

# Algernon Miller on Afrofuturism

By Molly Guillermo

“So, you have an interest in Afrofuturism?” Algernon Miller, who goes by Al, asked me when I called him in the middle of the afternoon. I was prepared with questions, but I didn’t need them. Miller was bursting with stories and ideas throughout our conversation and had already drawn up a list of bullet points to give me a full education in Afrofuturism and how he became a father of the movement. His groundbreaking artistic output spans decades and encompasses several mediums, including architectural design, sculptures, anthropomorphic spaceships, and paintings. His friendships with writers, artists, dancers, and musicians, set against the backdrop of 1960s New York City and onward, has made him an influential figure not only amongst other Afrofuturist artists but across the artistic landscape of New York City.

Miller’s art follows the doctrine of Afrofuturism, which has cultural, mathematical, and religious roots in African Buddhism, metaphysics, and Egyptian culture. It emphasizes a search for a new land and a new language of consciousness. Miller’s work honors antecedent culture and looks towards the future while simultaneously “deprogramming” disempowering ideals such as consumerism, Western supremacy, and ego in the present.

Over the course of our two-hour phone call, the conversation veered from the complexities of Afrofuturism as a doctrine and towards cheerful recollections of an older New York City and the vibrancy of its downtown scene--although Miller assured me there was plenty going on uptown that we didn’t have time to talk about. Afrofuturist art is vivid and culturally rich, and Miller’s own body of work and how it developed is as captivating a tale as the history of the movement to which it belongs.

MILLER

So, you have an interest in Afrofuturism?

INTERVIEWER

Yes, I wrote about [The Ellsworth Ausby] show at Eric Firestone Gallery so I learned about it for the first time there.

MILLER

Okay, so, let's see. So maybe we could talk about how I became an Afrofuturist, quote unquote.

INTERVIEWER

Yes, so who you studied, who your influences were.

MILLER

There are a lot of definitions of Afrofuturism out there. And a lot of them are related to technology. Now, of course, we're [Miller, Ausby, and friends] Afrofuturists that go back before computers. This narrative goes back to the 1960s, late 1960s post. I went to the School of Visual Arts. I recently discovered something that I hadn't noticed before from Sun Ra's film *Space is the Place*, so we can [get into that] too. But I'll start with my view and my journey with Afrofuturism. My journey started with the pursuit of my antecedent/Egyptian heritage before slavery, and the uncovering and understanding of ancient spiritual science, culture, and technology. And how that informed my process [was] a kind of synthesis--that's what I called it at the time. That was a word we used a lot: "synthesis." When I say we, I mean Ausby and friends. I'll get to that. So, through a kind of synthesis of past and present, I was able to create new objects and images that connoted a sense of future and liberation. For example, I would study African sculpture, sculpture, in objects and you know, other things, but essentially African

sculpture and transform them through drawing and then into like painting and sculpture. Usually it was painted wall constructions, you might say.

INTERVIEWER

As in, you would copy the sculptures?

MILLER

No, no, the important word is transformation. Some people did like to copy patterns and dealt with it in a kind of graphic way, you know what I mean? You know, sort of symbols and things they transferred onto their canvases. I think all of us did a bit of that, you know, but my process was more like a kind of automatic drawing, where I would take in sort of what I was seeing and then what came out was like something completely different and new. You know, it's funny, Ishmael [Reed] talks about "mumbo jumbo" so it's my own "mumbo jumbo," right? You know, kind of trance transformation is the only word I've been able to come up with, for, but it's a way of taking in information or visual objects and then through my own kind of transformative process, with some intention. I would kind of come up with these different sorts of things, sometimes they would be mask-like, but there were pieces that I called anthropomorphic spaceships. Some of the sculptures I was looking at were Senufo sculptures. And I kind of noticed that if I turn them horizontally, they sort of look like spaceships, you know. And then I sort of came up with this idea of anthropomorphic spaceships. You know, of course, this figurative sculpture is of human form. And there's an interesting sort of spiritual connection with that, you know, because African sculpture is not like Western sculpture that's of the flesh, so to speak. It's more of the Spirit.

INTERVIEWER

And you made your sculptures both.

MILLER

Yeah. So, I guess somewhere around 1967 [I made] these anthropomorphic spaceships with titles like *The Ancestor Searching for the New Land*. That was one piece, and [they had] these long titles, you know, but there was this idea in my mind that through the study of antecedent heritage, there were other systems and cultures and ways of structuring societies that were kind of lost and that we could, in a way, retreat. I don't know if you've ever heard of something called the Maat. We know about 10 commandments. Well, the 10 commandments come from an Egyptian doctrine, called the Maat. And it has, I believe, 77 so-called commandments. So, you learn things like that in this process. I didn't know that the 10 commandments were basically derived from something called a Maat that came from ancient Egypt. And then later I continued with it with an architectural project that started with words and listing, and it was called the De Tom-O-Tron complex. And that was around 1993, which was around the same time that [cultural critic] Mark Dery came up with the term Afrofuturism. The intention is ultimately liberation, you know, liberation of the mind. And that's why I call it the De Tom-O-Tron. It's a deprogramming concept that could have been computer generated or an actual building structure itself. I shopped around. What's good is the African American Museum in Washington, D.C. So, you know, so in a way [De Tom-O-Tron] was a bit ahead of its time in 1993.

INTERVIEWER

Oh yeah, the [African American Museum] is a beautiful museum design.

MILLER

Yeah, but the concept for it was the De Tom-O-Tron complex. There were a lot of different people saying, where's our black museum? So, I promoted the De Tom-O-Tron. I went on a cruise with the head of the NAACP, Dorothy Height. All these people from Washington, D.C.

were aware of my project because I didn't have any money to realize it, but people liked the idea. Hence, they chose another architect. You have the museum in Washington, D.C. Like as David Hammons would say, "You're ahead of your time!" David knows about this project. And then some of my early influences of course, were Sun Ra and Ishmael Reed. We used to hang out at his place on St. Mark's Place back in the day. That was a lot of fun.

INTERVIEWER

How did you guys meet?

MILLER

That's a really good question. I don't remember a moment where I was like, formally introduced to Ishmael. We were all on the scene with a lot of artists and we could have been in you know, a bar called Stanley's. I remember having conversations in some of the local bars, Ishmael and then you know, Ausby and some of the others and we would all hang out at Ishmael's house on St. Mark's place. His early book, *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* was a real influence for me. I love that book. It's a wild tale. And I remember making a piece that was a Hoodoo kind of base piece. And I think there was something about black and pink he mentioned in the book, so I was playing around with that. Ishmael doesn't even know this. That's the thing sometimes. We don't know how we influence each other.

INTERVIEWER

It also seemed like everyone knew [composer, musician, actor, poet, artist] Sun Ra.

MILLER

Oh, absolutely. Let me get into that a little bit. This was way back, maybe 1965 or 1966. I incorporated colored lights with my hard edge paintings because I noticed that different colors would cancel out the planes on the painting surface thereby changing composition. So, I used to

have little light shows at my apartment on the second street. Ausby was around the corner. And Slugs' [Saloon] was also around the corner, on East Third Street.

Alright. I'm gonna backtrack a little bit, just to give you a little backdrop. And I'm going to be dropping a lot of names, but just so you know what the environment was like.

When I was a student at the School of Visual Arts, I met Ausby, and another artist named Ernest Frazier while still attending SVA. I also met one of the models [Priscilla]. She was one of the nude models there and we dated later, but she was also one of the original Grandassa models, who promoted the Black is Beautiful movement, in other words, where the afro natural hair [movement] started, before it was called afro. It was called natural hair. We lived on East 87th Street. So, it's an uptown downtown story. I lived on East 87th Street near Central Park and a building where we had friends like, you wouldn't know some of these [names], but Sonny Morgan played there with Olatunji and Syvilla Fort's dance troupe. She was a protégé of Katherine Dunham. Do you have an inkling of what I'm talking about?

INTERVIEWER

I know where East 87th Street is.

MILLER

Are you taking good notes?

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

MILLER

Good. So anyway, Sonny Morgan was a drummer who played with Olatunji, who was a Nigerian musician and percussionist who brought over what some people felt at the time was sacred Nigerian music and drumming. He also played a lot at the World's Fair, and I worked there so I used to hang out at the African Pavilion a lot. And all the times he played there I met a lot of dancers, drummers, and musicians, like Sonny Morgan. That's what taught me rudimental Caribbean drumming. It was my first introduction to Afrocentrism. And I was introduced to Syvilla Fort, who was a protégé of Katherine Dunham, a well-known choreographer, who also delved into Hoodoo and Voodoo which was kind of interesting to me. And, you know, it's where I learned the rudiments of drumming, and I grew a large afro and changed my mode of dressing and then later, Priscilla and I moved down to East Second Street. Allen Ginsberg lived upstairs right above me. Next door to him was choreographer Raymond Sawyer. And so, I became immersed in the Lower East Side scene. I met and rubbed elbows with writers like Ishmael. There was [writer] Steve Cannon, [poet] John Farris, [writer] Leroi Jones aka Amiri Baraka, [artist] David Henderson, [artist] Hettie Jones, and, you know, and many other writers. And then other artists like Joe Overstreet, Mel Edwards, Gerald Jackson, Ellsworth Ausby, John Chandler. Also on the scene were Bob Thompson and Emilio Cruz, who were pretty prominent painters at the time, and then later I met David Hammons and many musicians on the scene like Archie Shepp, Hank Mobley, Philly Joe Jones, Cecil McBee, Cecil Taylor, Pharoah Sanders, Ornette Coleman, Charles Mingus, Jackie McLean, Thelonious Monk, and others. Later I became pretty good friends with avant-garde musician Milford Graves.

And Priscilla had been to the Congo and brought back African fabrics and python pocketbooks. There was a boutique called Khadija on St. Mark's place. Priscilla influenced Khadija. So now at

this point, we had African fashion and African fabrics downtown, right? And as I mentioned, I was putting on light shows in conjunction with my hard age paintings demonstrating color cancellation, utilizing multicolored lights that I found on Canal Street. Ausby lived around East Second and I lived on East Third or something. And we used to hang out at Slugs' where I was first introduced to Sun Ra. There were many artists and writers. It was a very rich and fertile scene, and it was just amazing. And it was also on kind of the tail end of painting abstract expressionism, which was around in Bohemian. [There were] lots of Bohemian writers and of course Steve Cannon and [The Gathering of the Tribes] are part of that scene, but I was kind of interested in this sort of African heritage which was a little bit different but was embodied in the music and persona of Sun Ra because there were a lot of references to Egypt. So, I kind of found myself not consciously, but somehow gravitating to that. And that was at Slugs', in the Far East, they called it. Lots of musicians there. And then I got one of my first studios on East Broadway in Chinatown in 1967 and created, again, painting and sculpture inspired by Egyptian and African motifs. I built pyramids out of large sheets of cardboard and continued to share ideas around color and symbolism and metaphysics, with Ausby and Frazier. Our immediate circle also included other artists like Joe Jackson and John Chandler, who helped to form the Eclipse, which was a black artists organization. And some of the other artists were Daniel LaRue Johnson, Bill Hudson. I believe Peter Bradley, Haywood "Bill" Rivers, Nathaniel Hunter Jr., Joe Overstreet, Jack Whitten, and Al Loving. And this later culminated into a show at the Whitney Museum, a survey of black artists. I can look that up for you at some point if you're interested in knowing the details to all that.

#### INTERVIEWER

Yes, I read a little bit about it on your website.



MILLER

The best way to understand my work in a holistic way is from [looking at] the early paintings, sculptures, and installations to the current time. I find myself seeking a form that resonates in quilt patterns and geometry and the harmony of the cosmos, music made visible in the language of spirituality. I'm interested in verb-based languages and sacred geometry. I met some Dōgen priests and some really interesting people that continue to broaden my understanding of African cosmology, science, technology, etc., etc. You know, so I continue to learn more about it.

INTERVIEWER

Have you traveled to Egypt or other places that have influenced you?

MILLER

I've been to Africa, and I've been to North Africa, but I haven't been to Egypt. And of course, it's on my bucket list. But I haven't been there yet. A lot of the things that we were studying, and [things] we knew about were because Ausby, Ernie, and I used to frequent a bookstore called Weiser's on the Lower East Side. They had a lot of esoteric books and metaphysical books. So, we got an understanding of what we call esoteric mathematics and numbers that only go from "one to three," these kinds of things. And so, we were these guys that were kind of like artists, but also very interested in metaphysics. So maybe let's go to Sun Ra. Recently the thought occurred to me that to call Sun Ra an Afrofuturist was sort of like calling Jesus a Christian. It's a term a lot of people have picked up and run with, but I noticed that Sun Ra seemed to be aware of some Buddhist doctrines, so I took some clips from the film *Space is the Place*.

INTERVIEWER

Which ones?

MILLER

Here's one. Here is an interview that Sun Ra gave in Detroit. I titled it *The Natural Self*. Sun Ra says, "I am trying to discipline myself. I mean, my other self, because I'm not too worried about myself, because they teach you not to be selfish anyway. Not to think about yourself. So, I think about my other self. That's the self that's never really had a chance. The music that I'm playing, that's my other self playing. And that disturbs some people because they never gave that other self a chance. The natural self. So that's my natural self playing." Now, if I hadn't been studying Buddhism, and in particular, a sage or teacher [called] Mooji, I might have overlooked that. So, let's just put a pin in that for a second.

There is a scene in the movie where Sun Ra opened up an outer space employment agency and the neighborhood drunk, a derelict, wanders in. And he says, "Who *is* you?" And Sun Ra is sitting there in his space regalia, and he says, "I am everything and nothing." So, you kind of have to have the frame of reference to understand that this is kind of a Buddhist-like statement. "I'm everything and nothing." So that other self is everything and nothing that he refers to. At least that's my read of it. So, he also says, in a scene where he appears in a community center with a bunch of teenagers, "I am a present from your ancestors." So here, again, is the introduction of self-knowledge through the ancestors, which I kind of think back to my early work when I was doing that piece called "The Ancestor Searching for the New Land". You're talking about the self that is the person, that is the self in this particular dimension, you know, on the physical plane, and that self has historical reference and all kinds of references that black people have. And so, in the same sense, Sun Ra is saying, "I am here in bringing to you this antecedent heritage or knowledge," which is what I was talking about back in 1967, and earlier in my own work, [but] not being conscious of [it]. I mean, I'm finding this later and I'm going

back and cross referencing and connecting the dots. It's interesting. So, when people try to define Afrofuturism, they become aware that this knowledge of self and liberation through knowledge of self is important, but at the same time, as Sun Ra points out, there are these two selves and there is essentially what you could call the God Self and the Self that exists as a person. And [for those of us] that are born in bodies that are brown or black, there's a lot that comes with that. Sun Ra's spaceship is a yellow structure with two fiery eyeballs that look like they kind of represent the sun in a way. But they look as though you pulled somebody's eyeballs out of their head. So, you cross reference this with what the Buddhist Mooji is talking about. He says, "The witness is not sure or unsure. You become like two eyeballs floating in space, with no mind behind them. No head, no brain, behind the real eyes, there is no mind. It is just pure." So, you follow? There's that disconnect from the mind, the person, and the body in that statement, and so both of them in the representation of Sun Ra's spaceship, are talking about seeing and pointing to the idea of seeing but seeing from a particular place that is based on the true self. Which is very difficult for most people to achieve because they associate themselves with their bodies and their personhood and their minds. You know, in Western [thought], they say, "I think therefore I am." So, this negates that idea completely. It was a real revelation for me to see that Sun Ra had this kind of awareness, and that there are also two ways of looking at space. When you come to the space where you have knowledge itself, you are in infinite space because that's the space of life. So, it's infinite with no ending and no beginning. It's the ultimate space. Sun Ra's talking about space, and you know, outer space and inner space. It's kind of like breathing, breathing in, breathing out. I'm working on a painting now. It's called *Coming and Going*. And I think it has to do with, you know, the idea of souls coming in and going and maybe, you know, reincarnation and things like that, which are also understood in these particular doctrines. And also, you learn early that

Buddhism was a philosophy that traveled from Africa to the East to Asia. If you look at the early Buddhas with the wooly hair, you can see that they were not the fat, roly poly guy, they were African Buddhas. So, these are some of the other things that you learn in the pursuit of antecedent heritage. So, it is my belief and understanding that some people are saying that we are in Afrofuturism 202. It's global and all of that, but without these understandings and knowledge of self we're not really moving that far into the future.

#### INTERVIEWER

It seems like there's so much from the past. And it's also sort of futuristic with spaceships. But then there's also no time, I guess, like you said, there's just infinite space.

#### MILLER

We have to differentiate physical space and even the idea of time itself, and mechanical ways of traveling through space. You know, through contraptions and all this. And this is why I couldn't figure out at first why Sun Ra's spaceship was anthropomorphic, you know, was a set of eyeballs that looked organic. And then when it finally came to me, it was very revelatory. I was like, wow, you know, we're talking about something that's invisible here, so there's a different space. Again, inner space, outer space. And that just increased my understanding and appreciation for Sun Ra. And I haven't found yet any or many people talking about what we're talking about now. Most art I see puts a lot of emphasis on you know, like cyborgs and AI, you know, artificial intelligence. And being somewhere in the future with these mechanical things attached to our bodies and depending on who's running that show it could be a good thing or a thing that's kind of dangerous. A lot of it sort of warlike, so I'm not so sure about some of these versions of Afrofuturism. I think that the scene where Sun Ra talks about and Mooji talks about is more important to us as beings, not just human beings. And that's another thing Sun Ra claims is, "I'm

not a human being.” You know, they call themselves Angels. So that again, is another sort of closer to God, space concept, I think. There's liberation and freedom. And of course, the ultimate freedom is this knowledge of self, the zero and before the zero, the cipher, these numbers, and the symbol for infinity that you've mentioned.

INTERVIEWER

Why did they call themselves Angels?

MILLER

Do you know June Tyson? June Tyson was, I think, the only permanent female member of Sun Ra's band. And they used to do a lot of call and response. So, Sun Ra would say something, you know, “Space is the place,” and she would say “Space is the place.” And they were known to be celibate. This was part of their “Angel consciousness.” I don't want to say “persona,” but consciousness. And so, connecting all these kinds of dots, which is something I love to do, I sort of come up with this idea that they are talking about that true self again, that Sun Ra mentions, and that he plays his music from that. And that is an amazing opening, because we as artists are always projecting. And the question is, where are we projecting from? Are we projecting from our egos? Are we projecting from our true selves? And of course, there are all kinds of other considerations there, you know, what happens in the marketplace? What is our relationship with the artist and so on and so forth? That's a whole other discussion.

INTERVIEWER

That's interesting you brought up the marketplace, because on your website one of your portfolios says something about consumerism. *Gucci Lights*, I believe. And the *Chopper Series*. They look like fashion ads turned into kaleidoscopes.

MILLER

Yeah, gosh. I'm really glad you brought that up. Because I have different ways within my work of saying the same thing. So, in the center of those paintings is this idea of a vortex you know, or a black hole, or a center--the kaleidoscope converges into a center. And for me, this is the universe taking back all of this junk, all these projections that I was talking about, so we get flushed through this hole in the center. You know, back to the God space, so to speak. I don't know how people read it, but this is what's going on in mind that you know what I mean? So, those yellow, red choppers are motorcycles and parts of motorcycles and things like that. And then I have other work that talks about consumerism, but in those pieces I'm really kind of talking about combustion. And in a conversation with a Dōgen priest, he was saying, "Well, hey, man, we knew about combustion, but we decided to leave that in the ground." So hence, with this Yang culture and warlike culture, we're using it to destroy people and to destroy the planet. And, you know, there are all these other issues of combustion and oil and gas. And I think that what some people don't understand is that it's not negating, you know, Western, white [ideals], but there's no spiritual doctrine that guides what they do. It's all rapacious. Greed based and capitalist stuff. And that's what I, as an Afrofuturist, am looking for--the new land, so to speak. And of course, in Sun Ra's movie, you'll see that the whole planet just destroys itself. And he takes a few people who have this consciousness, and he also liberates women. In one scene, he liberates a bunch of prostitutes and puts them on the ship and takes them to this new place where there is a whole other new language of consciousness. And consciousness is the language.

INTERVIEWER

So, your work follows a very specific doctrine, it's not necessarily colors and styles that define your work?

MILLER

I mean, in some cases [colors and style do], in my earlier work especially. Back in the days I was hanging out with Ausby, and we studied African color and color vibration. The relationship to sound and color, you know, I'm interested in all those things. But at different times, like when I'm talking about consumerism, you know, I'm using colors that are already in the environment. So even though some of these things are very beautiful, it's still about how we sort of glorify combustion, and you know, Egyptians would never have all that noise around. No way! Sound was just used to heal. So, [it's difficult] to get this kind of information into artwork, per se. I think in some ways writers can write about these kinds of things, but to make pictures or sculptures, you know, it can be done, but it's...I mean, just to study, Kemet or Merita, which is [the traditional name for Africa] and Kemet, the spiritual science, not the kind of science that we know, but spiritually based science which again goes back to that God space. Like when Sun Ra says, "I'm playing from this other space." Well, we don't play from that, we don't even know that that space even exists in this environment that we're in. Or if we know about it, we're not interested in it because it doesn't make money or you know, whatever. You know what I'm saying?

INTERVIEWER

Do you think if you made the work you're making now back in the 1960s or 1970s that it would have the same impact it has today?

MILLER

The work that I was doing in the 1960s came from a more visibly Afrocentric place, and the more recent work probably is, in some ways, more technological and mathematical. Like sacred geometry, for example. That wasn't something that was central. We were in some ways more abstract. And that's another thing--when you're looking at work that's an antecedent culture from

other cultures, if you will, that culture is not your own culture. You don't really know. In an experiential way you haven't grown up in the culture to know and understand its language and its rituals. A lot of things are ritual based. Like I discovered that zeros and ones and fractals were found in African societies. So, I wasn't using the language of fractals and you know, theoretical physics and things like that at the time. But now, because of changing technology and language, we discuss fractals, but again, I found fractals as part of the cosmology of certain African societies and the way they construct their villages. There was a young man who flew over part of Africa, and he noticed that the village was arranged in a fractal-like formation. So that's like, the repetition of the same form down to its most minute level, so to speak. And he got a grant to go back and study and do some research on what he had discovered from the air and went to talk to the Chief, and he was all, "Oh yeah, we've known about fractals." They didn't use that term, but they'd known about these concepts. And he asks, "Well, what are these things? I don't get it." And they're kind of like houses but nobody can live in them. And he said, "Those are for the spirit of the ancestors." So, the invisible is in these small vessels. And so, there's this whole fractal formation right down to from what you can see to what you can't see. So, there's a whole other system, and then in that same process, he found someone scrolling zeros and ones in the ground. And he was like, "Well, wait a minute. What are the zeros and ones? This is the basis of computers, math, and science." And he had to go through a whole initiation before this person would tell him how and why they knew about this stuff. So, these sciences and technologies, I think, as I believe Ishmael has stated before, have been in folklore and been a part of the culture all this time. So, the future is actually part of the present. People call it the past because we live in this sort of truncated society that disconnected itself from the origins of the sciences and



created their own, you know, capitalist Jesus and all this kind of stuff. You know, they've lost the route to things, and everything is new.

INTERVIEWER

Well and then we look back and call cultures primitive or label other cultures as less technologically advanced.

MILLER

White supremacy is an ego-based concept that negates everything else. So, if you're saying everything starts with you, you box yourself in a corner, actually. So, in a very short period of time, we find ourselves on the brink of everything. The planet, wars, just total chaos.

INTERVIEWER

What other sorts of things were you doing around this time?

MILLER

I met Andy Warhol and I got to touch base with so many people who are part of the art world and many jazz musicians. I worked at the Metropolitan Opera in Lincoln Center. [One time] Thelonious Monk was out in the back smoking a joint with another musician. You didn't talk to him because he didn't talk [before shows]. But he had on his blue house slippers and blue suit. All we had to do was walk out into the street and see Charles Mingus. And same thing with Ishmael--it was just a wonderful, wonderful time...

INTERVIEWER

Is it more difficult to make art now compared to several decades ago?

MILLER

...Now, you would go, oh, this guy was an Afrofuturist, right, but there was no one or very few people that were interested in it at the time. [Then there was] the Whitney exhibition. It was

Ausby, Ernest Frazier, and me, and we were probably cornered in our own space, because we were probably the three Afrocentric guys. My piece was actually the first piece to sell, I was told, which was a monolithic, polychromatic monolith, called "The Third World Tree". It was a piece of wood in the Whitney Museum that had African color symbolism. It was based on numerology or numerical code. Everything was based on three, which was something that we had discovered- numbers only go from one to three. Not everyone knew what it was about. So, it's sort of like, you have one and the two and then it's three, so if you're talking about the family of numbers, it's translated into mother, father, or child. So, the number three becomes the child... And Hammons uses it to sell his work [too], because it's kind of a formula you'd have to dummy down, he'd say. You only have basically, at most two elements, and it's easy to understand. It's like nursery rhymes. I'm not getting to it, you know, esoteric or something, but there's this whole understanding of numbers and how they work, and it flows over into our artwork and how people make art as well.

#### INTERVIEWER

What do you think of New York now?

#### MILLER

That's a good question... I don't think one has to be in New York. I do have collectors here and I don't want to move too far away from it. You know, I live in Harlem, was born in Harlem, and have connections here but it's changing so rapidly in different directions. You know, gentrifying and the drugs being put into the community, and there's this devastation that I haven't seen in a long time... So yeah, there's this deliberate action needed to see the progress of black people. But I'm seeing it here and it's disturbing... No matter how it goes, I'm in a pretty good place with myself. I'm happy that there are so many really bright African American artists that are having

success. They're amazing. They're so articulate. But there's a kind of competitiveness and I think appropriation that has maybe gotten a little out of control. But, you know, there are these young artists that are trying for these careers, so they don't care so much about the history, or history of the arts and how we got here in the same way that European cannons do, so to speak. So, they're just like, trying to find things that can turn into a good conceptual story and, you know, trying to sell themselves. Some of that is annoying. But I guess that's what we call progress.

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