

## Stephen Friedman Gallery

The Guardian

Kehinde Wiley's Equestrian Portrait of King Philip II (Michael Jackson): classical kitsch

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6 July 2018

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## Kehinde Wiley's Equestrian Portrait of King Philip II (Michael Jackson): classical kitsch

The American painter known for his naturalistic and progressive work depicts the King of Pop in the majestic glory of old masters



Kehinde Wiley's Equestrian Portrait of King Philip II (Michael Jackson), 2010. Photograph: Serge Hasenböhler/Stephen Friedman Gallery/Sean Kelly Gallery

### The man who would be king ...

In Kehinde Wiley's 2010 commissioned portrait of Michael Jackson, the King of Pop is presented in the guise of a monarch of yore, atop a steed, in deluxe armour.

### Man in the mirror ...

It is not intended as a reverent copy of the Rubens portrait referenced in the title. The original's angel here becomes a pair of infant cherubs, there are flowers and Wiley's horse has better hair.

### Look again ...

What's most important is the switcheroo Wiley has worked on art history and the power structures enshrined in works by the old masters: a world ruled by rich, straight, white men.

### Got your money ...

It's brazenly kitsch and it's meant to be. Wiley's glittering career has seen him depict street-cast black men, hip-hop stars and Barack Obama in this revisionist style.

### Double trouble ...

However, his work has an intentionally troubling edge. His body-beautiful models are both celebrated and uncomfortably objectified.