



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Transcript of interview with Columbus
McGriff

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

Tape-recorded Interview with Columbus McGriff

at the Artist's Home in Cairo, Georgia

March 21, 1977

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," "theirselves," 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

CM: Columbus McGriff

WV: Willem Volkersz

DV: Diane Volkersz

[Tape 1, side A; Volkersz' No. M1-1; dubbed tape marked M1 , continuing after Eddie Martin interview, about half way through the 45-minute tape side—Ed.]

[Volkersz noted that the battery was low and that the tape consequently was a little speedy. To further complicate things, McGriff speaks unusually rapidly and with much repetition, possibly a stutter.—Ed.]

WV: Thank you. [microphone and wind noise—Ed.]

DV: [unintelligible]

CM: _____ a long time to _____.

WV: Have you been having a lot of people stopping through to see your work?

CM: Yeah. I, it's so cold this year, I been _____ nothing, but. . . .

WV: Huh.

CM: . . . it's so cold, you know.

WV: In uh. . . .

CM: I had, see, when you 'come an artist it takes, takes money to work on these things.

WV: Yeah.

CM: Takes some time, you know.

WV: Do you, where do you. . . . Do you work right here in the house?

CM: Right here.

WV: How did you get started in making these?

CM: Oh, when I was a, when I was a little boy. When I was a little boy [unintelligible] in _____, Florida I started [barns] and working with wire.

WV: Uh huh.

CM: Here's a, here's. . . .

WV: Wow.

CM: Here's [unintelligible].

WV: That is a beauty. Now is that the one that's in the catalogue? On folk art? A _____ of that show?

CM: No, that's the ones, that's another one.

WV: They've got. . . . Oh.

CM: In Atlanta?

WV: Yeah.

CM: (laughs)

WV: I didn't see the show, but I saw the catalogue. That's how we got your name.

CM: Yeah. My name's in the catalogue, huh?

WV: Yeah.

CM: That's all right.

WV: I thought, "That man is really good. I've got to go see him."

CM: (laughter)

WV: Oh, boy.

CM: Yeah. Now here's the, here's a 'squito, _____.

WV: Oh. Oh, boy.

CM: These's things are not even put together. They're very hard.

WV: Yeah, I can imagine.

DV: Do they come apart?

CM: Yes. Sometime you oughta see [unintelligible].

WV: Oh, boy. . . .

CM: That's [unintelligible]

WV: Yeah. Oh, yeah, look at the wings. Now you paint all these?

CM: You ruin the beauty of it.

WV: Yeah.

CM: See, the 'tractive part is the nice economy of it. That's attractive. ____ run it through there. But the eagle, it is brown and white.

WV: [unintelligible]

CM: Let me show, let me show, let me show you the truck, the tractor trailer.

WV: Okay. Look at that truck. Oh, that is amazing! Look at that! Do you think we could photograph these outside? Would you mind?

CM: I don't mind. On the porch, on the porch.

WV: Wherever there's a little bit. . . . I could either take 'em with a flash [garbled tape] it's better to have little natural light. Or out in the grass ____, maybe? Or is that too far?

CM: I can put them on the grass.

WV: If you'd like me to I can make you some prints of 'em if you'd like to have them.

CM: Yeah? I'd appreciate it.

WV: Yeah.

CM: Have some prints of 'em?

WV: Yeah. D'you like me to do it?

CM: Yeah, I'd appreciate it.

WV: Here, I'll [unintelligible]. It's better to take them outside.

CM: Light.

WV: Yeah, the light is better [noise].

CM: Wait. Maybe you need somethin'. . . . I'm gonna take something to put them on, white.

WV: If you have it. Otherwise, against the grass wouldn't be too bad. Yeah, I guess something light _____. . . .

CM: White.

WV: . . . would show up better.

CM: Yeah, something white. [pause, to rearrange things—Ed.]

WV: So you make 'em right here at home, huh?

CM: Um hmm.

WV: [unintelligible, noise]

CM: Yeah. [noise]

WV: Well, no, I guess we don't need it. Yeah, okay.

CM: [noise] _____ in the background, _____.

WV: Well, if we just put that on the grass. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

CM: Okay, I ain't got nothing. . . . On account of sales, I'm waiting on wire so I can get some more.

WV: Yeah. How long do you figure it takes you to make 'em?

CM: Build one of these trucks it takes about twenty dollars a wack.

WV: Wow. But how long in time?

CM: It takes about a couple, three weeks.

WV: Three weeks?

CM: Um hmm.

WV: Is that working like all day on 'em, or what?

CM: It _____ time.

WV: Boy.

CM: By the way, the steering wheel turn. The steering wheel turn.

WV: Huh?

CM: The steering wheel turn.

WV: Oh, wait, yeah.

CM: No, the steering wheel there. Turn the steering wheel on the truck, there.

WV: Do what?

CM: Turn the wheel.

WV: The wheel?

CM: Um hmm.

WV: I'm sorry, I don't know what you're. . . .

DV: Oh, the. . . .

WV: Oh!

DV: Oh, my gosh. [pause]

CM: I'm gonna get the eagle. [unintelligible]

WV: I'll take 'em one at a time, see. [continuing to photograph—Ed.] Actually, we can [unintelligible]. . . .

CM: [unintelligible]

WV: [unintelligible]

CM: Better take the eagle and the chair.

WV: Uh huh.

CM: It can show up better by the flower, it'll show up better.

WV: Yeah, this is real good. These are really the most amazing thing I've ever seen. Boy.

CM: I love to make 'em.

WV: How long you been making 'em?

CM: Oh. . . .

WV: Since you were, since your boyhood?

CM: Mm, 'bout seven. I'm forty-three now.

WV: And you've been selling them all along, or what?

CM: I sell a few now and then. I sold about a couple hundred dollars worth at Christmas. I made a, I make a phantom jet for a lady.

WV: Ah.

CM: I made a phantom. . . .

WV: You mean people give you orders on things?

CM: They can order, yeah. I guess because y'all want to take a _____. 'D like to buy a butterfly. Let me bring some out. . . .

WV: This is a real beauty.

DV: It's great the way all the parts move. Hmm. [Long pause; sounds of movement and background birds and insects—Ed.] How about that red flag [Land camera shutter on end of tractor trailer—WV]?

WV: Yeah. [pause]

DV: Do you make it from pictures or just from memory?

CM: Oh, from memory.

DV: Really?

CM: I can do it by memory better than I can do it by pictures. I does everything by memory.

DV: Really?

CM: I done [that] truck by memory.

WV: Boy. Well, you have a good memory.

CM: Mm, it takes a memory. [unintelligible] Doing these is a lonely life. [unintelligible]

WV: Oh.

DV: (laughs)

WV: Let me take a picture of you with them.

CM: [Sound signifying assent.]

WV: That'd be real nice. [pause] Why don't you look over here for a sec. That's great.

WV: Now this is a. . . .

CM: That's a old man.

WV: Oh, yeah, walking with a cane and a hat.

CM: I bet y'all'd like to take that wit' you, take a souvenir something like that with you, don't cost too much to take something back wit' you where you can show da people.

WV: That'd be real nice.

CM: Take something back. Take a butterfly and take a [small] of mine. They don't cost too much there.

WV: Uh huh.

CM: Take something small like a butterfly. . . .

WV: Something like that'd be real nice.

CM: Yeah, won't cost too much, but if you want a run in money and you want to buy, you want to, you know, this one, this'd run fifty-five dollars.

WV: Boy. Yeah.

CM: This truck, this truck would run a hundred and fifty.

WV: I sure wish I had the money.

CM: Um hmm.

WV: How about a car like that?

CM: Uh, ninety dollars.

WV: Boy.

CM: 'Cause see all the work in there. You can get tired of it. You can [unintelligible]. You can sell it. I sold a lady one from New York. She went and sold it for a hundred, a man gave her two hundred dollars for it. You can get rid of 'em.

WV: [unintelligible]

CM: And put a star up to the eagle.

WV: Uh huh. Now, how did this [noise].

CM: I was in the papers, I was in the papers. [shows us a photo published in local paper of CM as a shoeshine in a movie—WV]

WV: Ohh, they wrote a story on you, huh?

CM: Yeah. Yeah, I go in the papers. [unintelligible] I ain't got enough of [unintelligible]

WV: [To DV:] He's neat.

CM: [unintelligible] [pause] I sure appreciate y'all coming by.

WV: Oh, I'm real glad to see these 'cause I'm an artist myself and. . . .

CM: Yeah, the, what you draws?

WV: Yeah. I draw and I make some sculpture too.

CM: Oh, yeah. I love that. I'm going to get me a big house, and in the future I'm gonna get a museum.

WV: Oh, and put 'em all up?

CM: Yeah, I'm goin' to be a big, I'm gonna be a big person like you. . . .

WV: Well. . . .

CM: I can. . . .

WV: Listen I'm no big person! (laughs) I'm a teacher, but I'm no big person.

CM: Yeah, but. . . .

WV: I'm not really well known, you know.

CM: No, but I can go to school, too, you know. I might do that. See, I'm gonna tell you about. . . . I guess you know about "modernite." Modernite can do anything. I mean a modernite.

WV: Uh huh.

CM: He can copy anything.

WV: Oh, that's so beautiful. You got colored wire down below, here.

CM: You get me the wire and send it down here, and some money, man, and I'll build you one where, you can put it in your school, huh?

WV: Oh, that'd be nice. (chuckles)

CM: You get the wire, so it won't cost you to buy the wire, so it won't cost you so much.

WV: So you have to buy the wire, huh? (loud noises)

CM: Yeah.

WV: You can't get it from people who, stuff left over. . . .

CM: No, you can't use that. You gotta use good wire. You can't use that rusty old wire.

WV: Oh yeah.

CM: You gotta use good wire.

WV: What's this in here now? What's that in here for?

CM: Oh, that's the, take it out, take it out.

WV: Oh, those are the, that's all right. Those are just the receipts, huh? [CM was using a duck's body as a container for his receipts—WV]

CM: Yeah, you can, that be a, where you can put receipts in there, see?

WV: Oh, that's handy.

CM: (laughter)

WV: Sure, you've got a little door. (laughs) I didn't know what it was. See it's useful as well. Beautiful as well as functional.

CM: Yeah. Now, I'm gonna take the eagle and the chair.

WV: I haven't taken this one yet. Let me get this one here.

CM: I'm gonna stand in the background, man. See, I'm a star, see. [posing with a wire star—WV] I'm a star.

WV: Oh, yeah. Here, let me get you with that. That's real nice.

CM: Wait a minute. I'm a star.

WV: Yeah, I will.

CM: That's a star. I'm a star, holding a star.

WV: That's beautiful. Those are real nice.

CM: Um hmm.

WV: You paint over those. What do you use, enamel paint?

CM: Enamel paint.

WV: Yeah.

CM: Some things I paint and some things—particularly the eagle—some thing I paint, and _____. The eagle that we took about his [pew, few]. The eagle that we took. The eagle that we took. [Referring to the eagle that was photographed—WV]

WV: Yeah, I'll do that in a sec. Let's see. Oh yeah. What kind of tools do you use?

CM: I use a wire plier, but I take, got to take the, I take them in [my] hand and wrap it. Mess your hand, wrap it with my hand.

WV: So you first built the whole, kind of the structure, out of this heavy wire?

CM: Um hmm.

WV: And then you go around it with the lighter wire?

CM: Um hmm. Yeah.

WV: That's the way to do it.

CM: Here's the motor, see. [describing parts of one of his wire trucks— WV]

WV: Oh yeah!

CM: Hole in there.

WV: Move that again with your hand, and I'll get your hand in there [in a photograph—Ed.]. I guess that's. . . . That's good.

CM: Um hmm.

WV: That'll give an idea [of scale in the photo—WV].

WV: That's beautiful.

MV: Yeah. I see.

CM: I'd like to come to Kansas City, when your, your hometown.

WV: Have you ever been there?

CM: No, if, if somebody'd like to pay my expenses.

WV: Yeah.

CM: 'D like to come there and visit school ____ ____.

WV: What I'd like to do is bring folk artists like yourself to. . . . See, I teach in an art school, where everybody goes for four years that are going to become artists, see.

CM: Well. . . .

WV: I'd like to show them what people like you do.

CM: Well, what I know. . . . Listen, I knows, I knows, I knows everything. I can do, I can do anything.

WV: Uh huh.

CM: Uh, I'm modernite. I mean, I don't try, I don't be a ____ for _____. I tries most anything. I can do anything. [pauses] Well, do me good to come out and stay a week or two of vacation.

WV: Yeah.

CM: If I can get a'budy to pay my expenses. (laughs)

WV: Right. Now do you make your living pretty much from this or do you have to do something else?

CM: Yeah, I make my living from that. See, I got, I have a, I have a glass eye, you know.

WV: Oh!

CM: And then the governor takes care of me a little bit.

WV: Oh, I see.

CM: They don't give me too much.

WV: Well, did you have an accident?

CM: Yeah.

WV: Oh, that's too bad.

CM: I get about \$160, \$167 to spend a month. That pay a little of my, but it ain't too much.

WV: So you can only see out of one eye?

CM: Um hmm.

WV: Huh!

CM: It's a glass eye.

WV: Boy, yeah!

CM: Man made, man made that was a artist, huh?

WV: Yeah, he really. . . . I didn't notice it! I didn't know it, huh!

CM: (laughs) Ohh.

WV: That's terrific.

CM: I've got a, I've got a little friend of mine, young friend; he's a artist in California.

WV: Yeah?

CM: Yeah, he's a, he's _____ same thing, getting in California. He pays some of my expenses—you know, help me out a little bit. He done got married now, a young couple like y'all.

WV: Uh huh.

CM: He done got married. I think he's in California now.

WV: That's a nice one. I was taking that. [They proceed to discuss the setup of a photograph.—Ed.]

CM: Let me get some better butterflies [wire sculptures—WV].

WV: Yeah, well, I'll just take him.

CM: Let me see, now.

WV: Here you go, here.

CM: Let me see, you better. . . . Where to. . . . Where to put this. I'll put this on; that'll make it come out. No, this white. No, _____ white. No, that would be as the background or _____.

WV: Be nice against the tree or something. We don't even need the chair, I don't think. Be nice to give it a natural environment, do you think?

CM: Let me see now. That for the [wind] I know. [pause] [Lay, Leave] that one [to Philip, across], I think. Yeah. No.

[Section too faint (too distant from microphone) to transcribe—Ed.]

WV: Oh, I can try. I don't have my _____ at my fingertips.

CM: No.

WV: What I do is I take these slides and I show them to my students, you know, and show 'em what people like you have done who haven't gone to art school, you know. And they sometimes feel like people like you do more interesting work than people who went to college. I think.

CM: You're right, you're right. That's nice.

WV: _____ natural environment, the eagle.

CM: That's American eagle. [unintelligible] I tell you what. I'll hold it. [unintelligible]

WV: Okay.

CM: ____.

WV: Yeah, I had one hanging down. That's nice against your jacket, like that.

[Another faint section]

WV: Do you get your mail right up here?

CM: No, at my mother's house.

WV: Oh, at your mother's house.

CM: Yeah, you can go by there.

WV: I went to her to find out where you were.

CM: [garbled] that how you find it.

WV: Yeah, I want a. . . . [garbled]

CM: Did you have a. . . . [garbled]

WV: No, I just have, I just. . . . [garbled]

CM: [garbled]

WV: . . . ____ ____ and started [garbled]

CM: [garbled] . . . into it.

WV: Okay.

CM: [garbled] . . . out with little ____ ____.

WV: Okay.

CM: [garbled] You better go out and get some ____ work.

WV: Okay.

DV: I'll write that down.

CM: Make sure. . . . [garbled]

DV: 107 Eleventh Street?

CM: [garbled]

WV: Okay.

CM: [garbled] then gives [garbled]

WV: Well, we'll take these inside and. . . .

CM: ____ ____ together. ____ [unintelligible]

[Conversation stopped while they changed locations—Ed.]

WV: That's real nice, you know.

CM: Yeah.

WV: (chuckling) That looks real natural, you know, like you'd [really] find him there.

CM: (laughs)

[Another garbled passage]

CM: That's American bald eagle. [Another garbled passage]

CM: . . . American eagle. Looks beautiful. He's American eagle.

[Interruption in taping]

WV: Ahh.

CM: Give me fifty dollars down.

WV: Uh huh.

CM: And he did it, too.

WV: Huh.

CM: And I'll move, I'll make a note. I'll make \$200 a day.

WV: That's incredible.

CM: \$200 a day. And I've friends that give me a check for \$1,000. Went, went about three weeks.

DV: Oh boy.

WV: That's a lot of money.

CM: And I think, _____, _____ know Ellis. . . . Know Ellis Cole?

WV: [shakes head negatively] [A baby has now joined the conversation.— Ed.]

CM: I with Ellis Cole. Ellis Cole and. . . . Boy, Ellis Cole and somebody _____, some brick mason _____, _____. I know a lot of 'em India. That was a good movie. You know one thing? I'm going to tell you. When you 'come a artist, you. . . . You artist, right?

WV: Yes.

CM: You can tell, you feel good when you [graduate]. Nobody got to tell you. Is that right or wrong?

WV: Right.

CM: Huh?

WV: You feel it in your heart.

CM: You feel it.

WV: Yeah.

CM: And when you 'come good, you know it. Nobody got to tell you.

WV: It's one of the most satisfying jobs you can do.

CM: Yessir, you feel good and you feel like you've gone to church and like that. But that's a beautiful thing. When you come good you be your own boss. Be [what] you call self-made. Self-made.

WV: Exactly.

CM: Take. . . . I can build anything.

WV: You didn't have anyone to teach you either.

CM: I can build anything. Anything I look at I can build it.

WV: Now have you. . . . You've only worked with wire? Have you ever worked with anything else like wood, or anything like that?

CM: I can make wood, but I don't like to work with wood. I can carve. I can carve.

WV: Huh.

CM: I can carve. I can do anything.

WV: But you prefer wire?

CM: I prefer wire. I want to draw, but I don't know. One of my intentions is to do a little bit of drawing, but I. . . I may do a little bit, but I don't go for it. I may do it; I don't go for it. I used to make clay, take up clay, make clay pots and [throw] like that.

WV: Huh.

CM: I used to work in clay. _____, work in clay: clay pots, clay monuments. But I, like you, like this, what you do? You chip [meaning carve—WV] sculpture?

WV: No.

CM: I work with wood and with cloth, and I've painted, I draw.

WV: Oh, that's all right.

CM: I make a lot of drawings. I do a lot of drawings. That's all right. Now, from this butterfly here, you can carve something like that, like drawing, like a, you can carve something like a butterfly. Like a. . . With claws like that. Take a little wire and you _____ with the wings. And [needle] it. And that may be beautiful when you do it. (laughs)

WV: Yeah. Yeah.

CM: With a needle, see. You can do it with a needler. You can make a little head, and then with the claws, and different kind of claws.

WV: Ah hah.

CM: And you _____ needler. And you can put different colors into the claws. You cut it out a different color, different colors and put it into the butterfly.

WV: That's beautiful.

CM: See ideas. . . . When I had had the art thing in New York, those peoples, those people, he bought my picture. I couldn't keep a picture on the thing. "I want that picture." Buy 'em [him—WV] a picture. I didn't have a picture left. What would you want with a picture? They were biddin' on my picture. Guy said, "Twenty five," guy said, "Fifty," I said, "What!"

WV: (laughter)

CM: I mean, he come higher, he want everything if I do it right. Who do you think make the greatest drawer in the world right now? A guy good with his hands.

WV: Boy. I know a lot of real good ones. There's so many. I go to art shows, and I see a lot of them that are pretty good. [Sounds of birds, wind, baby sneezing—Ed.]

CM: Well, I never been to, I see, I never been to Kansas City, I don't think. What Kansas, on other side of Kansas?

WV: We're just on the Missouri side.

CM: Oh, Missouri side.

WV: The city is, one half is in Kansas and one half is in Missouri. We live in Missouri. The show you had in New York, was that in an art gallery?

CM: Yeah, no, it was in my club hotel.

WV: Huh.

CM: Uh hmm.

WV: And you sold a lot of stuff there.

CM: A lot of stuff there. I sold. . . . I wasn't as good, though. I had a little race horse there; it wasn't nothin'. I don't, I won't throw it aside. Wasn't like a little [weaver] thing, like a little foal, know what I'm talking about?

WV: Uh huh. Uh huh.

CM: Make out of cloth, ____ cloth? And I just put a sign on it, fifty dollars, I figure, ah, ain't no sale. If the totals, if the totals in the other went the totals, then the other thing went. But somebody come buy that thing like a hotcake. [garbled]

WV: (laughter)

CM: [unintelligible] fifty dollar for that thing! It wasn't nothin' too much. This idea was like a horse, a horse carriage with a horse racer in it.

WV: Right.

CM: And he bought it right away, one-two-three. Oh, you been to the library up there? [referring to public library in Cairo where a collection of his work is on display—WV]

WV: Where?

CM: The ____ Library.

WV: Here?

CM: Yeah.

WV: No.

CM: You should look; I got a lot of things up there.

WV: Really?

CM: Yeah. For lookin'. They're not for buyin'.

WV: What kind of things?

CM: Oh, old time cars, eagles. . . .

WV: Oh, really? That's right here in town?

CM: Yeah, I got a whoopin' owl [referring to a hoot owl?—Ed.] in the back. Miss Wessie [Connell, library director since 1939—WV]. It's worth it. You can tell you been by here.

WV: Uh huh.

CM: 'Cause she wants you [to], she's about in her sixties. And she knows me since I was a little boy. She helped me on a lot of things. She helped me on a lot of things. She give me money. She won't nothing, she won't take no payback. She won't take nothin' back.

WV: Oh, that's real nice.

CM: I have. . . .

WV: What's the name of the library?

CM: Roddenbery Library. You go by it, you're goin' out this way. Go by and see it 'cause a lot of things 's up there.

WV: Okay.

CM: And, oh, I got a lot of things I made up there.

WV: She has a little museum out there?

CM: Yeah, yeah. She like to see you 'cause, 'cause she got a lot of thing [in] Atlanta.

WV: Okay.

CM: An exhibit for me up there.

WV: Oh, really?

CM: And she try to help me all she can.

WV: Oh.

CM: It'd be nice to go by and see her.

WV: [unintelligible reply.]

CM: As you're goin' out, go by and see her.

WV: I will do that.

CM: In the back, got a whooping owl, got a lot of things I put up there.

WV: Oh. Oh, really. I'd like to it, good.

CM: Yeah.

WV: That's right here in the center of town?

CM: Yeah. I got a lot of things there. Go by and see what the, see the history of me, huh?

WV: Oh, that's great.

CM: Roddenbery Library.

WV: Good.

CM: Do y'all go out Bainbridge Way?

WV: We came from. . . .

DV: We came from Bainbridge, yes.

WV: Yeah, we came from Bainbridge.

CM: Oh, go by [unintelligible] bill up there? By the [Gare] and [Beamish].

[Tape 1, side B]

WV: Do you have a car in there?

CM: Um hmm.

WV: Did you ever see the catalogue from that ["Missing Pieces," Georgia Folk Art 1776-1976—WV]? Did they send you one of those books?

CM: No, they didn't send me a book. I got a. . . . What? From Atlanta?

WV: Yeah.

CM: I got to write for a book. I got to get them from [Miss] Wessie. They didn't send me a book and a catalogue.

WV: Huh, they should send you one.

CM: Yeah. ____ Sears Roebuck catalogue?

WV: No. No, it's like a book of the show, you know? Like a book with all the pictures of the things that were in the show.

CM: Oh, I got to get one now.

DV: Yeah, I'm surprised they didn't send you one.

WV: Yeah.

CM: Do. . . . You got one?

WV: I've got one that I borrowed from somebody. You want to see it?

CM: Yeah, let me see it. [noise] Do me a favor. Write them people and tell them to send me a book, okay? 'Cause I ain't got time to write 'em, ____.

WV: Okay.

CM: Write 'em and tell 'em to send me a book. Try to get me a book. I should have called 'em by the address.

WV: Here's a painting [by Howard Finster—WV] I bought from somebody. What do you think of that?

CM: Hm, that's beautiful.

WV: Isn't that something?

CM: Get that one out in Cairo?

WV: No, that was out in Summerville.

CM: Oh.

WV: Near Summerville. It's in northern Georgia, isn't that nice?

CM: Oh, uh huh.

WV: It's all about religion, about. . . . Says, "What is the soul of man? It's all about the soul of man and the soul of animals. Real neat, huh?

CM: Um hmm, that's beautiful.

WV: Now the catalogue's in here. I'll show you where your picture's at. You haven't seen this book, huh?

CM: No, I haven't seen it.

WV: They should've sent it to you. Because that's how I know about you.

CM: Yeah.

WV: [unintelligible] Here you are!

CM: Yeah!

WV: Recognize that? [unintelligible] . . . wire sculpture.

CM: Yeah, that's beautiful! (laughter)

WV: (laughter) There you are! You're famous!

CM: Yeah.

WV: It says "Columbus McGriff, who lives in the Cai. . . ." Is it Cairo or Cairo? [asking for pronunciation—Ed.]

CM: Cairo [kay-row—Ed.].

WV: ". . . Cairo, has sold his hay wire cars and airplanes in both his home town and New York City where he has spent several years. [unintelligible]

CM: Well, you tell 'em to send me a book.

WV: Okay.

CM: [unintelligible] You tell 'em to send me a book. You know the company in Atlanta?

WV: Uh huh. Yeah!

CM: [unintelligible question]

WV: Yeah, I know that, I know the museum.

CM: Well, you tell them that I say I want a book. You write 'em and tell 'em [unintelligible].

WV: They owe you that.

CM: Yeah.

WV: If you were in the show, you know.

CM: Tell 'em I said send me a book, huh?

WV: Right. Okay, I'll send 'em a note.

CM: Yeah, and tell 'em I said I want a book. . . . Tell 'em I got a lot more things. Write 'em a letter, and tell 'em I got a lot more things [unintelligible] I want them to see. Huh?

WV: That car that you have in that book. Did they buy it from you or what, return it? [noise]

CM: Yeah, no. [unintelligible] Yeah, they bought the ar, they bought the car. [According to the catalogue, the work was loaned by Wessie Connell—WV]

WV: So. . . .

CM: [unintelligible] I put it on exhibit [unintelligible].

WV: Oh, so it's gonna come back to you, huh?

CM: No, I let it stay up there. I can go get it back, but I let it stay up there.

WV: Huh.

CM: Yeah.

WV: That, that art show is gonna travel. It's gonna go to Savannah and one other place.

CM: Well, tell them, won't you, that they can send me a ticket and I travel if they want to.

WV: Uh huh.

CM: I'd like to do a little traveling.

WV: Yeah.

CM: You tell 'em I'm building, I'm building a lot of things for 'em to see. You write 'em and send 'em a letter. You write them, then as soon as you get home, write 'em a letter.

WV: Yeah.

CM: And send 'em one of them pictures there.

WV: Yeah.

CM: And tell 'em there. . . . Tell 'em I need the [unintelligible], I need the expenses to work with. See it takes money to finish, finish my [creations].

WV: Sure, I understand.

CM: It takes money. See, you can't live if it takes money, you know.

WV: Yeah.

CM: And tell 'em I need to go places 'cause I need a little help, because if they can help me out. I got two more years in to finish. I'm working on like finishing college. [A bit of con here; CM is illiterate.—WV]

WV: Huh.

CM: I got two more years in the thing.

WV: Really?

CM: Yes.

WV: That'd be terrific.

CM: See, I'm sagnify. . . . I could be in the city havin' a good time, couldn't I?

WV: Yeah.

DV: (laughter)

CM: But that good time no good, ain't it? I'm sagnifying [sacrificing— WV]. See, you see how poor I'm livin'? I'm sagnifying to just knowin' something. If I be in the city havin' a good time, I be lose everythin', so. . . .

WV: Yeah.

CM: . . . I lose the thing God give me, right or wrong.

WV: Yeah, you're probably right.

CM: You know, you lose everythin' God give you. If I was a ordinary person, I could see it, right?

WV: Uh huh.

CM: But if I go out and drink and go to drugs, I'll be throwin' my life away.

WV: That's true. You're better off here, probably.

CM: Yeah, yeah. 'Cause I'm not throwin' my life away. I can't do that. It's no good, right.

WV: Right. You're making the right decision.

CM: No, it's no good.

WV: Well, it sure has been nice talkin' to you.

CM: Yeah.

WV: And thanks very much.

CM: Okay.

WV: I really appreciate your selling those things to me.

CM: It's okay.

WV: They'll be on display, and I'll tell a lot a people about you.

CM: Okay. If you can get me a, tell the school you want to send for me, they can do it, well, I'll spend a week or two out there with you.

WV: Okay. I'll see if they have the money to do it.

CM: Yeah.

WV: And I'll write a note to the museum in Atlanta and tell 'em. . . .

CM: Tell them. . . .

WV: . . . that you'd like one of the catalogues.

CM: Yeah, tell 'em to send me a book.

WV: Okay.

CM: [Something] to work on. Tell them that I work on them clay pots where they got me [unintelligible].

WV: Right.

CM: I'll see ya, baby. (chuckles)

DV: (chuckles) There you go, ____.

CM: ____ ____, thank y'all.

[End of interview]