

Philbrick, Harry. "Wilmer Wilson IV: *Slim... you don't got the juice*," *The Brooklyn Rail*, 7 March 2019.

The Brooklyn Rail logo, featuring a stylized train icon to the left of the text "THE BROOKLYN RAIL" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

## Wilmer Wilson IV: *Slim... you don't got the juice*

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by Harry Philbrick



Installation view: *Wilmer Wilson IV: Slim... you don't got the juice*, Susan Inglett Gallery, 2019. Photo: Adam Reich, New York. Courtesy Susan Inglett Gallery, New York.

Wilmer Wilson IV is a performance artist who makes sensuous objects, the process of whose creation leaves traces that inform the meaning of the artworks. Wilson's exhibition at Susan Inglett—his first solo show in Manhattan—encompasses his iconic staple pieces, ink on paper pieces, and a billboard style installation encapsulating his performance work, *a Running Tour of some Monuments of Philadelphia* (2015).

The staple pieces are large-scale photographic prints of found images, mostly portraits of African American adults, and in one case, a child, completely covered by a sea of silver metal staples. The effect is at once mysterious, the staples drowning out the details and personality of the portraits, and enchanting. We humans are mesmerized by shiny, glittering things, and the thousands of staples are certainly that. They are also

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traces of monumental labor by the artist—my fingers and wrist ache from the thought of using a staple gun for so long—and a record of incredible violence done to the image of these people.

Wilson's imagery often comes from found photos such as fliers, posters, or billboards, so these are public faces, the public faces of Black folks, that Wilson is attacking. In *Host* (2018), the largest staple piece in the show, are these seven ministers whose faces are engulfed in staples? Or is the artist protecting them behind a suit of metal armor? The dripping red wafer in the upper right certainly ties the work to the violence done to Christ's body.



Wilmer Wilson IV, *Host* (detail), 2018. Staples and pigment print on wood, 48 x 192 x 2 1/4 inches (diptych). Courtesy Susan Inglett Gallery, New York.

Wilson's exploration of the idea of violent mark making and the blurred spectrum of identity and representation takes a turn with the ink on paper pieces mounted in conjunction with the staple works. While the plywood substrate is required to give the staples something to bite into, the mounting of the ink on paper works on plywood seems provisional. The individual marks, however, are explosive in their impact, and accrete to create shrouded anthropomorphic shapes reminiscent of Norman Lewis's work.

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The gallery's back room includes two billboard-scale, wall mounted images drawn from Wilson's *Running Tour of Some Monuments of Philadelphia*, blurred images from run-bys of monuments celebrating great achievements. (It is worth noting that Philadelphia's first large scale, permanent monument to an African American, Octavius Catto, was unveiled only in 2017.) On the ground between these images is a half full (half empty?) jug of water labelled "Immortality"—this is the work entitled *you don't got the juice*.

Happily for us, Wilmer Wilson IV, approaching his 30th birthday, does indeed have the juice.