors Forum, 2013.8. © Kehinde Wiley. Photo: Max Yawney, courtesy of Roberts & Tilton, Culver City, California.



*Saint Anthony of Padua*, ca. 1843–1844, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, French, 1780–1867, stained glass window fabricated from the artist's design, 86 5/8 x 36 3/8 in. Chapelle St.-Ferdinand, Porte des Ternes, Paris. Photo: Philippe Bedin.



*The Two Sisters*, 2012, Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, oil on linen, 96 x 72 in., Collection of Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr. © Kehinde Wiley. Photo: Jason Wyche.



*Mugshot Study*, 2006, Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in., The Sender Collection, New York.  
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