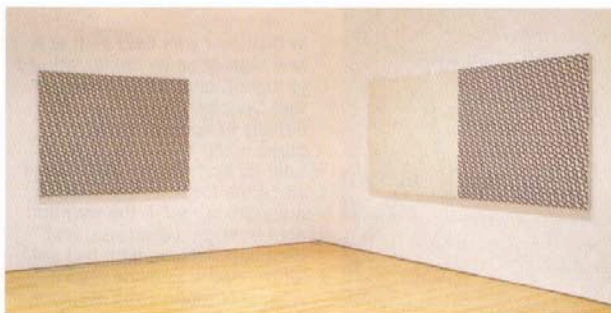


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Left to right, John M. Miller's *Untitled (GRV) SDV* and *Untitled (WWVV) 3DV*, both 1995; at Margo Leavin.

### John M. Miller at Margo Leavin

John M. Miller's paintings are familiar to Los Angeles viewers who have encountered them in numerous solo and groups shows over the last three decades. Having decided on a compositional structure—a repeating pattern of

diagonal bars on raw canvas—in the 1970s, he has continued to refine, resize and experiment coloristically without substantially deviating from his original vision.

For this show, Miller's pristine, majestic canvases occupied one large skylit room and two smaller galleries at Margo Leavin. The main gallery included four same-size vertical canvases, approximately 7½ by 6 feet, two on the long wall opposite the entrance and one on each side wall. Bathed in sunlight and glowing with deep, rich color, they were perfectly scaled to the architectural space and projected a commanding presence. Painted with acrylic and resin, the bars on two of the canvases are green; one bar is so dark that it's almost indistinguishable from black. Although Miller's palette has expanded since the '80s, when he worked primarily with different shades of black, the darker tones are still difficult to identify. He now includes abbreviated names of his colors in the paintings' titles. The dark green bars in *Untitled (DEEP GR) SR* (2006) had the surprising effect of throwing a gray-green cast (rather than one tinted red by an afterimage) onto the beige canvas. Likewise, the raw canvas of *Untitled (R) SR* (2006) was warmed by red bars, which lessens the contrast between figure and ground. The color of blood (rather than of Coca-Cola packaging or a fire engine), the red is specific, if not referential. This powerfully emotive work and the second green painting were installed halfway through the run of the show, replacing a 25-foot wide, five-panel painting. Miller prefers to emphasize the junctures, which he calls "divi-

sions," where the panels meet; thus the title of this black, green, blue, red and black painting: *Bang (BKGRBLRBK) 4DV* (2006). Not on view when I visited the show, the work was reportedly a triumph of subtle but complex color and monumental scale.

Two other gallery spaces held three paintings each. On smaller canvases, the bars are scaled down proportionally and create a tighter field. One way of thinking about the production of Miller's paintings is to imagine the field as potentially endless and emphatically planar, with the artist placing a rectangular frame over a preexisting section of the field rather than beginning with a blank canvas and filling it in with a pattern. This would account for the ways in which the bars are cut off by the framing edges and the fact that, while still part of the established progression, one diagonal bar often falls at the dead center of a multipaneled painting, split between two panels.

*Untitled (WWVV) 3DV* (1996), for example, includes four abutted canvases: two on the left with white bars and two on the right with very dark violet bars. At the center, bisected by the abutted edges of the two middle panels, one bar is exactly half white and half violet. The vertical divisions counteract the tendency to read the field as a landscape or the painting's shape as an object. For all their abstract, structural precision, the paintings' scale and handmade touch—especially evident in the way the edge of the painted bar bites into the raw canvas—are indelibly human.

—Frances Colpitt