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KEHINDE WILEY

ARTNEWS, August 25, 2026

Trump Administration Weighs Sale of Kehinde Wiley Painting in Larger Shift Away from 'Globalist and Woke Ideologies'

BY HIKMAT MOHAMMED  August 25, 2026 10:11am

    



Former U.S. President Barack Obama with artist Kehinde Wiley and his portrait that he painted.

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The US Embassy in the Dominican Republic is changing its artwork to reflect “American patriotism and the beauty of our great country,” US ambassador Leah Campos wrote in an Instagram post on August 11, that showed **Kehinde Wiley’s** *Young Artists After Siamesas 1960* (2013) being swapped for an image of the American flag. The post was accompanied by the song “We’re Not Gonna Take It” by Twisted Sister.

On Monday, the **New York Times** reported that the State Department wants to sell the painting. Campos said in her Instagram post that the “**Trump Administration** and under my leadership we are turning away from globalist and woke ideologies.”

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The Wiley painting, which was commissioned by the State Department in 2013, features four Dominican models, two men sitting and two women standing against a blue floral backdrop. The artist, who also painted President **Barack Obama’s** official portrait, spent two years studying the works of Dominican artists Celeste Woss y Gil and Gilberto Hernández Ortega before finishing the piece. “We worked very hard to get [it] taken down. It was very woke. It was by the gentleman who did Obama’s portrait and it was aesthetically terrifying,” said Erin Scavino, director of Art in Embassies in a **podcast interview with Sean Spicer**.

A spokeswoman told the *Times* that “the work of an individual with such violent and racist words and depictions has no place in the America First State Department,” referring to a comment that Wiley had made about a painting depicting the biblical scene of

Judith beheading Holofernes, which he characterized as a “play on the ‘kill whitey’ thing” in a **2023 interview**. The *Times* reported that the spokesperson’s statement also cites **sexual assault lawsuit** filed against Wiley in February 2025 as part of its reasoning; Wiley has denied the allegations in that suit.

A request for comment sent to Wiley via his New York gallery Sean Kelly was not immediately returned.

The spokeswoman added that the State Department is investigating whether it can legally sell the painting. “If that is feasible, it would be the goal of Art in Embassies to proudly do so,” said the spokeswoman.

“Calling this woke is difficult for me to understand,” adviser Virginia Shore, who served as director of acquisitions and chief curator for the Art in Embassies program between 2000 and 2017 and now serves as Curator of commissions for the Obama Presidential Center in Chicago, told the *Times*. “This is a program validated and financially backed under Bush. There is a science of building trust and empathy across borders.”