

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Kehinde Wiley

In Search of the Miraculous

24 November 2017—
27 January 2018

Film screening at The British Film
Institute, London
22 November 2017, 8.35pm

Private view Thursday
23 November 2017, 6 - 8pm



Stephen Friedman Gallery is proud to present internationally renowned American artist Kehinde Wiley's second exhibition at the gallery entitled, 'In Search of the Miraculous'. This exhibition marks a crucial moment in Wiley's career, as he sets out to push both his artistic process and social critique in to new territory.

Presenting nine new paintings and his first three-channel artist film, Wiley interweaves the canon of art history with present day politics to investigate key subjects of migration, madness and isolation in contemporary America. This comes at a critical time when the current political administration is seeking to fortify land and sea borders with an agenda that resonates globally.

In this exciting new body of work, Wiley departs from the singular portrait style for which he is most celebrated and engages with both classical romanticism and epic maritime allegorical painting. In a series of seascape paintings, Wiley captures dramatic scenes of men battling perilous waves at sea and more contemplative and serene portraits of men on shorelines. Here the artist crucially replaces the bold patterned textile backgrounds of previous work with darker, more earthy tones that evoke the unyielding nature of the sea.

Wiley consistently positions his practice firmly in the realism of the everyday and draws inspiration from classical portraiture while appropriating the tropes of historical paintings to engage contemporary subjects. Selecting local young men

from the rough areas of remote island nations, Wiley begins by photographing his subjects in the mirrored pose of a specific historical painting. These are ordinary men wearing their own clothing and, as with previous works, each one is valorised with the same significance as their paired historical source.

In developing this compelling body of work, Wiley reinterprets seascapes by J.M.W. Turner, Winslow Homer and Hieronymus Bosch, and drives forward a striking new visual style that pronounces his unparalleled painting skill. This new series retains Wiley's familiar figurative aesthetic and at the same time expands the scope and ambition of his painting.

The exhibition's title is taken from performance artist Bas Jan Ader's 1975 artwork 'In Search of the Miraculous', in which the artist attempted a solo Atlantic Ocean crossing and was never seen again. Poignantly, in Wiley's colossal and emblematic interpretation of Winslow Homer's 'The Fog Warning', a lone man is seen rowing his boat pitching in the waves on a rough sea. Flanked by an ominous skyline and choppy seas, his situation seems perilous and, as with the original, his fate remains unclear.

The pitch of the small boat in Wiley's 'The Herring Net (Zakary Antoine and Samedy Pierre Louisson)' shows two figures galvanized into action by the dark tempest that has suddenly obscured the sky. The men use the weight of their bodies on the edge of the boat to struggle against crested waves. The water in the foreground is plunged into deep shadow and the ominous change in light above the horizon implies impending danger. These paintings demonstrate the intense human perseverance needed to avert disaster and serve as a meditation on the struggles of mankind in a turbulent universe.

The romantic and heroic allusions in these paintings are counterpointed with satire and political commentary, most poignant in Wiley's painting 'Ship of Fools' inspired by the Hieronymus Bosch's painting of the same title. Wiley's painting reinterprets the cast of fools who are in the grips of madness. The archetypal 'Ship of Fools' has been reiterated throughout art history and classical literature and here serves as a central influence for Wiley.

'Narrenschiff', (Ship of Fools), is Wiley's first three-channel film and features the same young men who are the subjects of the paintings.

The film, which features an original score by composer Maxim Budnick, is narrated by acclaimed actress C.C.H. Pounder who reads from Michel Foucault's 'Madness and Civilization' and Frantz Fanon's 'The Wretched of the Earth'. A collage of wide-panning shots explores three interwoven scenes; enigmatic faces peer above the water's edge straight into the camera's lens; figures silently stand in groups contemplating the ocean; and a bird's-eye view follows men swimming as a collective. 'Narrenschiff', like the accompanying paintings, sympathetically expands on the theme of mankind's enduring relationship with the ocean but also suggests wider concerns of international territories and governance.

Throughout art history, the precarious lives of men living and working at sea has often been depicted tinged with madness and illness. 'In Search of the Miraculous' captures the full spectrum of the human condition and delivers in epic proportions the artist's grand narrative.

Gallery Hours

Tuesday to Friday, 10am–6pm
and Saturday, 11am–5pm

Social Media

Facebook: /Stephen-Friedman-Gallery

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For sales enquiries please contact:

sales@stephenfriedman.com

For further details please contact:

robert@stephenfriedman.com

Rosie O'Reilly, Scott & Co:

rosie@scott-andco.com

Kehinde Wiley was born in 1977 in Los Angeles, USA. He currently lives and works in New York, USA and Beijing, China.

Wiley will be part of the landmark exhibition 'Michael Jackson: On the Wall', at the Nation Portrait Gallery, London which opens in June 2018.

From 2015-2017 Kehinde Wiley had a major touring exhibition entitled 'Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic' which visited: Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York, USA; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas; Seattle Art Museum, Washington; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia; Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona; Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio; and the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, Oklahoma.

Other solo exhibitions include; 'Lamentation', Petit Palais, Paris, France (2016), 'Arts For All: Kehinde Wiley', Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, Florida, USA (2014); 'Kehinde Wiley: Memling', Taft Museum, Ohio, USA (2014); 'The World Stage: Israel', Boise Art Museum, Boise, USA (2013), travelling from The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, USA (2013) and The Jewish Museum, New York, USA (2012); 'Kehinde Wiley: Memling', Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona, USA (2013); 'Selected Works', SCAD Museum of Art, Georgia, USA (2011); 'The World Stage: Africa, Lagos-Dakar', The Studio Museum, Harlem, New York, USA (2008); 'Focus: Kehinde Wiley', Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, USA (2008); 'Kehinde Wiley', Portland Art Museum, Oregon, USA (2007); 'The World Stage: China', John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Milwaukee, USA (2007) and 'Columbus', Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, USA (2006).

Recent group exhibitions include; 'Africa Pop Studio', Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, USA (2017); 'ALL THINGS BEING EQUAL...', Zeits Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, Cape Town, South Africa (2017); Harlem: Found Ways, The Ethelbert Cooper Gallery of African & African American Art, Harvard University, Cambridge USA (2017); '30 Americans', Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio, USA and Tacoma Art Museum, Washington, USA (2016-17); 'A Material Legacy: The Nancy A. Nasher and David J. Haemseigger Collection of Contemporary Art', Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, New Jersey, USA (2016); 'Open This End: Contemporary Art from the Collection of Blake Byrne', Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; travels Ohio State University Arts Space, Columbus, Ohio; Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, New York; Ronna and Eric Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art, Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon, USA (2015-16); 'Black SoCal: Art in Practice in an Evolving Landscape', Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2015).

Wiley's work features in the permanent collections of numerous prominent institutions including The Jewish Museum, New York; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn; Studio Museum, Harlem; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, Texas; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Seattle Museum of Art, Seattle; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis and The Zabłudowicz Collection, London, England.