

# The Power in Emilio Villalba's Paintings

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“Explore the dissonance created when the familiar  
is fractured and distorted  
by outside influence.”

Emilio Villalba's Artistic Statement

Scrolling through my Instagram feed, as I usually do in the morning, my thumb stopped wiggling to view a work in progress of a painting, by an artist I've never met; elmo\_84. Elmo\_84, known as Emilio Villalba (pronounced Vee-jal-ba). Emilio Villalba is an abstract visual artist who creates with oil paint, canvas, and wood panel. His social media presence is impressive. His followers amount to almost 38,000, and he has 2,280 posts on his Instagram, most of which are photographs of his paintings. His portfolio consists of vibrant, conceptual paintings of eyes and emotion, inducing portraits of faces and eye catching symbolic works.

Clicking on the link attached in his “bio” on Instagram, I found his work being sold on the Modern Eden gallery website, a contemporary gallery located in San Francisco, California. The curators of the gallery display Emilio's work online much better than he does on his Instagram, which aided me to interpret his work from up close, and to understand what his vision is all about. After analyzing the nature and purpose of his work as an artist myself, I felt inspired to write about a few paintings in his collection, and to explain why he is an outstanding visual artist.

After combing through his three latest exhibitions, as well as work he made available to purchase, I selected four paintings that I love from Emilio Villalba's portfolio. "Smoking (Self-Portrait)," "My Motorcycle and My Wife", "Evil Good Evil", and "Clean Slate" burst with emotion, and tell personal stories through contrasting compositions of rendered, symbolic images harmonizing with the abstract.



"Smoking (Self-Portrait)" By Emilio Villalba © 2018 Oil on canvas 18 x 18 in.

Though a plethora of his work exemplifies conflicting emotions, I think that "Smoking (Self-Portrait)", shown above, is an outstanding example of Emilio's ability to convey complex emotions in a single composition. From a glance, I see the bright red of this figure's torso cut through the background, the disturbing deformity of the figure's face, the blown up scale of the

cigarette, and the collection of cool toned eyes on the right side of the face. Looking closer, I can see what this figure is feeling. The abnormally large cigarette placed on the same side of the deformed face is no coincidence; it screams pain. The suspicious blue eyes make for a great color contrast against the torso; furthering my realization of the suffering of the figure's face. Though the message of quiet suffering is shown clearly by the displacement of the mouth, I think the message is made interesting with the form of the figure, and haphazard style of brushstroke. What I love about this piece is that it conveys emotional, and physical pain in a captivating, aesthetic way.

The next painting makes me laugh.



“My Motorcycle And My Wife” By Emilio Villalba © 2019 Oil on panel 24 x 30 in.

Emilio's 24 x 30-inch oil painting titled "My Motorcycle And My Wife" packs a punch of color, contrast, and a hint of humor that my eye can't get enough of. Emilio's abstract vs. realism statement is as prevalent in this piece as it was in the previous one, but is used to convey something completely different. The matte black background makes the objects in the frame look as if they're floating about, which makes for a hilarious contrast in the weight of the grey scale figure. Below are white, sketched out illustrations surrounded by a beautifully rendered eye, a screaming horse, and flames.

To be honest, I don't know what is happening in this piece. I recognize that there is a story being told by the placement of these visual elements, and the conflicting styles they're adhering to, and that it's utter chaos, but I don't know the context of the story. And, I don't think I want to. Just viewing this painting makes me feel like a badass, and I don't want that feeling to be ruined by knowing this represents the horrid high life; hinted by the direction the cigarette and bottle are facing. It goes to show that this piece has a lot of layers, both visually and emotionally, which made me laugh and cringe at the same time.

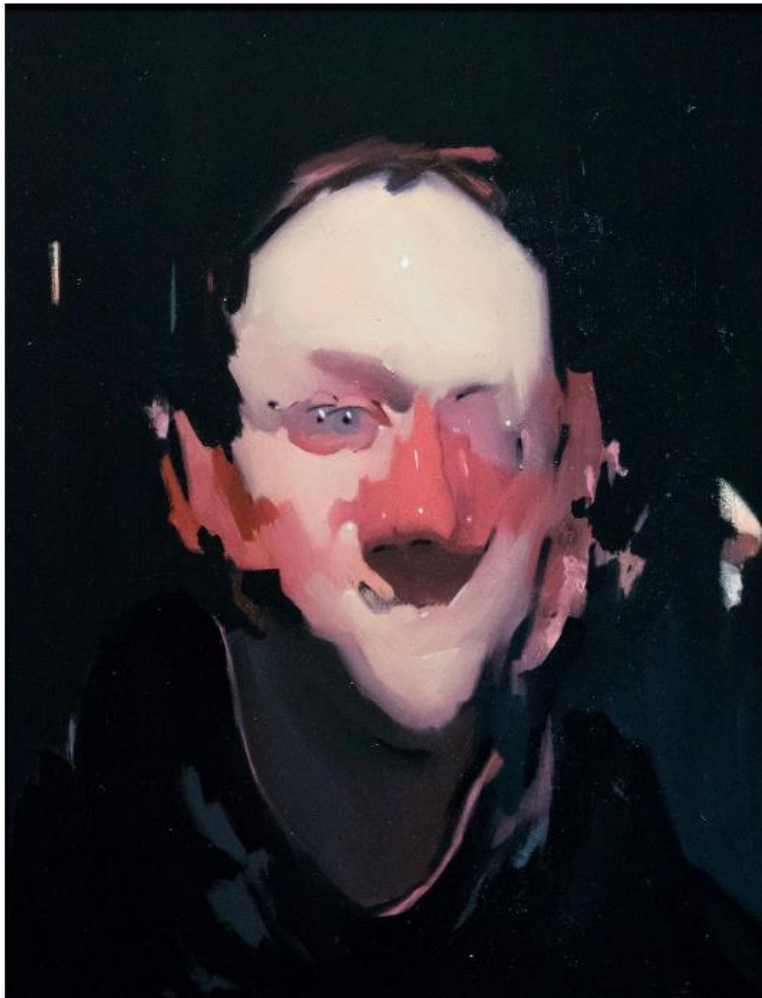
It is redundant for me to keep explaining how Emilio's work thrives on contrast, but this piece "Evil Good Evil" embraces incongruity to where it is almost ironic.



“Evil Good Evil” By Emilio Villalba © 2019 Oil on panel 36 x 48 in.

Obviously, what can be seen here is a textbook example of good contrast, in terms of subject and color. But contrast isn't the only visual element that makes this piece and Emilio's body of work aesthetic: it is in paintings like this that I can see the two sides pitting against each other, but cannot identify which elements are suppose to be the good, and the evil. Though this has the power to make viewers look away out of frustration, I think that the doubt in not knowing is appealing. For instance; the white wings paired with the skull, hovering over the human face flaunting dark wings, is an interesting juxtaposition. It makes me ponder Emilio's perspective of good and evil, and forces me to compare that to my own.

The final painting, I chose showcases Emilio's caliber as a painter, and statement as an artist.



“Clean Slate” By Emilio Villalba © 2016 Oil on panel 11 x 14 in.

This painting, titled “Clean Slate” was featured in Emilio’s exhibition “The Next Day” at the Modern Eden Gallery in 2016. This painting offers the idea of emotional disorientation in a fascinating composition, highlighting the movement and form of the figure’s face. Though the previous paintings I analyzed were riveting, I enjoy experiencing this one more, for the information it entails leads me to connect the expression to personal experiences in my life. The sharp form of brushstroke leaving the figure’s face reminds me of how a mirror shatters

when it's broken. This combined with the absence of the mouth and displacement of the eye, I can see that the painting is representing something bigger than a story or an aesthetic; it is representing the feeling of growing, or "shedding" out of oneself in a painstaking way. I draw that conclusion based on my interpretation of how the eyebrows interact with the rest of the face, but I am left questioning whether or not that is the case.

I'm left questioning because this representation relates to my emotional experience of coping with growing into adulthood; an exciting process that sometimes feels as if I'm shattering past projections of myself. Realizing that I could relate to what this painting is expressing expanded upon my knowledge of emotional conflict within myself. (In other words, I actually learned something about myself from looking at this piece.) The fact that this work achieved in developing my understanding of such complicated, abstract ideas such as emotions through symbolism, and aesthetic appeal is why I love Emilio Villalba's work.

At the end of the day, deciding on the excellence of a work of art is subjective, and comes down to who the viewer is, and what the artist is producing. In my mind, Emilio Villalba artwork offers a refreshing perspective of experiencing life. The paintings I selected read like a book, express a depth of emotions the same way a breathing person does, and captivate my eye with aesthetic compositions, as art should.



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Emilio Villalba, Modern Eden Gallery: <https://www.moderneden.com/pages/emilio-villalba>

Emilio Villalba Websie: <https://emiliovillalbaart.com/>

Paintings in cover page

Top left: "Portrait of Tim" Oil on panel, 16 x 20 in. © 2016

Top Middle: "Symbols of Death, Signs of Life" Oil on wood, 16 x 20 in. © 2018

Top Right: "Money, Love, and Death" Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in. © 2018

Bottom left: "Jason's Room" Oil on wood, 16 x 20 in. © 2018

Bottom middle: "Red Field" Oil on canvas, 11 x 14 in. © 2017

Bottom right: "Nerve Damage" Oil on canvas, 11 x 14 in. © 2018