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# frequency

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Lester Julian Merriweather  
Wardell Milan II  
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Michael Queenland  
Marc André Robinson  
Xaviera Simmons  
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Shinique Amie Smith  
Jeff Somhouse  
Hank Willis Thomas  
Mickalene Thomas  
Jina Valentine  
William Villalongo  
Roberto Visani  
Paula Wilson

THE STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

# William Villalongo



Re:Abolition of Slavery,  
2011

In William Villalongo's paintings and sculptures, nostalgia and fantasy often become ingredients in the on-making and the on-going of an of stories that tell of the way alone, black beings do participate in a less construction of identity. The characters witness the rigidity of comedy and the comedy of tragedy. To rise with others and to fall, they become trails for us instead of a road. Villalongo also plays with the notion of equilibrium and how it moves over (or descends) and shifts the way. The artist moves in the world. For an awareness of equilibrium as a stable foundation for you, and especially blackness.

Zisch recognizes that he destroys and recombines as points of departure for new self-narrative moments in which he makes "myself" many, redesigned to resemble the fictional paragraphs of African Americans within mass media. More importantly, he re-establishes the mythic stage (an African American is to be seen and define their identity as "American") and use the previous media image—imitations of reality—to temperate the very illusions created by this myth and messages in *The Curious One* (2011), *Confessions General Public: 2*, *Two is even greater*, *My*

*riding on a horse*, *two run*, *Edum*, a sculpture of an African-American couple, since embraced in a *rainfall*. The epitome of black love, they are merged in the new system (age) into a very different story that is no longer a story.

It is the most of level. It is the choice or urgent to create one's own landscape, to control the role figure in a world of being, who then merges into two's bestest (the hand, arm or the hand figure) *chuck*, now holds her head. Cut off at the legs and arms, and now to service, the figure remains a delicate reminder of their former selves. The work is an emotional state of a sculpture that was, before the artist's hand was introduced, a more nature and being image, standing (not rolling) on its own base. General Lee is the perfect for a hyper-sold myth, and Villalongo uses this to equal the actor of black love, itself, as heroic.

For also functions as the harbinger of poetry, abolition in slavery, as a foundation for the transmission of the African-American family and the spiritual memory of the south as a plantation but 1911.



black backs. Villalongo further adorns the sculpture's jeweled surface by adding gold glaze, encrusting rhinestones and adding velvet pieces to reinforce the couple's regal nature and their anomalous presentation. For him, these revisions refer to African-American culture and history as a work-in-progress, shaped by cultural retention, keen improvisation and a succession of next generations who take cues from the past to create the new.

In addition to inventing relationships, Villalongo injects an African-American presence into traditionally Eurocentric mythologies. In *The Abduction of Bacchus* (2005), Bacchus, the god of wine, is black. Also a promoter of civilization and a lover of peace, he is associated, in the extreme, with debauchery. But he is not presented in his traditional shade: Villalongo reassigns him racially with the intention of confusing history. He portrays a deliberately over-the-top irreverent scene in which he uses the abduction of Bacchus as a theme to forward his own art historical abduction imagery as an alternative vision of an accepted subject.

Villalongo chose an appropriately sexy and romantic surface—velvet—for *The Abduction of Bacchus*. His painting then becomes the process of adding associations to an already lush and charged starting point. The rich, tactile qualities of the material are embodiments of a seemingly endless space that immediately holds greater theatrical possibilities than clean, white canvas. His intent: to create a tactile painting that inspires amorous feelings—a surface delicious enough to make love upon. Velvet thus becomes a metaphor for fond memories and a type of romance that is hard to come by and even harder to keep.

Villalongo mines the senses and his memories to build an archetype, a truth within the objects, and to examine world mythologies, popular culture and African-American identity. His revisionist histories and thoughtful social commentaries question accepted facts, ask who really has the power to shape thinking and challenge how this power is (ab)used.

**TOSHA GRANTHAM**



LEFT: *Lone Before the Colonization of Mars, 2004*  
 (Figuratively installation view)  
 RIGHT: *The Centaur's Kiss, 2005*