



Smithsonian
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Transcript of interview with R. A. Miller

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Transcript

Preface

Tape-recorded Interview with R. A. Miller

at the Artist's Home in Gainesville, Georgia

March 10, 1984

Willem Volkersz, Interviewer

Editor's Note:

This transcript is from a series of recordings made by Willem Volkersz over a number of years. They are not formal interviews, but rather records of conversations, often taped during photo-taking tours of the artist's studios or home collections.

The naive/visionary artists in these interviews have unique verbal mannerisms, many of which are difficult or impossible to transcribe accurately into written form. Thus, for grasping certain nuances of speech, researchers will find it advantageous to listen to the original tapes.

Our intent in transcribing these interviews was nonetheless to translate as accurately as possible the spoken word into a comprehensible written form, making changes to clarify but not to interpret. Thus the speaker's grammar is unedited. For example, "them" for "those," "themselves," and "gotta" were all transcribed as heard. On the other hand, certain changes were made for clarity: "cause," was transcribed as "because," "fore" as "before," "yo" as "your," etc.

Other editorial notations are as follows: Bracketed words are of two types. Those with "[—Ed.]" or "[—WV]" are inserted by the transcriber, editor, or Volkersz. Other bracketed words indicate uncertainty: Two or more words or phrases indicate possible alternatives; "[unintelligible]" and "____" indicate words that are garbled or incomprehensible on the tape, the former being a much longer phrase than the latter; "[noise]" is self-explanatory.

The original format for this document is Microsoft Word 365 version 1908. Some formatting has been lost in web presentation.

Interview

RM: R. A. Miller

WV: Willem Volkersz

AW: Allan Winkler

[Tape 1, side B; Volkersz' No. T1-B]

[Volkersz was accompanied by Allan Winkler, Kansas City Artist—Ed.]

WV: Name is Willem Volkersz. I'm from Kansas City.

RM: Miller's my name.

WV: How are you, sir? Nice to meet you. This is my friend, Allan Winkler.

AW: Glad to meet you.

WV: Wonderful work you got out here.

RM: Hm? Something to do, anyway.

WV: Uh huh. How long you been making them?

RM: Ah, I guess about two years, two years and a half.

WV: Uh huh. What made you start to make 'em?

RM: I just retired, and I just had to get me up a hobby.

WV: Why windmills?

RM: I don't know. (said with a smile) I seed one, down [in] the country, and fella had one, bicycle with a wheel, and I said, "I can make one of them." And I just got started, and I got to making these too. I managed to get [up] another kind too, but can't keep things from my. . . . Old woman up there ironing and washing.

WV: Right.

RM: [inaudible]

WV: Uh huh. You've made those too?

RM: Um hmm.

WV: Do you have any of those around?

RM: No. This feller got the last one I had, and [inaudible]. High wind just pretty rough on 'em sometimes.

WV: I'll bet. They're really wonderful. Where do you get all your materials?

RM: I just pick it up around. There's a boy puts in this here gutters around the houses, have short pieces.

WV: Right.

RM: So I just get them.

WV: Ahh. How about all the posts that they're on?

RM: Looks like you just pick them up. . . . [unintelligible]. But I went down here in the woods and got them wooden posts.

WV: Oh, sure.

RM: Them iron posts is a. . . . You know these swings that they give away, throw 'em away, people throw 'em away.

WV: Uh huh.

RM: Pick 'em up. They give 'em to me. Just tear 'em apart.

WV: Looks like once you got started you couldn't stop, huh? (chuckles)

RM: Yeah. Yeah.

WV: That's great.

RM: Yeah, I made one. . . . Out yonder _____ is the footings I made. [Noise of walking through brush—
WV] I've been in the hospital. I just got out.

WV: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

RM: Yeah, harnia, harnia, whatever you call it.

WV: Hernia?

RM: _____, operation.

WV: Are you all right now?

RM: Yeah, he told me not to do no lifting.

WV: Uh huh.

RM: Made that one, made that one, made that one, made that one.

WV: When did you make those? Early ones, you mean?

RM: I made 'em yesterday.

WV: Oh, yesterday. How many can you make in a day?

RM: Well, them thar', I can make four or five, but them there my bicycle ones. I made one of them, _____ right back on there. _____ so much cutting out to do.

WV: Uh huh.

RM: Where'd you say you was from?

WV: Kansas City.

RM: Canada?

WV: Kansas City.

RM: That's a pretty good piece over there.

WV: Yeah.

RM: I make that right there yesterday.

WV: The one with the bicycle wheel?

RM: Yeah.

WV: Looks like a good one, yeah. It's got nice bright paint on it.

RM: It's got ball bearings in it.

WV: Yeah. Oh, they'll work real good.

RM: [unintelligible]

AW: Do you have to take the spoke out? Loosen the spoke and put it in there?

RM: [unintelligible]

AW: With the spoke loosener, like that, one of those spoke tighteners?

RM: Take a screwdriver and unloosen this little joint right here.

AW: I see, yeah.

RM: Every other one.

AW: Yeah.

WV: [Ah, yes.]

AW: This looks like a real good one.

RM: Yeah, that one. . . .

AW: Looks like you're getting better, huh?

RM: Uh huh. Yeah, that's, that's [stiff], that bike.

WV: Huh. These are birdhouses, I suppose, right?

RM: Yeah. These little airplanes [airplane windmills—WV], they, people like them.

WV: Yeah, I like them a lot.

RM: ____ _____. Look at this fly.

WV: So do you carve the propeller for that?

RM: Huh?

WV: Do you carve that? The propeller?

RM: Yeah, I make that with a pocket knife.

WV: Uh huh. Yeah, they're pretty neat. So you sell them?

RM: I would sell 'em, if you want to buy one.

WV: That's pretty neat. That's kind of nice with that face on it. [Referring to a windmill with sheet metal face for the tail—WV]

AW: Yeah, I like that.

RM: I make 'em some _____. Sometimes I make 'em like this right here. See that man throwing his hand up.

WV: Oh yeah.

RM: Cigarette in his mouth.

WV: That's great. Do you have any of those figures just cut out by themselves, without being on windmills?

RM: Huh?

WV: Do you have any of those figures by themselves? The little figures.

RM: No.

WV: They're just on the windmills. I really like those. The windmills are kind of large for us to take. I think I'd like to take one, but they're pretty big.

RM: Yeah. Yeah, they're pretty big.

WV: How much do you sell them for?

RM: All different prices.

WV: How about that one we were looking at a minute ago, with the head on the back of it?

RM: I don't know. It's just. . . . Yeah, I made this just before I went to the hospital.

WV: Huh.

RM: Here's another one I made. Which one you talking about?

WV: That's _____. Let me look around a little bit and try to decide. That's kind of a nice one.

RM: Right here's a pretty one, too. Hit ain't got the [names] yet.

WV: Must make some pretty good racket when they're whipping around, huh?

RM: Oh yeah.

WV: Yeah. How about. . . . See that one with the black figure on it there, with the red, white, and blue blades on it? See that one? On the blue pole? Straight back. The furthest back, almost.

RM: Solid blue.

WV: It's a blue pole with a black figure on it.

RM: Oh yeah, yeah.

WV: How much would you want for something like that?

RM: Oh, about. . . . I'll take \$8 for that.

WV: Um hmm. Could we just lift that off pole? Will that come off?

RM: That's the way it goes. Just lift 'em off.

WV: So has it got a ladder out there, or what?

RM: Uh huh. [noise] Yeah, that must be ____ ____.

AW: ____ ____ figure ones, the two figure ones. Yeah, I like this one, too.

[End of interview]