

“Frederick Douglas Circle” Algernon Miller

Legacies: Contemporary Artists Reflect on Slavery
New York Historical Society



Hi, I'm artist Algernon Miller, and my project in the Legacy exhibition has to do with Frederick Douglas Circle, which is the other bookend [opposite Columbus Circle], all the way up on Frederick Douglas Boulevard and Central

Park North, and is under, now under construction.

This concept that I had for the landscape is derived from a book called “Hidden In Plain View,” which speaks about quilts made by essentially African women who were slaves, that were used as signposts for Africans escaping North. This was perhaps the first language in the New World, this geometric language of the patterns.

One of the main elements is the winning model, the model of the Frederick Douglas Circle, which shows the quilt patterns, the wagon wheel fence, and also the fiber-optically lighted constellation wall and



fountain. The wagon wheel is the symbol for the circle itself, the physical circle. And it is important because most of the escaping Africans would get off of the plantation by use of wagons, and most of these wagons were made by the blacksmith, so that makes the wagon wheel, as in the poem that's mentioned in "Hidden in Plain View" says that the double monkey wrench symbol, which is analogous to the blacksmith turn[ing] the wagon wheel. And this wagon wheel often meant the chariot that would be carrying the slaves home.



[I am standing at the construction site and] this is the curb stone, the granite curb stone, which is one of the first things to arrive on the site, for the exterior part that is called Sands of Time, and it's integrated into the sort of pie shapes that create the sun burst effect that's on the outer

perimeter of the circle. This is the approximate spot for the North Star. And unlike the Duke Ellington sculpture, which has his back essentially to Harlem, this Frederick Douglas [statue to be placed here] will be facing Harlem. And there is a plaque on the front here that talks about Frederick Douglas' life.

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