

# Stephen Friedman Gallery

The Evening Standard  
'Life-changing' Kehinde Wiley portrait goes on show at V&A  
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Image: Courtesy of the V&A

A young EastEnder has described the “life-changing” moment she saw her portrait on the wall at the V&A.

Melissa Thompson was walking through Ridley Road market in Dalston when she was spotted by US artist Kehinde Wiley, who shot to fame when he painted Barack Obama's presidential portrait.

The resulting two-metre oil painting was first shown at the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow but has now been bought by the V&A.

Thompson, who grew up in Hackney and now lives in Ilford, was with her family when she was approached by the painter.



Image: Courtesy of the V&A

She said: “It was such a surreal moment when Kehinde Wiley approached me at Ridley Road Market and asked to take my portrait – I never thought I would end up in a museum.

“His work is so unique and powerful, it was a really life-changing thing for me. I love this portrait – it captures a moment in time. Seeing it on the wall at the V&A feels really special – I can now see parts of my own culture and east London represented in a museum.”

Los Angeles-born Wiley made his name by creating Old Master style portraits of people of colour and made history in 2018 when he became the first African-American artist to paint an official U.S. Presidential portrait for the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery.

The painting of Ms Thompson will eventually become part of the collection at the V&A's new site in Stratford which is set to start opening in 2024.