

Robinson, Kenya, "Is That a Rectangle in Your Pocket, or Are You Just Happy to See Me?",
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HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

Is That a Rectangle in Your Pocket, or Are You Just Happy to See Me?

Kenya Robinson



I suppose it happens to anyone attempting to have a more thoughtful relationship with fine art. It's a kind of rite-of-passage discovery that serves as a touchstone for deeper dialogues. It's the moment when you realize the secular geometry of the rectangle. A terrain of 90-degree angles that is not only the realm of architecture, books and painting, but, within the context of now, operates fully as the screen. Tablets and computers, cell phones and televisions -- each of these objects are an illuminated plane, transmitting signals for processing, a frontier of seeing-into, and are mundane in their ubiquity. As much as I privilege painting, often unwittingly, I wonder if I have the capacity to be engaged, much less impressed, by its historic rectangular functions.

William Villalongo's *Sista Ancesta* exhibition at Susan Inglett manages to spark an inquiry that reaches all the way down to the vibration at the bottom of my purse, and answers the call right before it goes to voicemail. Although his stylistically confirmed approach to the black body is on full display, it is his experiments with video and digital collage that glisten with possibilities. The entryway of the gallery showcases a large digital print of a Central African statue of mother and child, a motif that is repeated throughout these works. Set upon a background of deep space, the figures are beyond Earth Mothers; they are revealed as Universal Nurturers. Indeed, the masks that they wear, a curated selection of Frank Stella, Josef Albers and Ad Reinhardt, among others, acts as a kind of macaroni necklace, an earnest gift to the primordial muse. That the work references the Modern Art History canon is secondary to its appeal as both a dismissal and appraisal of linear time. The digital layers impress a physical reality, the universe came first, but we see these elements simultaneously, collapsing the actual process into a single moment. In addition, the mask of the rectangular plane is a compelling commentary on the digital age, emphasizing our own partitions of social networking, email, smartphones, television and online video, as the polygon through which we see the world, virtual and otherwise. Speaking of video, Mr. Villalongo's foray into that wilderness (*Water Root*) proves less fulfilling, reading more like a bootleg version of *Xena: Warrior Princess* than a worthwhile contributor to the conversation of the exhibition. I didn't appreciate the attempt to dramatize the paintings; I had done a much better job of that for myself, and so it felt needlessly redundant. But, even with that said, a brief POV shot through the mask of one the video's performers provided a reorientation unconsidered when I first viewed the paintings. Instead of a casual observer, I became a sprite on the figure's shoulder; a tiny Fred Flintstone dressed in a red devil suit, peering through the eyeholes and around the boundaries of the rectangle into the world. This new positioning locates a perspective of a virtual self, flipped onto the internal surface. Perhaps this experience could be enough incentive for further investigation.

The exhibition runs until December 15th. Bring your smartphone. Turn it to vibrate.

Staff, "MOCA Announces 2013 Lineup!", BUZZBIN MAGAZINE, 10 May 2012.



MOCA Announces 2013 Lineup!

ADDED MAY 10, 2012, UNDER: [ART + THEATRE](#), WRITTEN BY [BUZZBIN STAFF](#)

The Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (MOCA) will open a newly designed building in the center of Cleveland's cultural district. The first year of exhibitions, led by Chief Curator David Norr, will incorporate a dynamic range of contemporary art, taking full advantage of the Museum's expanded capacities and unique structure. There will be a focus on new and commissioned work, giving audiences access to diverse artistic processes through site-specific installations and performances.

The inaugural exhibition, *Inside Out and From the Ground Up*, opening to the public October 8, 2012, features major commissions by Katharina Grosse, Henrique Oliveira, and Barry Underwood, and new works by David Altmejd, Jacqueline Humphries, and William Villalongo, among an international roster of 13 artists. The exhibition provides an in-depth look at how contemporary art engages with architecture and concepts of space. Subsequent shows include a new in-situ studio installation by Corin Hewitt; the first solo museum exhibition by performance artist Kate Gilmore; Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's acclaimed media work, *The Paradise Institute*; and *Realization is Better than Anticipation*, a group exhibition proposing alternative narratives for contemporary art in Cleveland and the surrounding region.



MOCA View Down Euclid

"This first year of exhibitions reflects MOCA's core strengths, which include supporting the creation of new work and engaging our local communities," says Executive Director Jill Snyder. "This is the first time that MOCA Cleveland will operate in a building designed to present contemporary art, one that will both challenge and support contemporary artists and audiences. We are shaping an institution that is more accessible, critical, and open to dialogue."

Says Norr "This first year is an opportunity to establish MOCA Cleveland as a vital,

multifaceted, and rigorous institution. The exhibitions will connect audiences to artworks through experience, contemporary ideas, and historical grounding, creating a greater sense of context and possibility.”

Designed by London-based Farshid Moussavi of Farshid Moussavi Architecture, formerly with Foreign Office Architects, MOCA’s iconic building sits at the gateway to the emerging Uptown district in University Circle, a cultural hub of the city.

Inside Out and From the Ground Up (October 8, 2012 – February 24, 2013) This group exhibition, organized by Norr, features newly commissioned projects by Berlin-based painter Katharina Grosse, Brazilian installation artist Henrique Oliveira, and Cleveland-based photographer Barry Underwood. New works by David Altmejd, Jacqueline Humphries, and William Villalongo will be debuted, alongside works by Walead Beshty, Louise Bourgeois, David Hammons, Gordon Matta-Clark, Corey McCorkle, Rachel Whiteread, and Haegue Yang. These artists create an expanded dialogue on contemporary art and space, approaching this central theme through a range of tactile, visual, and conceptual means. Inside Out and From the Ground Up considers how people physically and psychologically relate to the built world, the tenuous boundary between inside and outside, self and other; and the disorientating effects of shifting perspectives.

About Farshid Moussavi Architecture (FMA) Farshid Moussavi Architecture (FMA) was founded by internationally acclaimed architect and Harvard Professor Farshid Moussavi as a London-based practice dedicated to architecture, urban design and landscape architecture. Moussavi was previously co-founder and co-principal of Foreign Office Architects (FOA) where she co-authored the design for the award-winning Yokohama International Ferry Terminal in Japan and was part of the United Architects team who were finalists for the Ground Zero competition, as well as the team that designed the London 2012 Olympics Masterplan. At FOA she completed a wide range of other international projects including the John Lewis Complex in Leicester, England; the South-East Coastal Park in Barcelona, Spain; and the Meydan Retail Complex in Istanbul, Turkey; and represented Britain at the 8th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2002.

About the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (MOCA) Founded in 1968, the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, a leading force in the cultural life of Northeast Ohio, is recognized nationally and internationally for its vital and creative exhibitions and public programs. These strive to challenge, inspire, and teach a wide range of audiences.

Through approximately eight exhibitions a year, all accompanied by public and education programs, and many also by scholarly catalogues, MOCA brings the work and ideas of a diversity of national and international artists to its audiences. MOCA’s critically acclaimed exhibitions have included *The Teacher and the Student: Charles Rosenthal and Ilya Kabakov* (2004), *Yoshitomo Nara* (2004), *All Digital* (2006), *Diana Cooper* (2008), *Sam Taylor-Wood* (2008), *Hugging and Wrestling: Contemporary Israeli Photography and Video* (2009), and *Marilyn Minter: Orange Crush* (2010).

From 1968 to 1990, MOCA rented modest quarters in University Circle, and from 1990 to the present it has rented second-story space from the Cleveland Play House on Carnegie Avenue. Today, as it prepares to move to its new building, MOCA looks forward to welcoming both established and new audiences to its exciting new space in University Circle.

Dewolf, Stacey, "Art as ignition", MONTREAL MIRROR, 20 June-6 July, 2011.



ARTSWEEK

ARTISTAT: The annual summer issue launch party (3713 St-Laurent, #202) set from METEOR and a complimentary issue: \$



CULTURAL CUT-OUTS: A work by Villalongo

Art as ignition

One of the things I have long admired about Jeanie Riddle, the director of Parisian Laundry (3550 St-Antoine W.), is the love she shows to emerging artists. This month, the gallery's annual *Summertime in Paris* exhibition is given a new subtitle—*Kindling*—and a new angle, focusing on five young artists whose work, like kindling, has the power to ignite and excite: **Luc Paradis, Rachel Shaw, William Villalongo, Jaime Angelopoulos** and **Chloé Desjardins**.

That Brooklyn-based Villalongo describes his work as a "conversation between history and art" makes sense when you see his paintings, with their collage-like aesthetic and interplay of cultural references. I was reminded of those felt boards we used to have as kids, with their cut-out characters and architectural details that could be layered into images. This sense of assemblage is also present in the paintings of Paradis, which seem determined to value the parts as much as the whole, and in doing so speak to modernist influences while remaining rooted in the present.

Also, head upstairs to see the gallery owner Nick Tedeschi's newest acquisitions to his personal collection, or downstairs to the bunker where **Rick Leong's** magical land and skylines are on view.

—STACEY DEWOLFE

William Villalongo: *Les Desmoiselles d'Brooklyn*, 2010, acrylic, paper and velvet flocking on wood panel, 24 inches square; at Susan Inglett.



WILLIAM VILLALONGO
SUSAN INGLETT

The paintings in William Villalongo's exhibition, understatedly titled "Bathing Nymph," depict quasi-naturalistic playgrounds of decadence and depravity, combining so many references and symbols from so many genres and sources that it would be difficult to inventory them all. Suffice it to say that in the 14 variously shaped, Rococo-derived paintings (all 2010) the overarching impression is of art history colliding with comic-book art, with the politics of race and sexuality as a constant underpinning. Is this a grim view of contemporary existence intertwined with a glimpse into the psychological and political machinations of a predominately white, male art world, or is it an irreverent romp through a similar environment? Are the shaped canvases or the figures who wear masks made of

miniature modern paintings—suggesting, for example, an Ellsworth Kelly fan or a Kenneth Noland target—meant to signify some sort of stylistic, formal debate? (At the show's opening, women wearing similar masks wandered through the crowd, to dramatic but uncertain effect.) Questions permeate these provocative works, which probe the contemporary status quo through visions of alternate realities where almost anything goes.

Each painting has a painted border of black foliage that surrounds the central scenes, which are lit up in hot, bright colors. The sharp edges of the foliage recall influences as diverse as Matisse's cutouts and the silhouettes of Kara Walker, the latter association imbuing Villalongo's pastoral scenes with suggestions of violence and exploitation. The cavorting nude women in *Moon Dance* recall Chris Ofili's representations of romantic interludes under moonlit skies, and certainly Villalongo's figures exude a degree of lassitude and joy despite the suggestion of bad things to come. *BBQ By The Lake* does not exactly whet the appetite, as dinner looks to be a roasted male figure impaled on a spit, and yet this gruesome detail doesn't seem to put a damper on the fun. A thin vibrant rainbow arches across a blue sky as if in cheerful affirmation of the festivities below.

Intriguing as all this may be, the viewer may wonder what the artist is getting at. The depth of his undertaking invites investigation, but the clues don't always lead to comfortable conclusions.

—Amanda Church

Staff, "Fresh Ammunition: The artist William Villalongo", Ammo Magazine, November 2010.

{fresh} ammunition
the artist

William Villalongo

what's your AMMO?

It would be the complex visual world around me, and its impact on our social and historical existence.

how would you describe your art?

This new work chronicles a community of women surviving in romantic & idealic landscapes. In a lot of ways it is an overview of their customs; work, play, ritual, procreation, etc. With in this survivalist narrative is a layering of the art history, western history, personal history, current events and popular culture. There is also a material layering of shaped surfaces, painting, collage and velvet coating that presents the narrative on a picture plan that is tactile.

how did you begin doing Art?

Like most people I began by finger painting as a child. Unlike most people I never stopped, eventually finding more sophisticated tools along the way.

how do you plan to influence the world?

I'm not so sure there is a plan. There's a lot of self-indulgence in any art and I'm just as guilty as anyone. However, the message or experience that I would like to come through is that of viewing both the personal and the historical as a complex and multifaceted space. A space that allows for contradiction and harmony at the same time. I want to challenge viewers to hold two contradictory experiences in their minds at the same time.

how has Africa and its art influenced or inspired you?

African culture and its art inspires me in how its history reverberates through Western art both modern and contemporary. When I look at a Fragonard painting I am swept away by its romance and lyricism, I can chuckle at its unashamedly decorative zeal, however I am very conscious of the paintings 18th Century historical context. It's the height of the African slave trade a time of mass brutality and extreme accumulation of European wealth. When I look at a Modigliani, a Paul Klee, a Picasso, a Brancusi, a Matisse I see their fascination with both Africa and the East. I also love looking at the contemporary American abstraction that follows these European titans, yet I am so very aware of our lack of understanding or of elucidation of these origins in contemporary critical dialogue about art. That is not to say there is no effort at doing this, its how it always manages to stay at the margins of our cultural dialogue in the visual arts. My Afro-Hispanic American ancestry and history inspires me.

your recent collection features many nude women, in all shapes and sizes..what meaning does this have?

This body of work really starts with looking at the genre of bathing Nymphs and Bathers Paintings that has been so popular in art. Your art history book and museums are littered with them. I thought to ask, who are these women? What do they do? And so on. Biographically I come from a family of mostly women. I'm very



aware of that influence on how I view the world. There is something in that experience that urges me to choose the female protagonist. The women in my paintings are in all shapes and sizes and ethnicities because I feel it is a reflection of the women I see in the world. Not everyone has an idealized body. I like thinking of this community of women as one that is diverse. Although, these women exist in an idealized landscape and a context that is fantastical and mythological, I'm very interested in how they are human within it.

what inspired you to create unique shapes for your canvases?.. and what was your process?

Well, the women in the paintings make abstract paintings as a cultural activity within the narrative of the paintings. One of the many questions of contemporary abstract painting is that of using the rectangle as a historically neutral picture plane vs. one that is shaped and therefore active. Although these women have a cultural idiom that is tribal or seemingly primitive they are asking very sophisticated questions about their practice like the ones we find in modern and contemporary art. The paintings begin with a detailed pencil drawing that is of the same scale and shape of the painting. The drawing is transferred to a wood panel in stages throughout the process of making the painting. The landscapes are painted directly on the panel while the figures have been painted on paper, then cut out and adhered to the surface. The silhouetted black border of flora and fauna the viewer looks through, is made by spray coating the area with velvet fibers.

who do you admire and why?

I'm not sure we have enough space for me to thoroughly answer this question. There are many and for many different reasons. So I'll choose comedians as a general group that I very much admire! Great comedians have the ability to make us laugh at the things that are most painful about the world.

what new projects can we look forward to?

At the moment I'm excited about the possibilities of the narrative of community in this body of work and their strategies of survival and leisure. I'm interested in its continuation into an interdisciplinary art practice.

what are your top 5 essentials?

Humor, Good food, Creativity, Hygiene, Rest.

the artist {fresh} ammunition



Currently on view at
SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY
522 West 24 Street
NYC, NY 10011
www.inglettgallery.com





NEW YORK

The New Nymphs

William Villalongo revises the Rococo, replacing the French masters' powdery-white, frolicking 18th-century figures with black women and men and updating their delicate, fussy brushwork with bold planes of color and a kind of retro '70s aesthetic. His second show at **Susan Inglett**, in New York, from October 21 through December 4, contains around 15 of these intriguingly edgy bacchanalian scenes. Inglett, who first noticed Villalongo's work in the 2005-06 "Frequency" group exhibition at the **Studio Museum in Harlem** (where he held a residency), says she was drawn to his melding of Rococo refinement and aristocratic sensibilities with the mass imagery of today's

*William Villalongo uses paint, paper, and velour flocking on panel in his *Untitled (Water Nymphs)*, 2009.*

popular culture. She is not alone in her recognition of the Brooklyn-based artist's talents: He begins a three-year teaching stint at Yale this fall.

—EMMA ALLEN

Fritchey, Sarah, "What if Obama and Nefertiti had a love child. . .", RHINOCEROS.POSTEROUS.COM, 29 April 2009.

What if Obama and Nefertiti had a love child...

WILLIAM VILLALONGO Eden's Remix Susan Inglett Gallery 522 West 24th Street **LAST CHANCE: Closes Saturday, May 2** This is Villalongo's debut exhibition at Susan Inglett, but you would never know it. His work, which successfully runs the siren-song-gauntlet of medium (painting, sculpture, collage), exudes the muscular ease and derivative sensitivity of a gallery all-star. Most refreshing is the subtlety with which he announces his sexual preference and race. There are no penis-and-butting photos, no persecuted O.J.s; in fact, mention of homoeroticism and race is reserved to compelling allusions of fantasy couples who also suffer from forbidden love. His photo collages remix a utopia, string-theory history of the world, pairing Obama and Queen Nefertiti, Dred Scott and Susan B. Anthony, Stokely Carmichael (Black Panthers PM) and Gloria Steinem (second-wave feminist leader), amongst others, offering a feel-good feel-nervous dose of the 'what ifs' and pushes of the post-11/4 big red Hope Button. The three foolhardy sculptures in the back room are Villalongo's darkest and most seductive works; and it is here that he comes out of the closet, with his love for science fiction. Each sculpture supports two ceramic figures, isolated under a plexiglobe, mounted on a black, rotating pie-shaped discs, and orbited in rhinestones, which shimmer as a lo-tech light changes the glow from red to orange to yellow to green to indigo to blue from underneath. The impending trance is akin to seeing Elvis in Vegas for the first time. The figurines are kitschy mash ups of Darger's Vivian Girls and Cowboy Collectibles from the 50s; and like the collages in the first room are private spaces for forbidden love. The secrecy of the "back exhibition room" is heightened by its galaxy-black walls, spot lighting, and unusual installation, which places the three sculptures in separate positions around the room: 1) at eye level, 2) three feet above eye level, and 3) three feet below eye level. In *Liberty (V Ship 5)*, the second sculpture, we push up on our tiptoes to see

Sacagawea, with Pomp in tow, standing proudly next to a Native American warrior who grips a long spear with his foe's severed head on the end. As the spaceship spins we see strange things-- the living Warrior's head has been replaced with an oversized, doll face (blonde hair, blue eyes, white bonnet and all), Lady Liberty's green crown is smothering Pomp (unbeknownst to Mom), Sacagawea wears a chain necklace, weighed down by a tombstone- charm that reads "July IV MDCCLXXVI." The longer we look, the sicker we feel. The vision is caused by delusion or paranoia...as far as we can tell. The problem with seeing one spaceship, or catching someone in the act, is that the experience leaves us craving another sighting. And, after watching the dance of *Adam and Steve* at eye level, I got down on my knees to watch the half-nude black man cup the Union Soldier's balls in *Country Romance*.

The main gallery also includes a jungle of plastic treasures; burgeoned from The Bible's Fall of Man allegory. Villalongo plays out the aftermath of Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit in the massive cutout *The Last Days of Eden*, a reinterpretation of Dürer's 1504 Adam and Eve etching. The unconventional remix, done in black velour, shakes up Dürer's quiet scene with the adult raunchiness of R. Crumb's cartoons. Eve bites barbarically into the agitated snake's flesh, letting it protrude from her bared teeth, as Adam prepares to take his own chunk. Of the four temperaments: the cat (choleric), the rabbit (sanguine), the ox (phlegmatic) and the elk (melancholia); the cat, rabbit and ox are missing, replaced by a turtle (wisdom, but distant relative of the snake), a monkey gripping Adam's leg (raucousness); and a flying bat (death and rebirth). The bit apple is barely noticable and out of reach, already forgotten. Like all of his works, the cutout takes a while to perceive in its entirety. Its crude, thin slits encourage our investigation from up close and then farther back. I found myself backing away slowly, and looking up, again, grateful that I was neither Montague nor Capulet.

-- **IMAGES** 1) *Barack and Nefertiti In the Vela Supernova Remnant*, 2009, hubble telescope poster, velour paper, mirrored mylar, acrylic paint, 29 x 23 inches. 2) *Adam and Steve (V Ship 2)*, 2009, ceramic parts, plexiglas, velour flocking, rhinestones and roating base, 21 x 18 x 18 inches. 3) *The Last Days of Eden*, 2009, velour paper, 79 x 70 inches. 4) Installation: *Eden's Remix (set 2)*, 2009, velour paper flocking, mirrored mylar, and acrylic paint/wood panel, all approximately 78 x 21 x 3/4 inches.

