

## Rumors of War: History, Representation, and the Context of Installation

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Kehinde Wiley's *Rumors of War*—a towering bronze equestrian statue—was spirited into New York's Times Square on September 27, 2019. Wiley's 25 feet long and 15 feet wide statue takes inspiration from Richmond's statue of General James Ewell Brown Stuart, emulating both the stance of the older statue's rider and the horse, as well as its 16 feet wide limestone base.

After its unveiling in Times Square, *Rumors of War* was permanently moved to the entrance of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts—which commissioned it in December 2019—standing in place of Confederate statues that had been the subject of protests. By placing an anonymous Black subject in the same venue as celebrated, white confederate soldiers, Virginian residents and other visitors of the museum are

prompted to consider Wiley's statue through a historical lens and debate on why Black soldiers—and Black culture—are often erased from American history, including military history. By comparing studies of Confederate statues and the unjust representation of history between hegemonic and minoritarian cultures, in addition to veiled visibility, *Rumors of War* can be seen as a success as it reappropriates tropes of white heroism for the representation of Black history. In his pointed, public representation of previously marginalized Black heroism, Wiley extends his critique of the European canon's habitual erasure of Black cultural experience. This paper argues that Wiley compels viewers to think beyond strictly formal elements, raising fundamental questions of equality in varied contexts of representation.



Photographer: Walter Wlodarczyk for Times Square Arts.