

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Ocula
Kehinde Wiley Pivots From Portraits to Landscapes in New Show
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15 February 2021

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Organised by London's National Gallery, the exhibition will include both paintings and a film when it premieres later this winter.

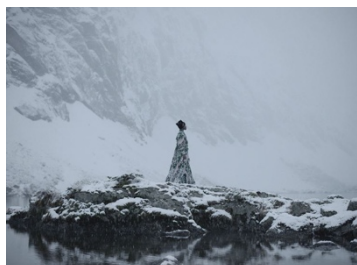


Image: Kehinde Wiley, *In Search of the Miraculous* (film still) (2021). Video. Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery and Galerie Templon.

Kehinde Wiley made his name painting portraits of Black subjects rendered in the style of Old Masters. In a new exhibition announced by the National Gallery, London, he will try his hand at something different.

'[Kehinde Wiley] will be engaging with the sublime landscape traditions in Western painting and I look forward to his strong and distinctive take on this subject,' said Dr Gabriele Finaldi, Director of the National Gallery.

The works will enter a dialogue with landscape and seascape paintings by Romantic painters in the National Gallery's collection such as Claude Lorrain, Caspar David Friedrich, J. M. W. Turner, and Claude-Joseph Vernet. While the exhibition's title and dates have not yet been decided, the National Gallery announced that Wiley will exhibit both paintings and a film whose actors he cast from the Black Londoners he met around the National Gallery.

This isn't the first time Wiley has worked in film. His video installation *Narrenschiff* premiered at the British Film Institute in 2017. The work took inspiration from the theme 'Ship of Fools', an allegory about a vessel with an incompetent crew that gained currency in Europe from the late 15th century. In the work, Wiley depicted a group of black men stranded at sea—a metaphor for centuries of migration and social dislocation.

Born in Los Angeles, Wiley typically paints young, anonymous subjects, elevating them through majestic and lavishly decorated settings. He has also painted well-known figures, though, such as Michael Jackson, who commissioned a portrait in 2007.

Wiley's most famous portrait yet is of Barack Obama, which shows the former US president seated and surrounded by green foliage and flora that reference his background—blue lilies for Kenya, jasmine for Hawaii, and chrysanthemums for Chicago. Along with Amy Sherald's portrait of former first lady Michelle Obama, Wiley's *President Barack Obama* doubled attendance at the National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C., when it was unveiled in 2018.

Finaldi said plans for the National Gallery's collaboration with Wiley began soon thereafter in early 2019.