

Talks with Kehinde Wiley

Date of report confirmed on ["Contactmusic" \(archived\)](#) ("February 4, 2008")

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Pop superstar Michael Jackson is hoping to add art mogul to his resume - after pursuing an up-and-coming American painter for his wares. The Thriller singer is currently in talks with acclaimed New York artist Kehinde Wiley, whose buyers include Denzel Washington and Sir Elton John. But Wiley - who is famed for his portraits of urban black men in classic Renaissance scenes - thought the planned hook-up was initially a hoax. He says, "Michael Jackson is calling me. We're discussing exactly what it will involve. He saw my work at the Brooklyn Museum and was taken with it, so he had his people contact me. "I thought it was a joke at first, so I ignored it for the longest time. Then he contacted a friend of mine who's an actor, so I knew it was for real."

["The Art Newspaper" \(December 2, 2009\) \(archived\)](#)

Kehinde Wiley's monumental commissioned portrait of Michael Jackson is being unveiled this week at Deitch Projects. The 32-year-old US painter was contacted by Jackson in 2008 after the performer saw the artist's work at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. "I was receiving messages saying Michael Jackson wants to reach you...and I ignored them because quite honestly I thought it was a prank," said Wiley. After a friend verified the request, Wiley set up a conference call with the performer, which he taped and transcribed. According to the artist: "He was also very curious about my personal story and surprisingly he was really knowledgeable about art and art history. I've done very few commissioned works, so we made arrangements to have certain art historical books sent to him, and he would send me back his preferred pieces." Wiley's studio was in the process of making arrangements for a formal sitting when they received news that the singer had died on 25 June; Wiley never received Jackson's selection of imagery. The portrait is a compilation of six paintings, including works by David and Rubens. When asked why he felt obliged to complete the work, Wiley said: "Unfortunately, I didn't have as much input as I would have hoped for, but I think it's something he would have been proud of. Michael was an extraordinarily talented person with a team who could realise his ideas as much as his performances, and I think that his idea of collaborating with me was something that he really wanted to see through...I felt a responsibility to him to get it done."