

MADISON SQUARE PARK CONSERVANCY

ROBERTO LUGO CELEBRATES PUERTO RICAN CULTURE IN INTERACTIVE PUBLIC ART EXHIBITION AT MADISON SQUARE PARK

Commissioned by Madison Square Park Conservancy,
Roberto Lugo: Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter) Expands Lugo's Practice with
Largest Public Art Exhibition to Date



Roberto Lugo, *Los Días Caliente (This Is For The Hot Ones)* and *Capicú de Cariño (I Heard It Both Ways)* in *Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter)* in Madison Square Park, 2026, commissioned by Madison Square Park Conservancy. Photo by Timothy Schenck. Courtesy of the artist and R & Company.

New York, NY | May 20, 2026—Artist Roberto Lugo brings a vibrant and resonant celebration of Puerto Rican culture and history to Madison Square Park in a new public art exhibition commissioned by Madison Square Park Conservancy (MSPC). Presented *Roberto Lugo: Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter)* expands the artist's practice to its largest scale yet, activating the park with new interactive works, including monumental sculptures painted with colorful motifs and figures that reflect both the struggles and triumphs of Puerto Rican communities as well as their resilience and creativity. *Alfarero del Barrio* is on view from May 20 to December 6, 2026.

An acclaimed artist, ceramicist, activist, poet, and educator, Lugo reimagines historical ceramic forms through the lens of his Puerto Rican heritage, North Philadelphia upbringing, background as a graffiti artist, and love of hip-hop. Through portraiture, ornate patterning, and references to European and Asian ceramic traditions, he creates hand-painted vessels and sculptures that bring overlooked histories and lived experience into forms historically associated with prestige and power.

"*Alfarero del Barrio* is a joyous exhibition that uplifts a multiplicity of voices and traditions. We are excited to bring Roberto's work to life at such a monumental scale in New York City, home to many Puerto Rican communities," said Holly Leicht, Executive Director of MSPC.

MADISON SQUARE PARK CONSERVANCY

“Roberto Lugo is revered for his work in ceramics—a medium he has remixed by infusing contemporary motifs and his own personal style, creating eye-catching works that prompt reflections on culture and humanity,” said Denise Markonish, MSPC’s Martin Friedman Chief Curator. “While *Alfarero del Barrio* nods to his ceramic practice, the exhibition expands his vision, marking a significant turning point in his artistic trajectory. At the same time, it represents Lugo’s ethos in its truest form—thought-provoking and deeply personal, imaginative and uplifting.”

In *Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter)*, Lugo pushes his artistic vision to its grandest—and most personal—manifestation yet, presenting larger-than-life works that honor Puerto Ricans’ rich history and culture and invite community interaction and play. Anchoring the exhibition are two new hand-painted sculptures: a 15-foot-tall fire hydrant and a 20-foot-tall urn, titled *Para Los Días Caliente (This Is For The Hot Ones)* and *Capicú de Cariño (I Heard It Both Ways)*, respectively. The fire hydrant functions as a familiar symbol for city dwellers as a source of enjoyment and relief during sweltering summers, and is embellished with graffiti, Lugo’s first artistic medium as a teenager. The urn features hand-painted vignettes of Puerto Rican luminaries, including Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Roberto Clemente, Bad Bunny, Quiara Alegría Hudes, and Lemon Anderson, as well as Lugo’s parents, Gilberto and Maribel Lugo. Lugo invites parkgoers to explore these sculptures up close and even walk through an archway in the urn, effectively becoming one of its vignettes. Additional references to Puerto Rican culture and urban life—including hand-painted domino tables and custom tire planters housing native Puerto Rican plants—will be installed throughout the park.

The two new sculptures were fabricated in partnership with The Johnson Atelier in Hamilton, New Jersey. Since 2022, The Atelier has collaborated with Lugo to explore new materials and large-scale fabrication processes, expanding his practice into monumental public artworks. This partnership has produced *Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter)* as well as major works for *The Village Potter* at Grounds For Sculpture and *We Here* at Mural Arts Philadelphia and ArtWorks Cincinnati.

Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter) is accompanied by a range of public programs, including an opening celebration at Madison Square Park on the evening of Wednesday, May 20, with performances by EZENWA and Tyson Ritter from The All-American Rejects. Lugo will participate in a public program with workshops and performances this summer, at a date to be announced, and the exhibition will be the thematic anchor of MSPC’s annual Public Art Symposium, which will be held on Friday, November 13, at the SVA Theater. The symposium will feature talks with Lugo, playwright Quiara Alegría Hudes, artists Frida Kahlo (Guerilla Girls) and Miguel Luciano, and curators Max Gruber (ICA Boston) and Grace Yasumura (Grounds For Sculpture), among others, as well as a Def Poetry Jam curated by Danny Simmons. A catalog on the commission will be published online on MSPC’s website this year. More details on these and other exhibition-related programs will be available at madisonsquarepark.org.

MADISON SQUARE PARK CONSERVANCY

The exhibition is part of MSPC's spring and summer season, which features a range of free engagements fusing horticulture, art, and community. Program details are available at madisonsquarepark.org/community/calendar/.

About the Artist

Roberto Lugo is a Philadelphia-based artist, ceramicist, poet, activist, and educator whose work reimagines historical ceramic forms through the lens of his Puerto Rican heritage, North Philadelphia upbringing, and the visual language of hip-hop and graffiti. Combining portraiture, ornate patterning, and references to European and Asian ceramic traditions, Lugo creates works that confront poverty, inequality, racial injustice, and exclusion while expanding who and what is represented within the canon of decorative arts. His hand-painted vessels and sculptures often feature portraits of cultural icons, thinkers, and community figures—including Sojourner Truth, Dr. Cornel West, and The Notorious B.I.G.—as well as family members and the artist himself, bringing overlooked histories and lived experience into forms historically associated with prestige and power.

Lugo has recently presented major public art commissions in collaboration with Mural Arts Philadelphia and Grounds For Sculpture. His work has been featured in exhibitions at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, and the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, among others. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including a 2023 Heinz Award, a Philadelphia's Cultural Treasures award, a 2019 Pew Fellowship, a Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon Polsky Rome Prize, and a US Artist Award. His work is found in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the High Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Brooklyn Museum, the Walters Art Museum, and more. Lugo holds a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute and an MFA from Pennsylvania State University.

Exhibition Organization and Credits

Roberto Lugo: Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter) is commissioned by Madison Square Park Conservancy. Initially curated by Brooke Kamin Rapaport, the project is being organized by Denise Markonish, Martin Friedman Chief Curator; Tom Reidy, Director of Art Operations; and Tiera Ndlovu, Assistant Curator. Holly Leicht is the Conservancy's Executive Director.

Support for *Roberto Lugo: Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter)* is made possible by MSPC's Presenting Sponsors New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and Butler Family Foundation; Leadership Sponsors AG Foundation, Sasha C. and Edward Bass and Bloomberg Philanthropies; Contributing Sponsors Anonymous Donor, The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation, R & Company, The Ruth Stanton Foundation, and Lenore G. Tawney Foundation; and Friends Bunny and Charles Burson, Suzi Cordish, Scott and Ellen Hand, Johnson Atelier/Grounds for Sculpture, Helen Kauder and Barry Nalebuff, Madison Square Park Conservancy Art Council, Audrey and Danny Meyer, New York State Council on the Arts, Ron and Ann Pizutti, Jane Richards, Fern and Lenard Tessler, and Urban Art Projects (UAP).

MADISON SQUARE PARK CONSERVANCY

About Madison Square Park Conservancy

Madison Square Park Conservancy (MSPC) is the nonprofit entrusted by the City of New York to conserve, maintain, and program Madison Square Park, a dynamic 6.2-acre public park in the heart of Manhattan. Through its public art commissions, horticultural stewardship, and engaging programming, MSPC cultivates an urban oasis that welcomes a diverse community of over 60,000 visitors every day. MSPC has led the park to national and international distinction, including its accreditation as a Level 2 arboretum—the only arboretum in Manhattan—as well as its selection as the first public art organization to commission the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2019. Responsible for raising 100% of the park’s operating budget, MSPC ensures that this evolving greenspace continues to be a haven for neighbors, visitors, and artists for generations to come.

#

Media Contacts:

Resnicow and Associates

MSPC@resnicow.com

212.671.5150