

# Mayor

2007. Acrylic on canvas, 30 x 48"

Antonio Villaraigosa was a rising star within the Democratic party. He even unseated another Democrat to win the position of Mayor of Los Angeles.

During the Mayoral campaign Villaraigosa trumpeted himself as the family man. On inauguration day, he walked down the street to City Hall with the family hand-in-hand – great photo-ops. The new Mayor had big plans – for himself. There was talk of Antonio being the next Governor of California; the position of Mayor was just a stepping stone, an item to add to his political resume. Within the State of California, many Democrats believed that was why he supported the Republican, Arnold Schwarzenegger, for Governor rather than the Democratic candidate Phil Angelides; a Republican guaranteed there would be no Democrat in office for a reelection campaign when Villaraigosa was planning to run for Governor.

In the meantime, the Mayor was always on a busy schedule in Los Angeles, running around town getting to as many photo-ops as possible in a day. – always ready for a pose and a big smile. These daily excursions required an official memo to staff. Among the requirements, aides were to always have ready for the Mayor: breath strips, hand sanitizer, bottled water (at room temperature), and when getting tea, it should be green tea with four packs of sweetener, “with very little non-fat soy milk.” Also, aides were to “remain at all times within the Mayor’s line of sight.” Why? So the aide could communicate to the Mayor “the amount of time he ha[d] left at the event.”\* And on to the next one!

However, Villaraigosa could not stay focused on any one project or goal. He then became easily distracted by the attention of a female news reporter, Mirthala Salinas, of the Spanish television network Telemundo. The relationship then turned into one of the more sensational political affairs in recent memory, in the fact that Salinas announced on television that the Mayor was getting a divorce, though never acknowledging to the viewers that she, Salinas, the mistress, was the cause of the divorce. It was a case of the media and the politician literally in bed together, both perhaps trying to advance their own ambitions. Of course as is always the case, it ends up at the public's expense; they both end up humiliated and the city's chief executive has to spend his time answering to the people and the press.

Though people who knew the background of Villaraigosa were not surprised – he had reputation for philandering. In 1994 he ran for and won a seat in the California Assembly, again portraying himself as the family man. However, on the night of his victory party, he “left town for a few days with the wife of one of their close friends.”\*\*

After the Mayor & the Mistress affair, Villaraigosa wanted his privacy and decided to lay low for a while. Which always begs the question: why be in *public* office if the desire is *privacy* to have affairs?

Perhaps the retreat to privacy was really a way to devise a come-back scheme – polish the smile, talk-up more big ideas, plan more photo-ops around town.

And resurface he did, campaigning for Hillary Clinton – buzzing around Iowa smiling, shaking hands, getting good photo-op. On February 11, 2008, Villaraigosa appeared on the Tavis Smiley show where he named all the states he had visited on behalf of the Clinton campaign; obviously there wasn't anything for him to do in the second largest city of the United States. He went on to say that he would do the same for whichever Democratic candidate wins the nomination.

Perhaps being back on the campaign trail for Clinton gave Villaraigosa some new ideas; maybe move on to new challenges like an appointment to higher office, in the event a Democrat wins the Presidency. Perhaps the Mayor was tired of not accomplishing anything for the City of Los Angeles, and was in need of another new goal. That seems to be the only thing Villaraigosa is capable of - moving from event to event talking up ideas, smiling and shaking hands. Before he ran for Mayor, Villaraigosa campaigned for a City Council seat, and talked-up ideas, and promised his district that he would stay for two terms, though after only one term as a City Councilman he ran for Mayor.

The story of Antonio Villaraigosa goes to the local roots of the patriot games, on two levels. First, just like Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, there is the never-ending campaign once in office. Second is the media; catering to those in power and always trailing the never-ending campaign like an entourage of celebrity fans.

\* *The Mayor Needs It – Now: Villaraigosa is no rock star, but he gets the treatment. OK, where are the breath strips?*, Los Angeles Times, by Duke Helfand, July 26, 2006

\*\* *Fault Lines: Can Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa keep control of L.A.'s battling factions?*, The New Yorker, by Connie Bruck, May 21, 2007