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The US artist is 'known for highlighting the absence or relegation of black figures within European art'.



Image: Kehinde Wiley (Abdoulaye Ndao)

Kehinde Wiley, the first black artist to paint an official portrait of a US president with his depiction of Barack Obama, will hold an exhibition at the National Gallery.

The US artist is known for “highlighting the absence or relegation of black figures within European art”. A free exhibition of Wiley’s new work will go on show in Trafalgar Square this winter. Instead of portraiture, he will look at artistic conventions in the European landscape tradition in the exhibition.

The National Gallery said Wiley’s work raises “questions about power, privilege and identity”.

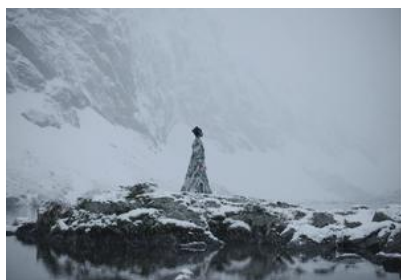


Image: Film still from In Search of the Miraculous 2021 (Kehinde Wiley. Courtesy of Stephen Friedman Gallery and Galerie Templon)

His portraits “render people of colour in the traditional settings of Old Master paintings”, it said.

National Gallery director Gabriele Finaldi said: “We have been in conversation with Kehinde Wiley since early 2019 about working together on National Gallery Collection-related themes. “He will be engaging with the sublime landscape tradition in Western painting and I look forward to his strong and distinctive take on this subject.”

The new exhibition will be Wiley’s first collaboration with a major UK gallery. It will explore European Romanticism and its focus on epic scenes of oceans and mountains, and humankind’s relationship with nature. A film will feature black Londoners that Wiley met and cast for a film on the streets around the National Gallery. Wiley was commissioned to paint president Obama in 2017. The artist also painted the final portrait commissioned of Michael Jackson before his death. It depicted the King of Pop in full body armour and a blue cape astride a white horse with cherubs flying above his head.