

JOSEPH OLISAEMEKA WILSON

*Hard Times and Silver Teeth at the
Spicewood County Casino*

January 10 – February 22, 2025

Opening Reception: Friday,

January 10, 6–8 pm

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of new paintings by Joseph Olisaemeka Wilson entitled *Hard Times and Silver Teeth at the Spicewood County Casino*. For this show, Wilson tells a story set within a visionary casino, replete with masked and costumed gambler/performers and chimerical slot machine/animal hybrids which resemble altars. In this timeless context, Wilson's poetic narrative walks the line between reality and imagination, and gambling becomes an allegory for life and love.



Ursula, 2024, oil on canvas, 66 x 59 inches

Oh, how fast it falls apart!

Lord, I'm in the red.

A shiver's heading down my spine, and a fever's in my head!

***Poodie said to Lefty "say, what makes your spirit sing?" Lefty overturned his cards;
the man had pocket kings.***

I left my wife and crying babe, my cabin in Des Moines.

I'm running into trouble,

And I'm running out of coin!

I took a younger lover

I thought that she'd be true

Her skin was clear, her eyes were brown, she left me feeling blue!

Perhaps you'll find a diamond gemstone buried in the sand

Or perhaps you'll lose your fortune, depending on your hand!

Irene,

I'm writing from a state of pure ecstasy and splendor.

Oh, I love the machine!

And the machine loves me back! Who's the luckiest man alive? Who?!

I am, of course! The luckiest man alive. I flick my cigarette and it lands upright! I text and I drive, without a scratch. I'm parked in the red honey, and Mr. Ticket just winks and waves.

Ah, don't they say good things happen to good people? And I've always been the charitable kind. The gracious kind! The kind kind! So go figure, I happen to be rewarded by the machine. I'm a winner honey, so confirmed!

Remember what I told you? I'm allowed to smoke inside, and out of both respect and gratitude, I'm called "boss" by the men who work here. The ladies in fishnets are all friends of mine. They find my sense of humor to be so on point. I drink for free. And I am sometimes permitted to play quietly on the piano in the lobby.

Money is fun, that's for damn true. You can spin it around and make it dance, you can make a pair of wings from it and fly right outta here! You've never even been to Paris, have you? Nope. You're just a down home, old school, spare tires, and oatmeal girl. That's why I love you so bad. When I get back, I'm gonna butter your bread for'real. Hey now!

Seems like you get sour and soggy when I'm here in front of the machine. It doesn't make sense, considering the machine what's gonna make it all happen for us! Maybe one day you'll understand it and you'll quit sulking and complaining all the live long day. The machine doesn't like negativity. That's bad luck isn't it. Yep, it's terribly bad luck.

Losers!! Losers and pessimists. Synonymously useless!! They have no business in this building, let alone in front of the machine. People like that end up working for people like this!!! I remember when this whole thing started. I always knew it was all mine. I knew I had the tools. This game ain't for amateurs and it ain't for children. Ya can't tip toe around the machine. It will pick you up by the hind legs and skin you— you'll end up in the pantry: freeze-dried and salt-cured! Not I, honey. You married the Tennessee stud! That makes you the Tennessee mare don't it! It sure does. Let's ride away, why don't we? I know we will!

Haven't heard from you in a while, my sweet. What's the matter? I told you I'd be returning to you as soon as I was able. But it looks like the machine picked up on some of your negativity and doubtful spirit, so I've run into a small setback which will likely extend my stay here in Spicewood. Sometimes I feel that you are unsupportive of me which is very painful. And in my hour of need, you have vanished. Please send me a bit of money, which you said you would do and never did indeed do, did you? Make me a winner! The sun is setting very beautifully over a river, but I cannot enjoy it because of you. Bats are flying out from under a bridge and dancing up into the sky. And I'm sitting here watching and wondering if I'm still yours,

Wali

(Text by Joseph Olisaemeka Wilson)

Joseph Olisaemeka Wilson (b. 1999, Los Angeles, CA) has lived and worked in New York since 2017. Recent solo exhibitions include Vielmetter Los Angeles; Asia Art Center Taipei; Tiwani Contemporary in London and Fergus McCaffrey in St. Barth. His work has been included in group shows at Palo Gallery, New York, Fergus McCaffrey, Tokyo, and Lyles & King, New York.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 38 Walker Street between Broadway and Church Street. Hours are Tuesday – Saturday, 10am to 6pm, and by appointment. For further information please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit www.derekeller.com.