

SEANKELLY



Kehinde Wiley

What the Light Becomes

Sean Kelly, New York

November 6 – December 23, 2026

Opening reception: Thursday, November 5, 6-8pm

Sean Kelly Gallery is delighted to announce, *What the Light Becomes*, Kehinde Wiley's fourth exhibition at the gallery. The exhibition focuses specifically on contemporary New Yorkers and, more broadly, on how New York represents a portrait of America at this moment, not as a single cohesive identity, but as something diverse, shifting and continually being remade. The exhibition is conceived of as a love letter to New York and a return to the subject of the city that launched Wiley's career, after a number of years in which his practice has taken him around the world. There will be an opening reception on Thursday, November 5 from 6-8pm. The artist will be present.

For this new body of work Wiley draws inspiration from Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, a longstanding motif in art and literature, employed as a metaphor for the passage of time and the cyclical nature of change. Against the backdrop of a city defined by continual transformation, the changing seasons become a framework through which to consider transition, renewal, and regeneration.

SEANKELLY

Wiley's process of selecting subjects for his new portraits was based on chance encounters on the streets of New York. Instead of an extensive casting process, Wiley approached people going about their ordinary activities, walking to the subway, shopping, leaving a CVS, and invited them to be photographed. The sitters were depicted in the clothing they happened to be wearing that day, with Nigerian stylist Ugo Mozie adding select elements. The resulting portraits elevate these chance encounters, speaking to the pleasure and "miracle" of simply being alive and encountering one another on New York's vibrant streets.

The exhibition features new paintings, oil studies on paper, and a film that follows several of the individuals portrayed, delving into their histories and lives.

Kehinde Wiley is widely recognized for his expansive reimagining of the traditions of portraiture, history painting, and representation. He earned a BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute and an MFA from Yale University and has received honorary doctorates from the Rhode Island School of Design and the San Francisco Art Institute. Wiley's work has been the subject of major solo exhibitions internationally, including the Museum Van Loon, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; the de Young Museum, San Francisco, California; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France; Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, Italy, presented as a collateral event of the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia; and The National Gallery, London, England. His work is held in the permanent collections of leading museums and public institutions worldwide.

In 2018, Wiley's portrait of Barack Obama entered the permanent installation of presidential portraits at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, making him the first African American artist commissioned to paint an official U.S. Presidential portrait. That same year, he received Harvard University's W.E.B. Du Bois Medal in recognition of his contributions to African and African American culture and history, as well as his advocacy for intercultural understanding and human rights.

Wiley is also a recipient of the U.S. Department of State's Medal of Arts and has been named a Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government. In 2019, he founded Black Rock Senegal, a multidisciplinary artist residency in Dakar that brings together artists from around the world to live and work in Senegal. Wiley lives and works in New York and Nigeria.

For additional information on Kehinde Wiley, please visit skny.com

For media inquiries, please email Adair Lentini at Adair@skny.com

For all other inquiries, please email Lauren Kelly at Lauren@skny.com

Image: Kehinde Wiley, *Portrait of Madison Billups*, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 inches © Kehinde Wiley Courtesy: the artist and Sean Kelly, New York