



Interview by
FLORA OGILVY

Combining art with science and philosophy, Lina Iris Viktor is the poster girl for a digital generation of multi-disciplinary artists. We met at her New York studio and drank green tea, discussing her plans to eventually abandon the city for Japan.

Her private gallery and studio space Atelier LVXIX is divided into a minimalist studio and a gallery with the opulence of an ancient Egyptian tomb. Adhering to her purist colour palette of black, gold, white and Majorelle blue, it acts as an homage to sculptor Constantin Brancusi's visually stunning Paris atelier.

Born to Liberian parents, but raised in London and Johannesburg, Lina has continued to travel widely. Debuting at Gallery 151 in New York and at the SCOPE Contemporary Art Fair in Miami, her work has been met with critical acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic. Exhibiting alongside Jean Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol, she is known for experimenting with a broad spectrum of mediums, including her photography and paintings which are embellished with 24-karat gold.

FLORA OGILVY: *You once wanted to be an astrophysicist. Why did you choose to become an artist?*

LINA IRIS VIKTOR: Art is the channel that links all my knowledge; it's the distilling vessel for all my interests, including maths and the sciences, and I find it interesting to formulate my knowledge of different disciplines into the visual world. There's nothing I cannot say through my art.

FO: *You travelled a lot as child. What was the most interesting place that you lived?*

LIV: London and New York were home, which were similar in terms of their energy, but I also grew up in Johannesburg, which had a completely different visual landscape – as a teenager it felt like an alien world, with its beauty offset by its racial tensions.

FO: *Do you find working as an artist in New York to be liberating or limiting?*

LIV: I'm reaching the natural end of my relationship with the city after 12 years, because it's the city of dreams where you can make anything happen – or so they say – but I've already got everything out of it that I can. And although the work ethic energises me, I tend to migrate between my Wall Street studio and apartment on the Upper West Side, whereas when I travel I explore new cities by following the 'when in Rome' philosophy, truly immersing myself in the traditions and lifestyles of locals.

FO: *Why have you made Atelier LVXIX into both a private gallery and a studio space?*

LIV: For the experience. I like bringing people into my world and creating a home for my vision. I wanted to have a private space dedicated to showcasing both unfinished and completed work, where my collaborators and collectors can come to visit.

FO: *Have the challenges of life as an artist ever made you question your career entirely?*

LIV: Socrates said that "the unexamined life is not worth living". I'm critical of my own creative path and always try to ensure that I'm being true to myself.

FO: *Can you explain the significance of your restricted colour palette of black, Majorelle blue, white and gold?*

LIV: As an artist I believe that you have to create your own boundaries so that you can grow within them. There's a cosmic aspect to gold, which humans use as a signifier of power and other-worldliness. Black and white are the extremities of the colour spectrum, representative of negative and positive space. Majorelle blue is named after the painter Jacques Majorelle who created the Majorelle Garden in Marrakech. It's also aligned with Yves Klein blue, which he likened to a void or an abyss that overwhelms you. The Egyptians combined the colour with gold – it's very powerful to me.

FO: *You mentioned Morocco, what is it about the country that you find aligns with your artistic vision?*

LIV: Marrakech is built on geometry; Islamic art is the art of maths, science and the sacred sciences. I also just love the vibrancy of colour and the patterns in Marrakech, Rabat and the beautiful blue city of Chefchaouen.

FO: *Why was your space at SCOPE in Art Basel, Miami also painted Majorelle blue?*

LIV: One of Warhol's gang Patti Astor said she was tired of seeing "white walls, white people, white wine" in galleries, which made me laugh. It was also important for me to transport people and create a break in the space-time continuum of art fairs, which feel like endless repetitive mazes. Most people lack the ingenuity or desire to create an experience in those spaces because they are so consumer-driven.

FO: *As a New Yorker, do you take inspiration from London's art scene?*

LIV: I re-engaged with London's art scene last year at William Kentridge's exceptionally beautiful exhibition at the Marian Goodman gallery, as well as seeing Kara Walker at Victoria Miro's gallery. I don't visit galleries to seek inspiration, but rather to see artists that I'm moved by and care about. In the digital age, the experience of being in a curated space of one person's body of work is more powerful than seeing it on an iPhone.

FO: *As an artist of Liberian descent, what is your relationship with Africa?*

LIV: This year marks a renaissance in my national identity as I take my work to Africa. I just did a show in Lagos, Nigeria and hope to exhibit in Cameroon and South Africa next. I take the egalitarian view that I want to exhibit in cities like London and New York to stay relevant, but am equally interested in more unexpected places.

FO: *How much of an impact has Egypt's rich cultural history had on your work?*

LIV: I appreciate their ideologies and the ways their civilisation was built without division between disciplines like philosophy, maths, sciences and the arts, which were all interrelated, and taught as such.

FO: *As an international artist where do you hope your travels will take you next?*

LIV: I plan to spend a lot of time on the African continent in Egypt, South Africa, Cameroon and Senegal, but I'll also be in Costa Rica in February and am excited to be in South America for a while. Eventually I'd like to expand my studio to Kyoto. Japanese culture fascinates me.