
Overview:

In this “Master Series Lecture” at the Toledo Museum of Art, acclaimed artist Kehinde Wiley recalls the motivation for and direction of his works.

Summary:

Artist Kehinde Wiley reflects on his time as an artist-in-residency with the Studio Museum in Harlem and describes the inspiration for his works. His portraits draw their style from Classical European art while maintaining content from Wiley’s own culture. In this excerpt, “Kehinde Wiley: Reconciling European Tradition and Modern Culture,” the artist offers a unique perspective on cultural representations through art and the state of contemporary black culture.

ODE 9-12 STANDARD: *Social Studies; Course, Contemporary World Issues; Topic 1, Civic Participation and Skills; Topic 2, Civil and Human Rights*

Discussion Questions:

1. Wiley mentions having a “love affair with classical painting ... a love affair on the other side of the fence,” but insists on stressing a different narrative in his portraiture from what they have traditionally included (grand manor houses, opulent possessions, etc.). What struggles may exist between use of traditional European art forms and the depiction of non-white individuals?
2. What are some examples of art emphasizing the white, straight, male narrative? How does Wiley work to break these boundaries?
3. In what other ways can artists of any medium (music, dance, film, etc.) continue to challenge cultural assumptions and artistic expression?

Activity:

Allow students to brainstorm a list of movies, musical albums, or books that contain a non-white, feminist, or LGBTQ main character. Then, ask in what specific ways these works seek to break down stereotypes and whether or not the work succeeds in that effort.

Resources:

About Kehinde Wiley: <http://kehindewiley.com/>
NPR Interview with Kehinde Wiley: <https://www.npr.org/>
Kehinde Wiley on Painting the Powerless. And a President: <https://www.nytimes.com/>

