



*"They were pieces of a broken human face ... Here were the remains of a very ancient and fine type of art ... These meager relics were eloquent of a symmetry, a vitality, a delicacy of form directly reminiscent of ancient Greece and a proof that, once upon a time, a race, far superior in strain to the negro, had been settled here". - Leo Frobenius, German ethnographer on first seeing terracotta sculptures in Ife, Nigeria. 1910*

*"Those masks were not just pieces of sculpture like the rest. Not in the least, they were magic". - Picasso, Reflecting on his first encounter with African art. 1937*

In William Villalongo's world of myth and allegory, images of Abstract paintings represent radical Modernisms while the "colonial gaze" is ever present. In the artist's hands, these paintings appear as masks sported by a clan of exotic brown women. In many works the viewer peers covertly through a velvety-silhouette onto "tribal" scenes in which various attributes of Abstract painting find usefulness as raw material in the hands of these matriarchs. In this way, Villalongo explores a historiography of female exotica from Greek & Roman Myth and 18th Century nymph/harem scenes to Josephine Baker and Sheena comics.

Orbiting multiple modes of making, from painting and works on paper to video, Villalongo weaves wildly imaginative scenes where lines between History, Mythology and Biography are blurred, dislocated, even profaned. Ever concerned with origins as a view to marginalized histories, the artist's current body of work and third solo exhibition at Susan Inglett Gallery engages the often willfully overlooked relationship between Modernism and Colonialism. Where establishment histories see these two extremely determinative periods as separate and distinct, Villalongo sees a continuum. His work underscores the well-documented notion that the aesthetics of Modernism was hewn from a look outward from the European continent employing a hybrid language born out of conflict, desire, ambivalence, alienation and Imperial oppression.

In Villalongo's words, "That outward look was squarely focused on the plunder from distant lands which was detained in ethnographic museums and on exotic postcards by the turn of the 20th Century. This titillated gaze was undeterred as the British Empire achieved its height - quickly followed by a steep fall in the form of global conflict by 1939 (WW2). It was an outward look whose perspectives on the bodies and cultures of those distant lands has yet to be corrected fully, nor its pleasure, pain and comedy spoken of without ambivalence. This gaze would give the West a new visual language in the form of Abstraction. It seems convenient that we never speak of the birth of Western Abstraction as an extension of Colonial power and desire. It is perhaps more convenient that we speak of Contemporary Abstraction as having broken with this past. It is a useful means to understand the issues of Representation and cultural exchange today and, in my work, a rich reservoir of complications in which to find narrative."

With creative mythos Villalongo sets Modernism on a fantastic voyage for its Sista Ancestas.

William Villalongo's "Sista Ancesta" will run from 18 October to 15 December with a reception for the artist 6 to 8 PM Thursday 18 October. The artist will be featured concurrently in the inaugural exhibition of the new Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, "Inside Out and From the Ground Up". The gallery is located at 522 West 24 Street and is open Tuesday to Saturday 10 AM to 6 PM. For additional information please contact the Gallery at 212.647.9111 or [info@inglettgallery.com](mailto:info@inglettgallery.com)