

Nicole Wilson
National Debt Project

August 16 to September 28, 2024

Opening Reception
Thursday, August 15 from 6-8 pm

Artist Talk Moderated by Gloria Sutton
Saturday, September 14 from 3-4pm
Coolidge Corner Theatre

(Brookline, MA – June 12, 2024)

U.S. national debt in 2009 = \$13,561,623,030,891.79

U.S. national debt in 2023 = \$33,167,334,044,723.16

Fifteen years ago, in August of 2009, Obama was President of the United States, the world was reeling from the 2008 financial crisis, and the national debt was \$13,561,623,030,891.79. Nicole Wilson was a 21 year-old art student in Philadelphia living off a summer research grant, having recently had the opportunity to vote in her first presidential election. The growing national deficit was at the top of the news cycle, with pundits claiming that a portion of the U.S. deficit belonged to every citizen of the country. According to them, the debt was “ours” to pay and it was growing exponentially each day. It was from this moment that an unusual and meticulously organized work of performance art was born. Praise Shadows Art Gallery is proud to present the exhibition debut of the *National Debt Project*, a durational body of work by New York-based artist Nicole Wilson, her second solo presentation at the gallery.

The *National Debt Project* began on August 31, 2009. With all of the loose change that Wilson would find in her pockets, on the street, tucked away in nooks and crannies, it seemed ridiculous to her that the National Debt would continue to grow while money was floating around seemingly everywhere. In response, she decided to send her change to the United States Department of the Treasury, and copy President Obama on the correspondence. It was summer break, she was an art student, and it would be a satirical piece of performance art.

Through Obama’s second term in office, Trump’s presidency, and Biden’s current tenure, Wilson has never stopped sending in her loose change: taped to her letters and sent certified mail via USPS.

Now that the *National Debt Project* is approaching its 15th anniversary, Wilson’s years of daily contributions and letter writing to the federal government have evolved into a multifaceted and multimedia practice, all of which will be presented in the exhibition. They include:

- The 5,479 certified mail receipts that she used to mail each letter to the United States Department of the Treasury will completely line the walls of the gallery, demonstrating the breadth of years dedicated to this project.
- A printed multi-volume set of books encompassing the entirety of the materials from the project from August 31, 2009 to August 30, 2024. Meant for audience members to hold and peruse, the

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artist considers this a limited edition sculptural work. Each volume represents one year of the National Debt archive organized by the day they were sent, as well as the acknowledgement letters to Wilson by the Presidents, scans of certified mail receipts, and any other responses received from the federal government.

- A group of 15 ceramic “Piggy Banks” created in collaboration with ceramic artist Andrew Casto. Each porcelain vessel represents one year of the *National Debt Project* and is glazed using 22 karat gold. The collaboration brings together Casto’s aesthetic, and features sculptures that exist in a space of both stability and instability, with a conceptual sales agreement that builds upon and proliferates the themes native to Wilson’s daily project.
- The ability for anyone to join in Wilson’s project of donating to the National Debt.

As this chapter of the first fifteen years of the *National Debt Project* comes to a close, Wilson is opening the next phase up for public participation and engagement. In the run up to the 2024 Presidential election, following global disasters such as the Covid-19 pandemic and continued geopolitical upheaval, this work satirically emphasizes communal responsibility as an ideology, not an actuality.

An artist talk between Nicole Wilson and Gloria Sutton, Associate Professor of Contemporary Art History and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Northeastern University will take place on September 14. Registration information will be available in August.

About the Artist

Nicole Wilson (Daly City, CA) is a research-based conceptual artist who makes long, tedious, and process-driven projects that excavate the everyday through a feminist lens. Working interdisciplinarily and in relation to institutional structures, Wilson is interested in a material investigation that documents and articulates absences within our lives. She is best known for a body of work called *Ötzi*, which was first exhibited at Praise Shadows in May 2021, where she registered the world’s oldest natural mummy’s tattoos on the Blockchain.

Previously an Artist-in-Residency at the Bemis Center (Omaha, NE), Wilson’s work can be found in the permanent collections of the Everson Museum of Art (Syracuse, NY), Tisch Special Collections (Medford, MA), Special Collections and Archives at VCU (Richmond, VA), and the Thomas J Watson Library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY).

About Praise Shadows Art Gallery

Praise Shadows Art Gallery is a contemporary art program based in the Boston area with a focus on exceptional artists working in all artistic disciplines. Our worldview is informed by the notion that the artworld’s untapped and unrecognized potential is worth cultivating, supporting, and championing. Since our founding in December 2020, the gallery has placed artworks by our artists in esteemed public collections, and our exhibitions have been covered widely in major international media outlets. Our work is grounded by partnering closely with artists to develop opportunities in traditional and emerging models of creativity and entrepreneurship—exhibitions, commissions, brand partnerships, new technologies, and original concepts that no one has ever tried before. www.praiseshadows.com

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PRESS CONTACT:

gallery@praiseshadows.com