

Harn Museum of Art

Educator Resource



Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, *Dogon Couple*, 2008, Oil on Canvas, 96 x 7 ft. (243.8 x 213.4 cm), Museum purchase, funds provided by the David A. Cofrin Acquisition Endowment and Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Fund



Norman Wilfred Lewis, American, 1909–1979, *Untitled (Subway Station)*, 1945, Oil and sand on canvas, On loan from Art Bridges

**How is community
portrayed in art?**

**How can our communities
inspire art-making?**

KEHINDE WILEY

Kehinde Wiley is a New York based painter from Los Angeles who works in the art historical tradition of portrait painting. The subjects in Wiley's paintings are based on photographs of young men and women found on the street, mostly from Harlem's 125th Street or from the South Central neighborhood where he was born.

Wiley's representations of young people of color depict unexpected positions of power. He paints everyday people and as a result, heightens their representation within the museum through large-scale paintings. His artworks encourage us to reflect on personal and cultural histories embodied in the human form, to challenge ourselves to inquire past the surface.



Micaiah Carter for TIME

Dogon Couple is part of a series that looks to heroic figures of Africa's post-colonial public sculpture. Wiley's painting is based on one of the most celebrated examples of Dogon art that can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection.

The painting's ornate backdrop is patterned after *kaftan*, a traditional African cloth originally imported by the Dutch from Southeast Asia. One man wears a pendant bearing the image of Leopold Sédar Senghor, former poet and president of Senegal.

Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, *Dogon Couple*, 2008, Oil on Canvas, 96 x 7 ft. (243.8 x 213.4 cm), Museum purchase, funds provided by the David A. Cofrin Acquisition Endowment and Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Fund



KEHINDE WILEY



Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, *Dogon Couple*, 2008, Oil on Canvas, 96 x 7 ft. (243.8 x 213.4 cm), Museum purchase, funds provided by the David A. Cofrin Acquisition Endowment and Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Fund



Dogon Peoples, Mali, *Figure: Seated Couple*, 18th – early 19th century, Wood and metal, 28 ³/₄ in. (73 cm), Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think is the relationship between the two figures depicted in this painting? Does the pose influence your understanding of their relationship?
- What is the relationship between the patterned background and the figures in the foreground? How does their placement impact your understanding of the work as a whole?
- What kind of community do you think these figures belong to?
- What can we learn from studying other cultures and communities?
- Does this painting remind you of your community? How do you relate or differ?



Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, *Dogon Couple*, 2008, Oil on Canvas, 96 x 7 ft. (243.8 x 213.4 cm), Museum purchase, funds provided by the David A. Cofrin Acquisition Endowment and Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Fund

NORMAN LEWIS

Norman Lewis was born in Harlem, New York City, to Caribbean immigrant parents, and lived in New York most of his life. He began his career during the 1930s as a social realist artist, depicting bread lines, evictions and police brutality. Beginning in the mid-1940s, he shifted from a figurative style toward abstract expressionism.

Norman Lewis was the only African-American artist among the first generation of Abstract Expressionists. His work was overlooked many times because of his political involvement, and also because of the area where he lived. His skin color at this time period had a major impact on his work life.



Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Exhibition, Procession: The Art of Norman Lewis.

NORMAN LEWIS

This untitled painting is a dynamic view of city life in which people from different backgrounds, races and ethnicities intermingle on a subway platform. Lewis included several architectural elements suggestive of the subway, for example, the horizontal wall tiles in the background, and the hint of train tracks toward the bottom of the painting. The expressive lines, strong diagonals, overlapping forms and blocks of bright color animate the overall surface of the painting. Lewis also mixed sand with the oil paint to add texture and density to the surface.



Norman Wilfred Lewis, American, 1909–1979, *Untitled (Subway Station)*, 1945, Oil and sand on canvas, On loan from Art Bridges

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who are the figures in this painting? What are they doing?
- How does your environment influence your appearance and how you live?
- How does Norman Lewis paint to reflect a specific community?
- What kind of community do you think these figures belong to?
- Does this painting remind you of your community? How do you relate or differ?



Norman Wilfred Lewis, American, 1909–1979, *Untitled (Subway Station)*, 1945, Oil and sand on canvas, On loan from Art Bridges

FIGURATIVE ART



Norman Lewis, *Girl with the Yellow Hat*, 1936, Oil on burlap



Kehinde Wiley, American, born 1977, *Margaret, Countess of Blessington*, 2018, Oil on canvas

Figurative art describes any form of art that retains strong references to the real world and particularly to the human figure.

COLLAGE



A collage is an artistic composition made of various materials secured to a surface. This technique may include materials such as magazine and newspaper clippings, ribbons, paint, bits of colored or handmade papers, portions of other artwork or texts, photographs, wood and other found objects.