

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

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SUSAN INGLETT

{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.

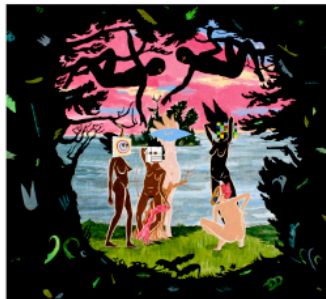
what are your top 5 essentials?

Humor, Good food, Creativity, Hygiene, Rest.

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Currently on view at
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