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Press release
2 April, 2019

Tahiti - Kehinde Wiley

18 May – 20 July 2019

Press Conference with the artist: Friday May 17, 2019 at 4 PM

Opening: Saturday May 18, 2019 from 12 PM to 8 PM



Kehinde Wiley on location filming in Tahiti

« I am interested in transformation and artifice. My newest exhibition will engage with the history of France and its outward facing relationship to black and brown bodies, specifically relating to sexual proclivity. Gauguin features heavily in the imagination of France and her global interface – with that comes an entire history of complicated gazing. I interrogate, subsume, and participate in discourse about Māhū, about France, and about the invention of gender. »

– Kehinde Wiley, 2019

Kehinde Wiley, star of the American art scene and Barack Obama's official portrait artist, is back in Paris. For his first Parisian exhibition since the 2016 show at Petit Palais, he will be unveiling a new series of paintings and a video-installation based on his time spent this past year in Tahiti.

Wiley's new works are focused on Tahiti's Māhū community, the traditional Polynesian classification of people of a third gender, between male and female. The Māhū were highly respected within their society until they were banned by Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Wiley's portraits of beautiful, transgender Tahitian women reference and confront Paul Gauguin's celebrated works, which also feature subjects from the transgender community, but are fraught with historical undertones of colonialism and sexual objectification. Building off of Wiley's earlier portraits that addressed issues of masculine identity and virility, these new portraits explore issues of identity through the lens of transformation, exploring both artifice and artificiality as a trans-cultural phenomenon.

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Over the past fifteen years, Wiley has developed a remarkable body of work that at once questions and participates in the western art-historical canon of portraiture. Wiley's encounter with Tahiti joins with the artist's continued journey across the contemporary world, following his explorations of North America, South Asia, and West Africa. Wiley's focus on Tahiti now offers the opportunity to re-examine France, its colonial history, and its image through the prism of Gauguin's work. True to his oeuvre, this exhibition presents a uniquely political and aesthetic perspective on the power of art to shift perception and to make visible history's forgotten figures.

Biography

Kehinde Wiley was born in Born in 1977 in Los Angeles. He currently lives and works between New York, Beijing, and Dakar.

Kehinde Wiley graduated from Yale University in 2001 and completed a residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2002. In 2018 he became the first African-American artist to paint an official U.S. Presidential portrait for the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery. Former U.S. President Barack Obama selected the artist for this honor.

Kehinde Wiley has held solo exhibitions at institutions across the United States and Europe including: Brooklyn Museum, New York; Bozar Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas; the Petit Palais, Paris; Saint Louis Museum of Art, Missouri; and Seattle Art Museum, Washington. His works are included in the collections of numerous public institutions.

In June 2019 in Dakar, Senegal, Kehinde Wiley will inaugurate a new multi-disciplinary artist-in-residency program, Black Rock Senegal.