

# Stephen Friedman Gallery

It's Nice That

Kehinde Wiley portraits of Dalston women to show at William Morris Gallery

Jenny Brewer

18 November 2019

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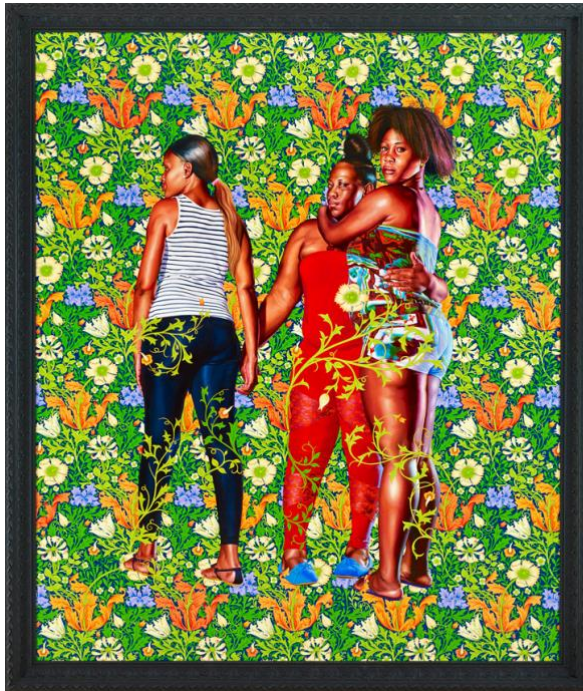


Image: Kehinde Wiley: Naomi and Her Daughters (2013)

© 2019 Kehinde Wiley. Courtesy of Stephen Friedman Gallery.

LA-born, New York-based artist Kehinde Wiley is known for his glorious portraits of black subjects on decorative floral backgrounds, which have often looked to British arts and crafts pioneer William Morris for visual inspiration. In 2018 he became the first black artist to paint an [official US presidential portrait](#), selected by and depicting Barack Obama for the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery (alongside Amy Sherald who depicted Michelle); while his previous subjects included Notorious B.I.G., Grandmaster Flash and Ice T. Now, his artistic focus has turned to the women of Dalston, east London, for a show of new works to be displayed at William Morris Gallery, in nearby Walthamstow – the artist's first solo exhibition at a public institution in the UK.

The location for the show hints at Wiley's long-term fascination with William Morris and his floral motifs, which he has sourced for his paintings for over 15 years. For the series, titled *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the models are depicted in "reimagined fields inspired by the Morris oeuvre," a statement from the gallery states. William Morris Gallery is based in the designer's family home, and houses the world's largest collection of his work.

*The Yellow Wallpaper* is Wiley's first series to focus on exclusively female subjects and is a visual response to a well-known feminist text of the same name by American novelist Charlotte Perkins Gilman. "*The Yellow Wallpaper* is a work of literary fiction that explores the contours of femininity and insanity," explains Wiley. "This exhibition seeks to use the language of the decorative to reconcile blackness, gender, and a beautiful and terrible past."

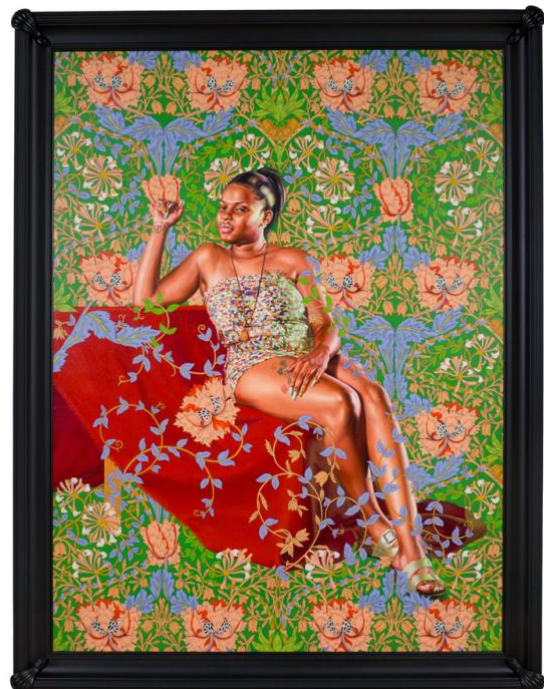


Image: Kehinde Wiley: Saint Jerome Hearing the Trumpet of Last Judgment (2018)

© 2019 Kehinde Wiley. Courtesy of Roberts Projects.

Published in 1892, the short story tells the semi-autobiographical tale of a woman diagnosed with hysteria, living in one room and forbidden from working as a form of treatment. In turn, it explores the consequences of denying women independence. In

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response, each of Wiley's portraits depicts his subjects as autonomous, empowered, and an "emblem of strength within a society of complicated social networks". Gilman also has links to William Morris, having socialised and collaborated with the designer's daughter May Morris.

The gallery explains in a statement: "Wiley's portraits offer a rubric through which to engage with the beautiful yet fraught histories and traditions that black women – and all women – are heir to."

Kehinde Wiley: *The Yellow Wallpaper* opens at William Morris Gallery from 22 February – 25 May 2020.