

WILLIAM VILLALONGO

William Villalongo’s paintings are ultimately visions of modernity’s possibilities. His allusions to African masks, and Renaissance perspective, suggests a world of mythological and pedagogical continuities. These continuities between culture-based perceptions of art, pedagogy, vision and ritual, link his characters to the evolution of modern art as both subjects and protagonists. And as with religious texts, Villalongo’s paintings bring together themes of love, empathy, and renewal. In this exhibition’s *Summer, Winter, Spring and Fall* (2015) the artist moves from an examination of communal interiors to a bodily one. These paintings represent an excavation of the body’s psychic forces (as seen in their irreverent color). It is also a way for Villalongo to speculate on the possible connections between these forces and larger cosmic bodies, as well as those possibly between black matter and black bodies. In *Fall* (2015) and *Winter* (2015), the figures that were a vibrant presence in *Summer* are now the personification of the black body as darker matter wandering, haunting the earth through

arabesque frames of decaying foliage. But the foliage turns with the laws of terrestrial seasons these dark bodies do not recognize, are not held or subject to. The figures are otherworldly, do not turn away or hide from the viewer and the resulting tension is undeniably present, confrontational, worth considering. They are monolithic personifications standing as unclothed as Eve in their stark visitation from elsewhere. Posed in dominant stances like deities, they are unashamed as the centers of their own mythologies, their own gravities, and the speculative universes they personify. In all, William Villalongo’s recent work offers a meaningful inversion of reality as an intervention into the storied and often troublesome histories at the roots of modernism, modern painting, and the race and gender-based assumptions therein.

- LeRonn P. Brooks, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
African & African American Studies, Lehman College, NY

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

William Villalongo (American, b. 1975, Hollywood, Florida) is a New York-based artist and Assistant

Professor at The Cooper Union School of Art. He received his BFA from The Cooper Union and his MFA from Tyler School of Art, Temple University. Villalongo is the recipient of a Louis Comfort Tiffany Award and Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant. His work is held in the collections of The Studio Museum In Harlem, Princeton University Art Museum, The Weatherspoon Museum, and The Whitney Museum of American Art. He is represented by Susan Inglett Gallery, New York.

MARK THOMAS GIBSON

The ambiguity of Gibson’s main character—a worried wolf or coyote who struggles to survive in a harsh rendition of a Western-like movie version of the Land of Manifest Destiny—stems from the fact that this same critter also appears in the totally unsympathetic role of marauding cavalry soldiers stampeding under the banner of the Lone Star State, and as a member of angry demonstrating mobs. So if he is “Everyman,” then every man is his own biggest problem. And, thus we return to the ambiguous and ambivalent dialects of Walt Kelly. And also Philip Guston, who in the same

era that Gil Scott-Heron wrote his rap, cast everyone from Richard Nixon to the painter himself as that arch villain of American history, a Ku Klux Klansman. All of this noted, Gibson’s art is topical in the same way as Heron’s or even Guston’s. It is flat-out mythic. And flat-out—though deeply chiaroscuro and often wildly undulating—weird. Or, to revive another Seventies turn of phrase, outright trippy. His is a Book of Revelation by a prophet who isn’t afraid of going to hell so much as he is on full alert after having been there.

- Robert Storr, Artist, Critic, and Dean of
Yale University School of Art (2006–2016)

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Mark Thomas Gibson (American, b. 1980, Miami, Florida) is a New York-based artist and full-time lecturer at Yale School of Art. Gibson received his BFA from The Cooper Union and his MFA from Yale School of Art in Painting & Printmaking, where he received the Ely Harwood Schless Memorial Fund Award. Gibson is an Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at the Yale School of Art. He is represented by Fredericks & Freiser, New York.

Mark Thomas Gibson, *Last Dance (1-6)*, 2016



MARK THOMAS GIBSON

Last Dance (1-6), 2016
ink on paper
30 x 22 in. each
Courtesy of the artist and Fredericks & Freiser, NY

That’s That Fall, 2016
acrylic on canvas
60 x 40 in.

Turnt Up, 2016
acrylic on canvas
60 x 40 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Fredericks & Freiser, NY

WILLIAM VILLALONGO

Autumn, 2015
acrylic, paper and velvet flocking on wood panel
72 x 36 in.
Collection of Eileen O’Kane Kornreich

Spring, 2015
acrylic, paper and velvet flocking on wood panel
72 x 36 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC

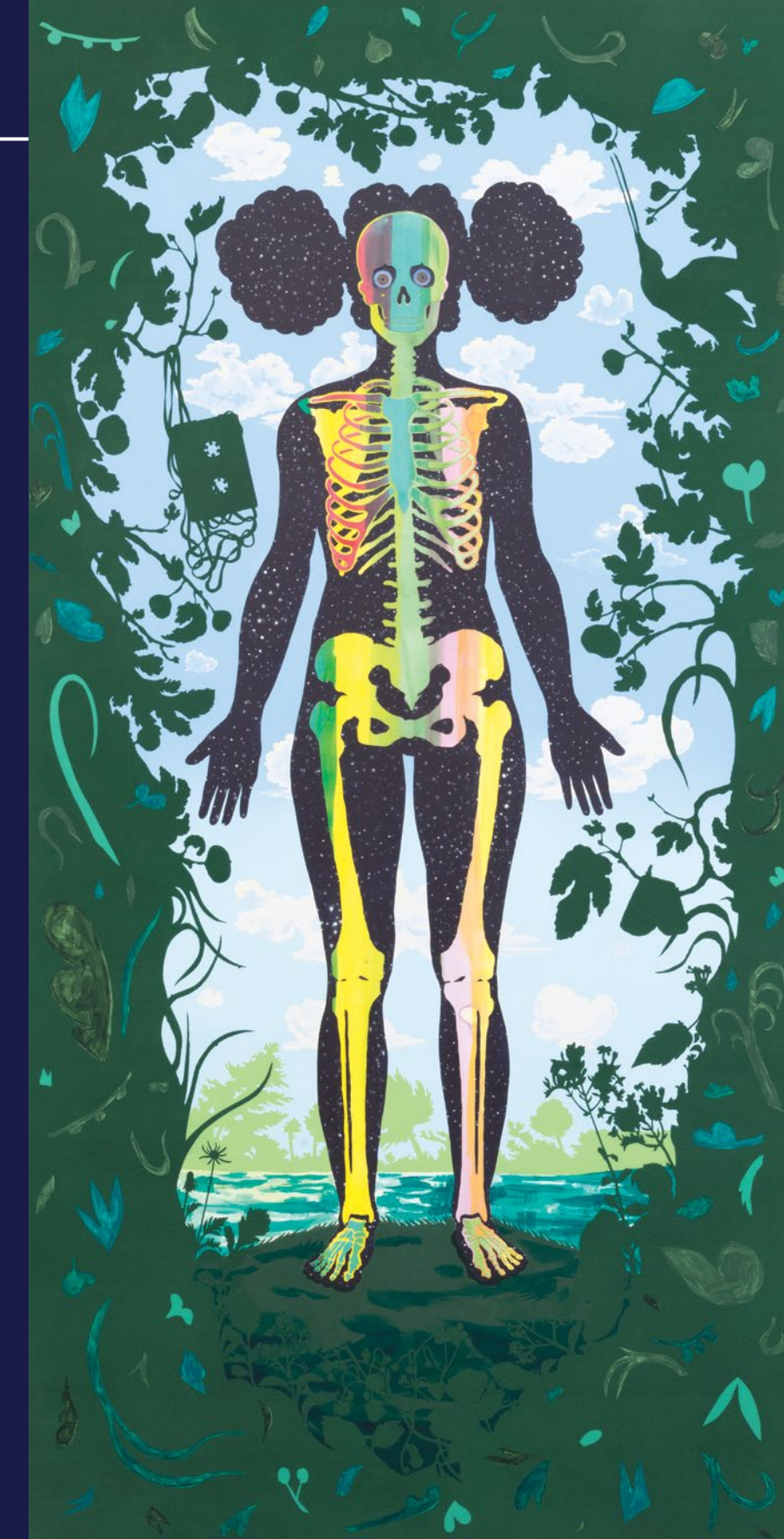
Summer, 2015
acrylic, paper and velvet flocking on wood panel
72 x 36 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC

We Can’t Breathe, 2015
silkscreen on velour paper mounted on coloring book pages with acrylic wash
12 x 9 in. each / 60 x 27 in. overall
Courtesy of the artist and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC

Winter, 2015
acrylic, paper and velvet flocking on wood panel
72 x 36 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC

You Matter, 2015
silkscreen on velour paper mounted on coloring book pages with acrylic wash
12 x 9 in. each / 36 x 27 in. overall
Courtesy of the artist and Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC

William Villalongo, *Summer*, 2015





WOKE!

Woke! brings together recent work by William Villalongo and Mark Thomas Gibson, artists and the curators of *Black Pulp!* The term “woke” is contemporary American vernacular terminology for acute awareness, particularly in reference to the socio-political contexts we inhabit. *Woke!* presents works made over the past two years, a time when the influence of the hyper-visibility of police violence upon Black bodies and the cultural currents of the Black Lives Matter movement informed new narratives in their practice. They traverse the psychic and spiritual landscape of Black erasure through narrative-figural styles; often negotiating high and low forms of image making. Limited notions of the illustrative tradition’s ability to take on grand narrative or serious content is confronted, questioned and overturned by these works. Villalongo and Gibson address perennial change, biology, protest and revolution in highly contrasting ways, opening up pathways to engage the difficult realities of American history and culture. *Woke!* calls on the viewer to reorient themselves to current cultural inequities and their reverberations on how we imagine ourselves from the inside out.

William Villalongo, *Winter*, 2015



William Villalongo, *You Matter*, 2015

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Cover: Mark Thomas Gibson, *Turnt Up*, 2016

W O K E !

**JUNE 2 to
JULY 22, 2017**
 USF CONTEMPORARY
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