

Fritchey, Sarah, "What if Obama and Nefertiti had a love child..." RHINOCEROSPOSTEROUS.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-butt 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.

