



Susan Inglett Gallery is pleased to present WILLIAM VILLALONGO's *Black Menagerie*, 7 September through 14 October 2023. The artist's seventh solo exhibition with the gallery *Black Menagerie* was inspired by research done during a recent residency at the American Academy in Rome. A reception for the artist will be held Thursday 7 September from 6 to 8 PM.

*The mythological dimensions of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea as containers of trauma, forced displacement, and as a gravesite that is still growing is bisected by the aspirational nature of the range of found objects, resurfaced with velvet imbuing them with warmth, softness and depth.*

- Justin Randolph Thompson

*Black Menagerie*, a product of Villalongo's 2022 Residency at The American Academy in Rome, expands upon the artist's work toward a comprehensive representation of Black identity. As a researcher and collector of material culture, the artist composes kaleidoscopic collages that simultaneously disassemble and reconstruct perceptions of the Black past. Featuring a strategic use of imagery and material, each panel is populated with collections of ancient slipware from North Africa and pottery from the American South, geological forms, seashells, butterflies, and Etruscan vases caught up in the current that connects shared histories of the Black Mediterranean and Black Atlantic. Villalongo returns to his characteristic motifs such as the drinking gourd, a coded symbol for the Big Dipper used as a navigational device on the Underground Railroad, while adding imagery associated with Mediterranean and North African mythologies to his metaphoric vocabulary. *Black Menagerie* makes a case for an expanded understanding of Black identity that reaches back in time and across continents to establish an ancient and deeply rooted history.

During his months in Rome, the artist found inspiration in the parallel histories and objects unearthed in his research. Against the backdrop of Villalongo's signature velvet, artifacts and motifs ranging from Ancient Mediterranean to Contemporary culture tell a nuanced story of the Black presence. Straying from traditional figurative representation, the implied anatomy floats weightless in a condition of compressed time, resurfacing histories of migration and forced labor. Both corporeal and otherworldly, Villalongo retraces migratory passages to explore Deep Time and pieces together a reimagined representation of the Black figure. Together, the universal portrait powerfully contextualizes the experience of diaspora and imbues a sense of reclamation, healing, and metamorphosis.

WILLIAM VILLALONGO (b. 1975, Hollywood, FL) raised in Bridgeton, NJ, now lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. He received his B.F.A. from The Cooper Union School of Art, NYC and his M.F.A. from the Tyler School of Art at Temple University, Philadelphia. In 2024, Villalongo will have a solo museum exhibition originating at the Grinnell College Museum of Art, Grinnell, IA, traveling to the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison, WI; Museum of Art, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO; and Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA. He is the recipient of the 2022. Rome Prize, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Award, and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant. Opening October 2023, the artist will be featured in *Puerto Rico Negrx Museum*, Contemporary Art of Puerto Rico (MAC), San Juan, Puerto Rico. Recent exhibitions include *Roma, A Portrait | Festival of Foreign Academies and Cultural Institute*, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, Italy; *Yesterday's Tomorrow: Selections from the Rose Collection, 1933-2018* at the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; *Afrocologies: American Reflections*, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT; and Greater New York, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY. His work is included in the permanent collections of the Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO; Grinnell College Museum of Art, Grinnell, IA; Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ; the Studio Museum in Harlem, NYC; the Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT, among others.