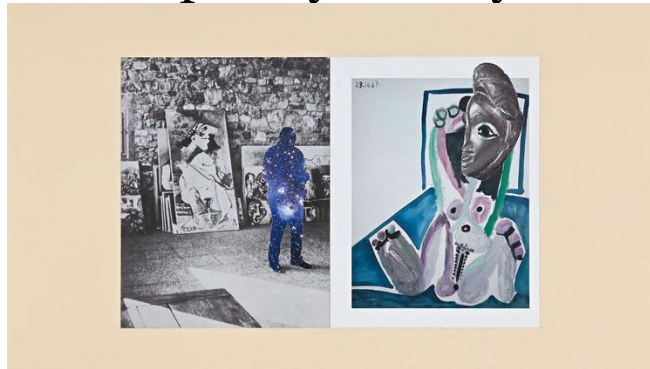


Dunne, Susan. "Picasso-Inspired Artist William Villalongo at UConn Contemporary Gallery,"  
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## Picasso-Inspired Artist William Villalongo At UConn Contemporary Gallery



"Re: History -- Affinities (Picasso, Dan)," a 2015 collage by William Villalongo, is on view at Contemporary Art Galleries at UConn. (Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC)

The new exhibit at Contemporary Art Galleries at UConn is a one-man show of work by William Villalongo. But really it's a three-man show, as Villalongo's art is inspired by his muses, Pablo Picasso and Aaron Douglas. "For both artists, African masks and sculpture was key to unlocking the metaphysics of space," the artist says.

Villalongo, an African-American artist, loves Picasso's "Bathers" paintings, especially "Demoiselles d'Avignon." He created his own "bathers," fusing classical imagery with Douglas' modernist, Cubist-inspired aesthetic and casting African-American women as the goddess-like bathing beauties.

Villalongo's goal is to erase erasure, to put front-and-center the African Americans whose images were scarce in modernist artworks even as those artists were influenced by African art. Dominating the gallery, and tying the theme together, is Villalongo's video "Water Root." In the video, one white woman and three African Americans frolic in bikinis in a field and a pond, wearing sharply geometric masks. Interspersed with their play are scenes of multicolored paints being flung, seemingly haphazardly, onto a canvas. That imagery is re-created in still form, on "Rhombus," a mixed-media artwork showing the nude young women. Two dip in a pond, one's face covered with an abstract painting. Another throws yellow paint onto a black canvas, the extra dripping into the pond. The third nymph hides behind a modernist artwork.

Items from Villalongo's "Jet" series take the theme of African-American bathing beauties in another direction. The artist created collages with model photos snipped out of "Jet" magazine juxtaposed against modern art and celestial images. Other collages, from his "History: Muses" and "History: Affinities" series, show the modernist influence on his own art, as well as shoving to the forefront the traces of Africa found in the work of the modernists themselves.

One collage in the "History: Affinities" series is a charming tribute to Villalongo's hero. Beside a painting of a woman topped with an African mask, Picasso works in his studio, his body turned into a starry sky.

The exhibit coincides with Villalongo's upcoming artist residency at the School of Fine Arts' Counterproof Press.

***OUTSIDE MY NAME OR THROUGH OTHER EYES: WORK BY WILLIAM VILLALONGO*** is at Contemporary Art Galleries at University of Connecticut, 830 Bolton Road, in Storrs, until Oct. 13. [contemporaryartgalleries.uconn.edu](http://contemporaryartgalleries.uconn.edu).