

CONTEMPORARY & AFRICAN ART COLLECTION

Kehinde Wiley

Dogon Couple

2008

Oil on canvas

96 × 84 in. (243.8 × 213.4 cm)

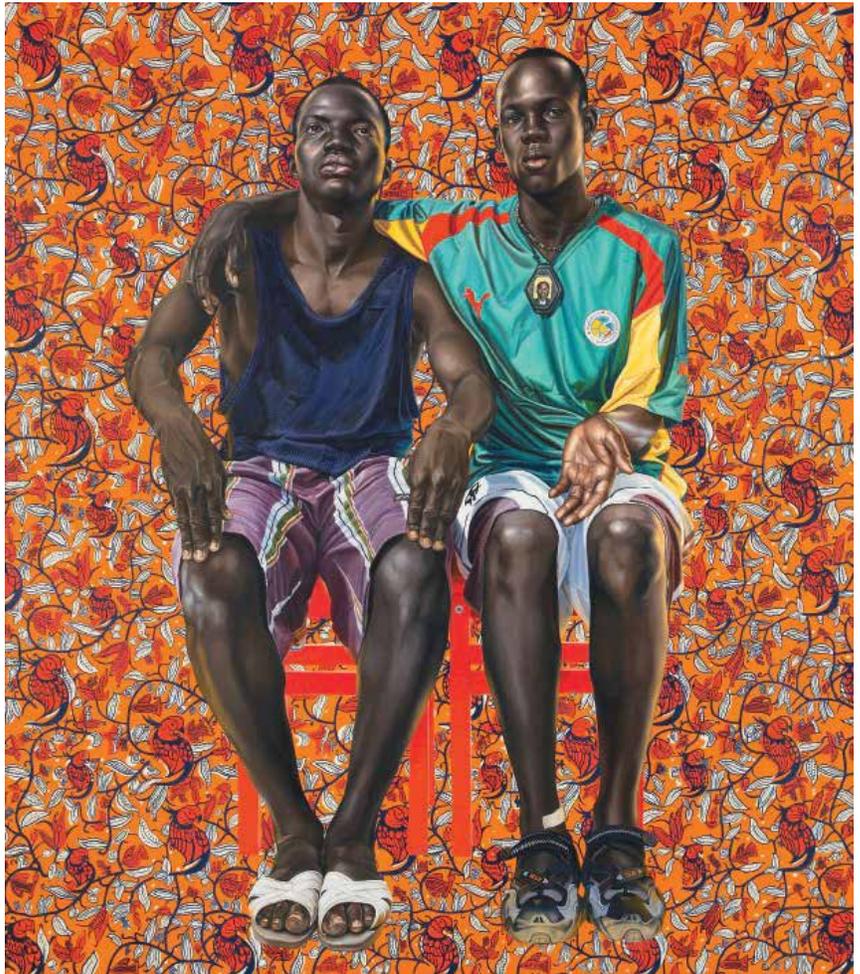
Museum purchase, funds provided by the David A. Cofrin Acquisition Endowment and Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Fund

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Kehinde Wiley is best known for appropriating the high-art conventions of European portrait paintings in large-scale depictions of urban black men. These subjects are based on photographs of young men he encounters on the street, from Harlem's 125th Street to the South Central neighborhood of Los Angeles. Wiley's models assume the heroic poses of privileged and elite figures portrayed in art history books. The men are set against ornate backgrounds and within opulent frames; however, they retain their hip-hop attire. Through the devices of irony and parody, Wiley challenges accepted notions of history, power, and representation and creates juxtapositions that are provocative and ambiguous.

Wiley's recent project *The World Stage: Africa, Lagos-Dakar* looks to the heroic figures of Africa's postcolonial public sculpture, figures that embody and celebrate ideas such as independence, nationalism, and ethnic diversity. *Dogon Couple* is modeled after an archetypal West African sculpture from the Dogon people of Mali, an ancient symbol of creation, productivity, and the interdependence between man and woman. In Wiley's corresponding painting, the two young men assume the same pose.

Dressed in hip-hop clothing, Wiley's subjects demonstrate the reach of global economy and culture. The design of the painting's ornate backdrop alludes to an even earlier



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stage of global economy. It is patterned after *kaftan*—a popular cloth in Africa that was originally imported by the Dutch from Southeast Asia and eventually evolved into an emblem of African identity. One young man wears a pendant bearing the image of Leopold Sédar Senghor, former president of Senegal and one of Africa's most acclaimed poets. Senghor is known for coining the term "négritude," which identifies and asserts the power of black people across borders. Throughout his work, Wiley uses the chronicle of public art to examine historical and contemporary representations of global power and disenfranchisement.

