

**ROBERTO
LUGO**

**ALFARERO DEL BARRIO
(VILLAGE POTTER)**





Front Cover: *Capicú de Cariño (I Heard It Both Ways)*, 2026
This Page: *Para Los Días Caliente (This Is For The Hot Ones)*, 2026

Roberto Lugo
Alfarero del Barrio
(Village Potter)

Madison Square Park Conservancy

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Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter)

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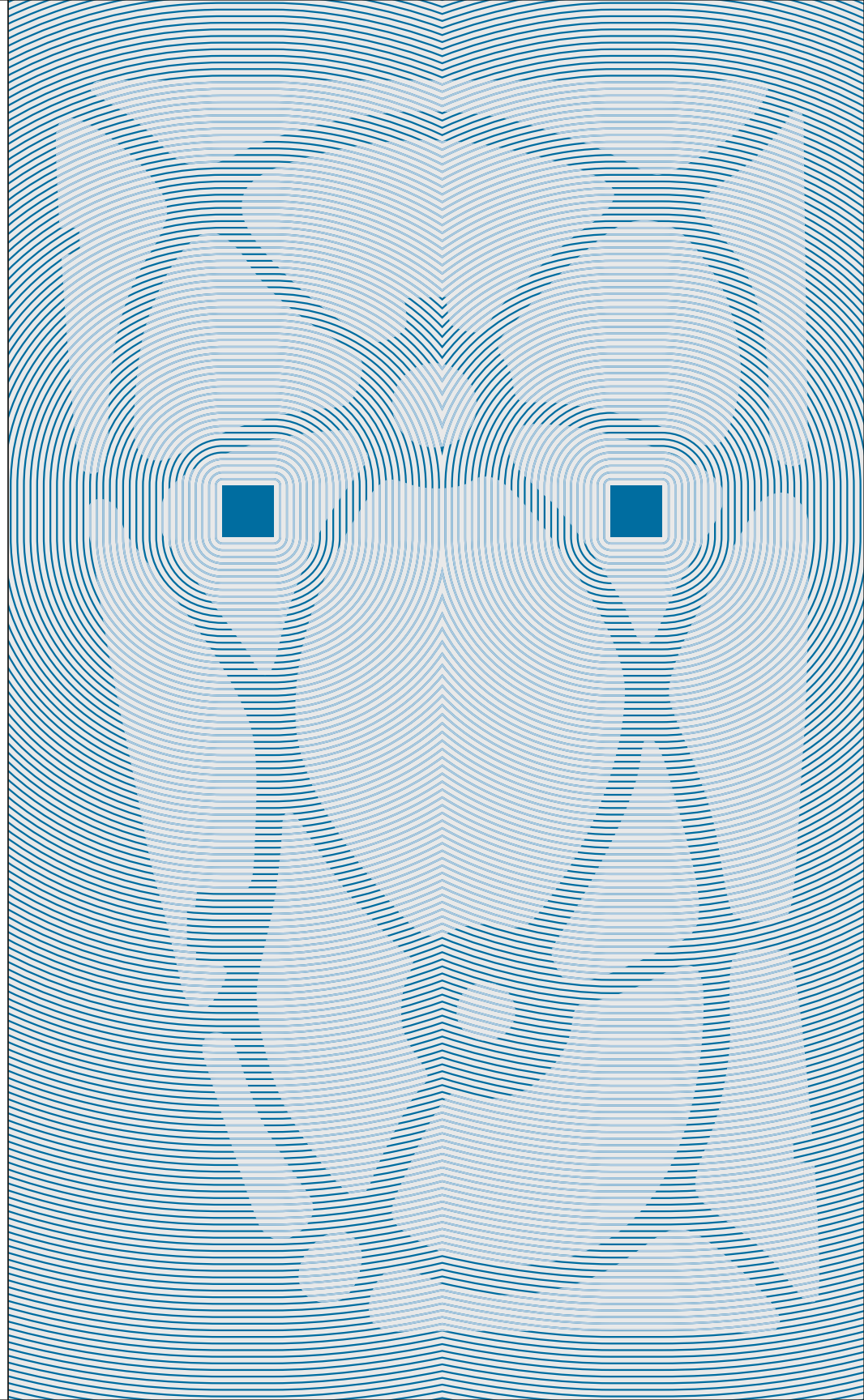


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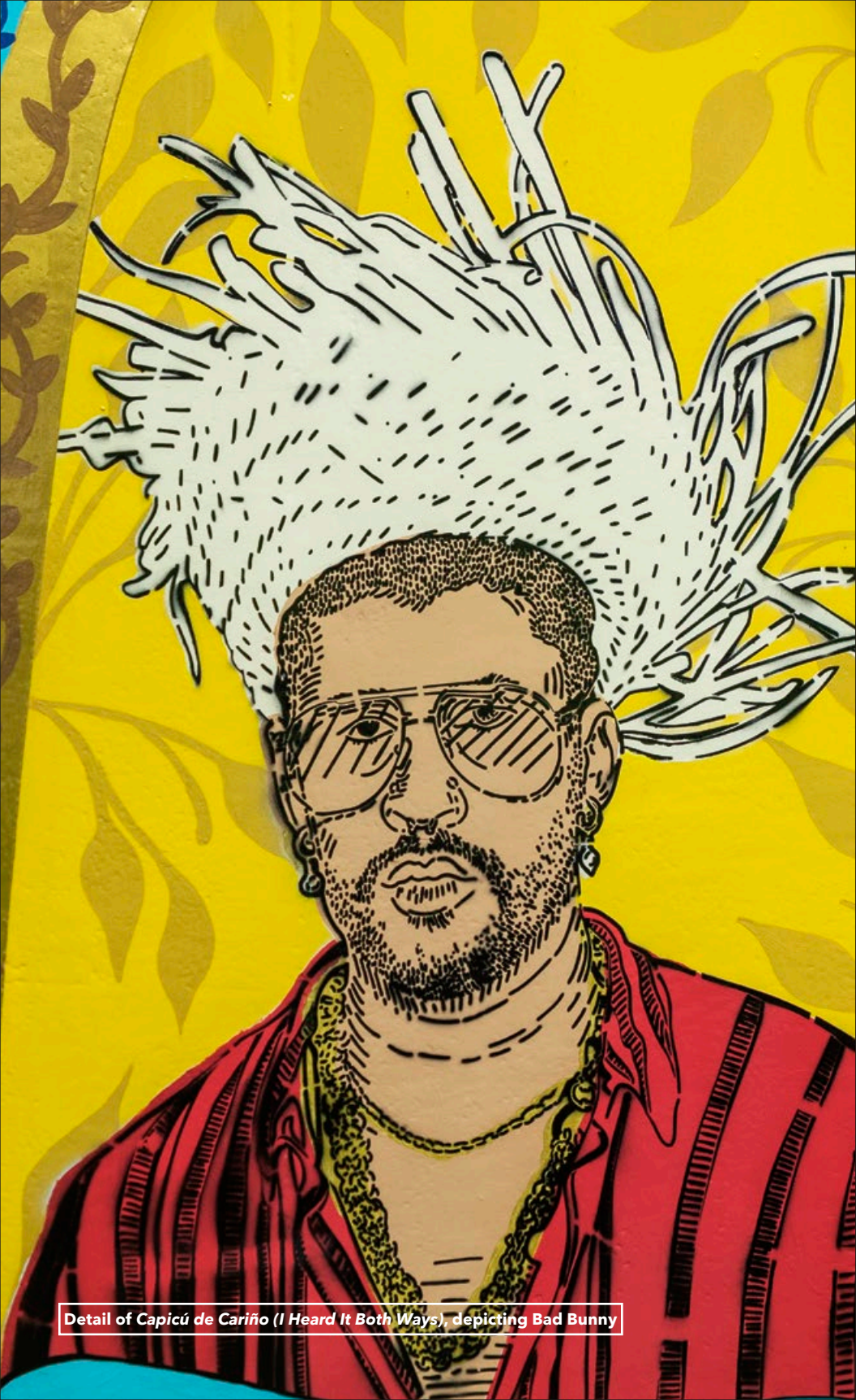


Detail of *Capicú de Cariño* (*I Heard It Both Ways*) depicting Lin-Manuel Miranda and Justice Sonia Sotomayor



Detail of *Capicú de Cariño (I Heard It Both Ways)*, depicting Lugo's mother, father, and poet Quiara Alegria Hudes (left to right)





Detail of *Capicú de Cariño (I Heard It Both Ways)*, depicting Bad Bunny

Look Over Here: Roberto Lugo's Public Art

Denise Markonish

"Little details that tell the world we are not invisible."

—Abuela Claudia, from *In the Heights*¹

December 2025 saw the United States government commence "Operation Metro Surge," a title so absurd it feels like a new rendition of the video game *Grand Theft Auto*. In reality, the brutal operation targeted the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, ferreting out supposed undocumented immigrants while senselessly murdering multiple civilians. Two months later, on February 8, 2026, Benito Ocasio, better known as Bad Bunny, took the stage at Super Bowl LX. Much to the chagrin of the MAGA set, who were not keen on their football being interrupted by some "foreigner" speaking Spanish, the performance was a celebration of Puerto Rico (which many seem to forget is a U.S. territory). Bad Bunny began by walking through sugar cane fields highlighting farming culture before dancing outside bodegas. It was a proud proclamation of diversity, amidst a world on fire. In the end, he held a football on which was written in English: "Together, we are America" before adding, "*Seguimos aquí*" ("We are still here").

This statement of visibility and resilience against all odds permeates Puerto Rico due to its centuries-old colonialist history. The theft of culture for Western European means is no stranger to the history of ceramics as well, which was co-opted from Indigenous and Asian peoples and made elite for white European markets. Accordingly, artist Roberto Lugo has placed himself at the crossroads in this fight for visibility. Lugo, an Afro-Puerto Rican artist, works towards both honoring and reinterpreting the history of ceramics while elevating his story, that of his community, and the culture of 21st-century America. Simultaneously, Lugo, like Bad Bunny, reminds us that "we are still here!"

The history of ceramics is ancient; the oldest known artifact dates to circa 28,000 BCE, found in what is now the Czech Republic. The earliest examples of East Asian pottery were found in a cave in China and date back to 18,000 BCE.

The history travels through ancient Greece and Rome in 350 CE. Then with the expeditions of Marco Polo and the opening of the Silk Road, East Asian ceramics were exported to Europe in the Middle Ages. This back-and-forth continued well into the 19th and early 20th centuries at ceramic manufactories like Sèvres (France), Doulton (England), Meissen (Germany), and Herend (Hungary). With this concentration of power in Europe, ceramics became the fodder of the aristocracy, with fine china sets made for kings and queens, and later available for the elite to acquire.

Throughout his work Lugo references this complex history by utilizing orange and black patterns of Greek vessels, elegant shapes of Herend vases, and Sèvres' use of portraits. However, Lugo is not merely paying homage; instead he adds his own spin, imbuing his work with contemporary iconography. By bringing history to the present, Lugo assures that the future lineage of ceramics will include his work as well as imagery of contemporary culture, such as graffiti and hip-hop, or portraits of figures such as activist Cornel West, abolitionist Harriet Tubman, and hip-hop artist The Notorious B.I.G. Of this historic mash-up, Lugo states: "If you look at Peruvian ceramics, you know something about weddings; or Greek pottery, you know that people used to eat lying down. I love to think that thousands of years from now, people will know a little bit about the community and culture that I grew up in because I made it in clay."²

In addition to the long history of ceramics, Lugo comes from a legacy of contemporary artists working in clay who destabilize the medium's traditions. Forebears include the grandfather of California Funk, Robert Arneson (1930–1992), who shifted away from functional objects to caricature-like self-portraits; Ken Price (1935–2012) who made abstract sensual forms; and Grayson Perry (b. 1960), who covers traditional vessels with decorum gone wild. Alongside these three, though not working in clay, are two artists perhaps most closely aligned with Lugo: John Ahearn (b. 1951) and Rigoberto Torres (b. 1960). Ahearn and Torres have been collaborating since the early 1980s depicting their Bronx community through direct plaster casts of friends and neighbors in moments of everyday life and play. Cast in partial relief and hung on walls like murals, or presented as full figures, the works depict girls playing

Double Dutch, a man with a boom box, a woman with her arms around her tattooed boyfriend, or a grandmother watching over the neighborhood. These portraits lovingly show the people and places that make up home.

Commitment to community is instrumental to Lugo as well. Early in his career, he referred to himself as the "Ghetto Potter," a term he never saw as derogatory or limiting. Instead, he considers "ghetto" a form of resourcefulness, one he saw modeled in his community growing up. So, for him, the term is about the ability to make something out of very little, to make a rainbow in the spray of a fire hydrant on a hot summer day. Writer Glenn Adamson says of Lugo, "He often describes his work as bilingual, fluent both in the living language of the streets and the more formal vocabulary of historical decorative arts."³ Lugo, who began making art through street graffiti, brings this community resourcefulness into everything he does, whether it is dragging his pottery wheel, emblazoned with the phrase "this machine kills hate," to the streets to teach kids how to throw pots, to installing art in the Kensington neighborhood in Philadelphia where he grew up. It is no surprise that over the years, Lugo has shifted his nomenclature from Ghetto to Village—an expansive view of how he creates community wherever he goes. So from the Ghetto Potter, he becomes *Alfarero del Barrio*—Village Potter.

To fulfill this title of "Village Potter," Lugo, like a pied piper, has in recent years taken not just his wheel but his work to the streets, expanding into the realm of public art. In 2022, he was commissioned to do a new exhibition at the Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton, NJ. It was there that he became acquainted with The Johnson Atelier which helped him reimagine his ceramic forms at a monumental scale. To do this, they CNC-milled high-density foam, which Lugo hand-painted. The exhibition included a series of ceramics alongside the over 20-foot tall *Put Yourself in the Picture*. The work is a footed urn whose base starts off with orange and black Greek design before bursting forth with bold colors, graffiti, and drawings of pit bulls. There is a staircase that leads into the hollowed-out center of the vase, which Lugo graffitied in blue and white as a sly nod to traditional porcelain now updated in the 21st century. For Lugo, the cut out serves as a vehicle for anyone to become part of the



Roberto Lugo, *Put Yourself in the Picture*, 2022; mixed media, 240 x 132 x 324 inches, Grounds For Sculpture, partial gift of the artist and partial purchase, Funds provided in part by the Kunz/Guindo/Lombard Family & Friends in loving memory of Camille Lombard Kunz. Photo: Lauren Collato.



work, upending historic ideas that portraiture on ceramics was reserved for the elite.

In 2024, Lugo produced *We Here* with Mural Arts in Philadelphia. For this project, he created three 12-foot tall vessels (again at The Johnson Atelier), and placed them throughout his hometown neighborhood of Kensington. This area, once rich with industry, faced increasing decline as manufacturing left the region starting in the 1960s, and now faces threats of gentrification. Kensington is rich with pride and is a landing place for many of Philadelphia's immigrant populations. Like *Put Yourself in the Picture*, the works in *We Here* contain cutouts, this time going to the ground so people can stand inside the works. Video and photos on the Mural Arts website depict the joy and pride of the neighborhood residents becoming part of the project. This community embrace began with pattern-making workshops that Lugo held in advance of painting the sculptures, and residents' ideas were incorporated into the final designs.

At Madison Square Park Conservancy (MSPC), Lugo increased his ambition yet again. Here the mission is clear — to celebrate and honor Puerto Rican history and culture, while also reminding us of the accessibility of public art to all people, particularly in a site that gets upwards of 60,000 visitors per day. Titled *Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter)*, the exhibition is comprised of two large sculptures: a 15-foot tall fire hydrant and a 20-foot tall urn. It also includes planters made from hand-painted tires which contain native Puerto Rican plants and a series of domino tables that Lugo embellished that sit around the Park's reflecting pool and are made available for people to play on, provided they bring their own dominoes.

The fire hydrant is a key object for Lugo, tracing back to his childhood and his beginnings as an artist. This ubiquitous urban symbol often means relief on a hot summer day, and, as Lugo remembers, it was also a shower when the water got turned off. The hydrant also symbolizes strife between citizens and authorities. On May 7, 1904, *The New York Times* published an article with the headline "Busy Street Deluged: A Little Boy's Prank. He Loosened the Hydrant on a Fifth Avenue Corner," and from there the battle raged on: running from the authorities while trying to cool off in a steamy city. So it is no surprise that when Lugo



Roberto Lugo, *We Here*, 2024, EPS Foam, steel, urethane hard coat, paint, 78 x 65 x 132 inches, commissioned by Mural Arts at Kensington Corridor Trust. Photo: Kyla G. Photography.

made his first ceramic artwork more than 20 years ago, it was a fire hydrant soap dispenser. On MSPC's Sparrow Lawn near 25th street and Madison Ave; Lugo turns the humble hydrant into a monument with *Para Los Días Caliente (This Is For The Hot Ones)*, 2026. Soaring among the trees, Lugo's hydrant is orange like those he sees across Philadelphia, with graffiti tags across the surface. For Lugo, this sculpture pays homage to its diminutive cousin while also, he hopes, gaining "must see" status akin to tourist attractions like the locks on Paris's Pont des Arts or Seattle's Gum Wall.

Across the north end of the park on the Redbud Lawn near 25th Street and 5th Avenue is Lugo's urn, *Capicú de Cariño (I Heard It Both Ways)*. The location of this piece is serendipitous for if visitors walk to 57 West 25th Street they will come upon Chimney Corner Hall, the historic site where in 1895 the design for an independent Puerto Rican flag was approved by the Puerto Rican section of the Cuban Revolutionary Party.⁴ Lugo's urn is an homage to Puerto Rico, but its form is inspired by a 19th-century Herend vase from Hungary, which Lugo saw on a trip to the manufactory. Herend was founded in 1826, and the company's forms and designs show clear reference to Ming Dynasty vases, once again illustrating the colonialist roots of Western European ceramics. Herend became synonymous with the aristocracy when they exhibited a set made for Queen Victoria at the 1851 London World's Fair. Decorated with butterflies and peonies, the pattern is still produced today. Lugo takes the curling vinelike flower designs ubiquitous in historic ceramics from Herend designs to those of William Morris (1834–1896), the father of the 19th-century Arts and Crafts Movement, and makes them wholly his own. European plants are replaced with hibiscus flowers and sugar cane from Puerto Rico, vines become hip-hop gold chains, and dominos and chickens appear. Most importantly, Lugo highlights his own anointed royalty: figures from Puerto Rico such as his parents Gilberto and Maribel, writers Lemon Andersen, Lin-Manuel Miranda, and Quiara Alegría Hudes, musician Bad Bunny, baseball player Roberto Clemente, and Justice Sonia Sotomayor. As in his previous public artworks, Lugo again provides an archway in the urn so that visitors to the park can place themselves inside the work, becoming a part of history alongside the figures Lugo depicts.



Detail of *Capicú de Cariño (I Heard It Both Ways)*, 2026

Like Bad Bunny's Super Bowl, Lugo's *Alfarero del Barrio* is about what it means to be an American, with its trauma and, just as importantly, with its pride. At a time when so much is at stake and under attack politically, it is refreshing to see an artist acknowledge that, while also providing a site for celebration. For every person who doesn't feel like they belong, Lugo's work encourages them to become part of history. With simple recognition he encourages everyone to be present and "watch our old silences become loud songs," reminding us "we are here."⁵

1. *In the Heights* was written by Quiara Alegría Hudes with music by Lin-Manuel Miranda, 2005. Both figures are featured on Lugo's work at Madison Square Park.
2. Victoria Woodcock, "Say it With Clay," *Financial Times*, January 12, 2024.
3. Glenn Adamson, "Taking it to the Streets," *Crafts* magazine, July/August 2018.
4. Christopher Gray, "A 6th Ave. Automat Sign, Wanamaker's Walkway," *The New York Times*, June 1, 1997.
5. Quiara Alegría Hudes, *My Broken Language* (NY: Random House, 2021), p 313.





Left to right: detail of *Capicú de Cariño (I Heard It Both Ways)*,
Roberto Lugo sketching inside *Capicú de Cariño (I Heard It Both Ways)*





Sofrito of Musings

Roberto Lugo

Yo soy Boricua.
a proud domino-playing,
pasteles-making,
piragua-selling,
fire hydrant-spraying,
plantain-peeling,
salsa-dancing,
alcapurria-consuming,
limber-on the front porch-hustling Puerto Rican.

Puerto Ricans are bar none a resilient people.
The same bars that protect the windows of our row homes
from thieves.
We got bars that imprisoned our brothers who grew up in a
life where they felt they had no other option but to steal the
bread and not let their child starve.
We have bars, like the ones we drink at to forget the pain.
The same bars in our hip-hop.
Bars like the one passed by Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

We are proud.

The same pride that inspired my grandfather to ask for
his gravestone to have the American and Puerto Rican flags
etched on it. The love that Puerto Ricans have for the Island,
culture, and people reminds me of the love of country that
many Americans have for the United States. The story of the
Puerto Rican migration is often marked with the search for
opportunity, but the more time that search continues, the
less connected we can feel to our motherland and ances-
tors. It is in the crafts that I find these connections to the
African potters and Taíno weavers who came before me.

In recognition of the semiquincentennial of the United States of America, I wanted to recognize the diverse contributions of Puerto Ricans. *Alfarero del Barrio* is a celebration of Puerto Rican culture and a visual representation of our resilience, creativity, and courage. Puerto Rican heritage has roots in African, Taíno, and Spanish culture—a sofrito that provides flavor to everything we do. The history of this intersection is filled with stories of strife, injustice, and horror, but through it all, Puerto Ricans have proven to be icons of resourcefulness and ingenuity that are celebrated through our food, music, and culture.

Part of my role as a potter is to explore how history represents culture, and how I can use my work to tell the story of my people. In many ways, I am a traditional artist, so it is important to me to reclaim traditions that I feel have been stolen from us through the diaspora and enslavement of my African ancestors, the genocide of my Indigenous bloodline, and the pillaging of resources from the Island. Like many artists, I look to how our ancestors made objects, and in that I find representations of community. In my work, I consider how historically the role of the village potter was to create objects that transform everyday life into moments of ritual. What we call in Spanish “disfrutando.”

During the semiquincentennial, celebrate us, all of us. Puerto Ricans are as diverse as the entirety of the United States: we are black, white, liberal, conservative, and we have a wide range of philosophies within our communities. Yet what brings us together is a pride in our culture. Through my exhibition, I wanted to confront this complicated history by acknowledging the past while celebrating our greatness. I want to create a monumental vase with vignettes inspired by royal porcelain manufacturers, who depicted influential figures on objects that were affordable to the most wealthy. But *Alfarero del Barrio* is for everyone, and visitors to Madison Square Park can walk inside this vase and become one of its vignettes—proving how everyone is individually important and can contribute greatly to the world. The figures represented on the work have achieved incredible feats, from becoming a Supreme Court Justice to winning Grammys, Oscars, Pulitzers, and Tonys, but they also include my mother and father, whose daily work made it possible for me to have the life and career I am blessed with.



This installation exemplifies that all contributions are significant and none are small. *Alfarero del Barrio* celebrates all of us and is a reminder that we get to choose who we want to be and how we show up in the world. Together we can create a more just, loving, and empathetic place.

And I hope all visitors will stop for a moment and take pictures of themselves in the vase
 Play a game of dominoes
 Play around the fire hydrant
 See that to be Puerto Rican is to be American.



Detail of *Capicú de Cariño (I Heard It Both Ways)*, depicting Roberto Clemente

Outside Man: Roberto Lugo's Recentering of Ceramics

Sarah Archer

In 2026, Roberto Lugo's work is so widely recognized and admired that it is easy to forget that there was a time when audiences were not accustomed to associating the silhouettes of 18th- and 19th-century European ceramic forms with portraits of figures such as Lin-Manuel Miranda, Justice Sonia Sotomayor, and Roberto Clemente. Their visages now grace Lugo's grand, Herend vase-shaped sculpture on prominent display in New York City as part of the exhibition *Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter)* commissioned by the Madison Square Park Conservancy. Apart from photographer Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) whose tongue-in-cheek 1990 ceramic work *Madame de Pompadour (nee Poisson) Soup Tureen and Stand*, part of a full 30-piece dinnerware set produced by Artes Magnus and fabricated at the French porcelain factory Limoges, relatively few contemporary artists have chosen European ceramics as a canvas on which to create intricate narrative scenes or arresting portraits.

Lugo's work is distinctive and unusual for several reasons. It weaves together images of iconic figures from hip-hop, Black history, and his own Puerto Rican heritage with forms from the rather insular worlds of tableware made for European courtly dining and works of monumental porcelain produced for display in royal residences and as diplomatic gifts. This sets Lugo apart in both the contemporary art world *and* in the ceramics world, where he was trained and came of age as an artist. Lugo's work is doubly distinctive because narrative pottery has frequently been out of vogue in contemporary ceramics, and because contemporary ceramics is *itself* a medium that has only recently gained mainstream acceptance in the broader art world.

Ceramics hold a curious position relative to contemporary art. Once kept strictly in the realm of craft, it has recently emerged as an art world darling in its more adventurous

sculptural forms; artists like Simone Leigh (b. 1967), who represented the United States at the 59th Venice Biennale with the exhibition *Sovereignty*, alongside Nicole Cherubini (b. 1970), Francesca DiMattio (b. 1981), and in the previous decade, Grayson Perry (b. 1960) and Sterling Ruby (b. 1972), have all had their work shown in major museums and at art fairs around the world, to serious critical consideration.

When the field of studio pottery began to flourish in the United States, first during the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau eras in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, and later in the wake of World War II, literal narrative was out and more abstract polychrome surfaces were in. The makers of ceramic masterpieces by the likes of George E. Ohr (1857–1915) and Louis Comfort Tiffany (1857–1915) in the United States, or Ernest Chaplet (1835–1909) and Jean-Joseph Carriès (1855–1994) in France, tended to find meaning and expression in the beauty of glazes that might run or bleed over an edge in a graceful way, forming new color combinations and allowing low-relief designs — abstract shapes, flowers, or Art Nouveau figures recalling the characters from classical mythology.¹

This was deliberate, and though partly inspired by innovations in glaze technology, better temperature controls in newer kilns, and higher overall temperatures, it was also a reaction to the era that immediately preceded it, in which ceramics studios and factories tended to treat the surface of their vessels almost like canvases. Makers would use the forms of vases or teapots to depict everything from pastiches of patriotic imagery, as in the historic *Century Vase* of 1867, to bucolic scenes of people in pastoral settings, portraits of monarchs, flags, or floral designs as on the surface of a typical Staffordshire transferware coffee or teapot.

Victorian Transferware and later painted porcelain of the 19th century Beaux Arts era was imitative of the kind of precise painterly surface decoration that was created in the royal workshops of Sèvres or Meissen, porcelain factories both founded in the 18th century, making use of glazes that fire at lower temperatures which are much less viscous and tend to have flatter, more straightforward pigmentations. These glazes are also similar to those used by most kids's elementary school clay sculptures, brushing colors onto their creations in a painterly fashion. These

glazes change color in the kiln, but stay where they were applied, so the final product emerges from the kiln more or less as envisioned, only shiny.

The runny colors of Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts ceramics presaged the luminous works of studio ceramics that were made in the 1930s–1950s starting with artists Lucie Rie (1902–1995) and Hans Coper (1920–1981) in Great Britain, and Peter Voulkos (1924–2002), Gertrud Natzler (1908–1971) and Otto Natzler (1908–2007), and Toshiko Takaezu (1922–2011) in America, to name just a few. The edge of a coppery glaze might react in tiny, crystalline blooms with a line of brilliant magenta on the outside of an achingly translucent Lucie Rie bowl, etched with delicate fine lines. This way of working in clay is deeply expressive, but it does not share a narrative story or depict something from life or nature. It represents a fully abstract approach and a rebuke of the densely illustrated surfaces that came before it. This mode of working in clay and glaze — notwithstanding the brightly colored and comical sculptures of the California Funk movement that peaked in the 1970s — has been the dominant style in American ceramics studios since World War II.

Many glazes currently in use have Japanese names: Shino, a creamy white with copper edges; Tenmoko, a glossy black with specks of iron; or Oribe, a blue-green. This is not an accident: much of American studio ceramics culture was shaped by the influence of Japanese potters like Shoji Hamada (1894–1978) who toured studios and schools throughout the United States in 1950 with English potter Bernard Leach (1887–1979) and Japanese critic Soetsu Yanagi (1889–1961).² When Leach himself set up St. Ives, his studio in Cornwall, England, it was Hamada who helped him build a high fire kiln and an updraft kiln for raku, both of which were the first of their kind in the West.

In the wake of World War II, as colleges expanded their visual arts offerings to include ceramics and other craft media, the Japanese mode of studio pottery was fresh in American artists' minds, and became deeply rooted in American studio ceramics practice. This influence can be found in summer camps, high schools, and community studios all over the United States.³ Artists like the aforementioned Peter Voulkos, alongside William Daley (1925–2022), Don Reitz (1929–2014) and Otto Heino (1915–2009)

all studied ceramics at the university level with the support of the GI Bill, and each of them — especially Voulkos, who pioneered the mode of Abstract Expressionism in clay — revolutionized the field. None of these artists worked narratively; each of them built (or threw and altered) large, complex forms, and used glaze or simply left the clay body exposed to give their works surface coloration. If these pieces told a story, it would be rugged, primal, and male.

More modestly scaled and traditional ceramic works tend to be less acclaimed, less costly to purchase, and more apt to be dismissed when misunderstood. While some craft practices, like knitting, lend themselves well to the do-it-yourself spirit — especially in the age of YouTube tutorials — ceramics is different, requiring specialized equipment, tools, and supplies. Additionally, ceramics are often made within a community setting, sharing wheels and kilns. These resources, to put it bluntly, are not cheap: a well-resourced school, after-school art class, or summer camp is in fact a deceptively humble barrier to entry to the ceramics world, and in the United States these places are far from being equally accessible to all.

To break down these barriers to access, non-profit initiatives like The Clay Studio's Claymobile⁴ in Philadelphia, which brings ceramics to kids when they wouldn't otherwise have access, begin to provide inroads for young people to experience ceramics. This is the context in which Lugo, who grew up in one of Philadelphia's poorest neighborhoods, sees his work as existing and why it was imperative for him to "take it to the streets." In September 2022, speaking at the Smithsonian American Art Museum⁵ as part of its annual Clarice Smith Distinguished Lectures in American Art series, Lugo discussed his experience setting up a potter's wheel in the northeast Philadelphia neighborhood of Kensington. He began by sharing a clip from "Ghetto is Resourceful,"⁶ a 2014 work of video art in which he sifts clay from the dirt in a vacant lot and throws a pot on a wheel he constructed from a tire axle and a tree stump, smoothing its surface with soda from a half-empty bottle instead of water. "In these streets," he tells the crowd, "I never had an art class."

He explains that instead of encountering art in classes or museums, he saw murals on the walls of buildings all over Philadelphia (thanks to Mural Arts Philadelphia) and



Roberto Lugo (center) leading a pottery workshop at The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, PA. Courtesy of the artist.

that he spent time in his neighborhood with some older cousins, mostly as a way to feel protected, and their graffiti inspired him to start his own visually distinctive graffiti practice with the tag Robske, a reference he still uses in his work today. In 2006, when he was 25, Lugo moved to Florida and took his first pottery class at a community college, and he never turned back. In 2022, a segment about Lugo⁷ on *CBS This Morning* shows him setting up his street studio and inviting curious people walking by to try pottery for the first time. The resulting interactions are among the most moving scenes of art education I've ever witnessed: Lugo sits with two adults, both Kensington locals, and guides their hands over the clay, helping form the vessel out of the spinning blob, and one by one their faces behold what they've been able to do with wonder and delight. They express amazement at what they've created with his help, totally unexpectedly, in their own neighborhood.



Karl L. H. Müller (American, born Germany, 1820–1887). *Century Vase*, 1876. Glazed porcelain and enamel with gilding. Height: 22¼ inches (56.5 cm), diameter of base: 10 inches (25.4 cm). Brooklyn Museum, gift of Carl and Franklin Chace, in memory of their mother, Pastora Forest Smith Chace, daughter of Thomas Carll Smith, the founder of the Union Porcelain Works, 43.25. Photo: Brooklyn Museum.

In graduate school at Penn State, Lugo became fascinated with ceramic history. As part of his MFA course, he studied European and American pottery and porcelain, and found himself drawn to forms like the *Century Vase*, an 1876 masterpiece of porcelain design and decoration that could not be less fashionable now if it tried. Made by Karl L. H. Müller (1820–1887) at Brooklyn’s Union Porcelain Works, it was commissioned for the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. It is high Victorian in its literalness, precision, exuberance, and sheer density of its surface decoration: the vessel’s handles are the heads of North American Bison, and depict inventions like the telegraph pole and sewing machine, along with a bas relief portrait of George Washington at the center.

There are numerous versions of the *Century Vase* in collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the High Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and the



Roberto Lugo, *All about the Benjamins Century Vase*, 2016. Porcelain, china paint, gold luster, 14½ × 12 × 15½ inches (36.8 × 30.5 × 39.4 cm), Purchased with funds contributed by The Women’s Committee and The Craft Show Committee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2016, accession number 2016-140-1.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, each with slightly different ornamentation. The Brooklyn Museum’s example is the one that first inspired Lugo, and has become a kind of Rosetta Stone for his artistic practice. In response to the *Century Vase*, Lugo began making monumental vessels, culminating in the creation of his 2016 work *All About the Benjamins*, which is appropriately titled as it features a portrait of Benjamin Franklin and is in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In Lugo’s work, Franklin’s mouth is covered with a fabric bandana and framed by visual elements including song titles from the Wu-Tang Clan — “Hustle Hard” and “C.R.E.A.M.” On the obverse, a self-portrait of Lugo is flanked by the title of the Mobb Deep tracks “To All the Killers and the Hundred Dollar Billas” and “Ain’t No Such Thing as Halfway Crooks.” To viewers who have an interest in art or hip-hop but no particular background in clay, the degree of ceramic nerdery on view

here is staggering. For people who study and admire ceramics and the decorative arts, referencing the *Century Vase* is like paraphrasing the title of an obscure, beloved song: its admirers feel seen and understood. That this work is apt to have this effect on fans of Mobb Deep, the Wu-Tang Clan, and Karl L. H. Müller of the Union Porcelain Works is especially delightful.

Because Lugo started his career as an outsider working in an outsider's medium, it's gratifying to see his work presented now in a high-profile setting suffused with both institutional prestige and wide viewership — partly by virtue of the fact that it's prominently situated outside. In ways both poetic and literal, Lugo's work seems to belong there.

1. For more on French Art Pottery, see: <https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/french-art-pottery>.
2. For more on Leach, Yanagi and Hamada's tour of the United States, see: <https://chipstone.org/article.php/154/Ceramics-in-America-2004/Bernard-Leach-in-America>.
3. For more info about the postwar studio craft movement, see *Crafting Modernism: Midcentury American Art and Design*, edited by Jeannine Falino and Jennifer Scanlan, Harry N. Abrams, 2011.
4. For more about the Clay Mobile at The Clay Studio in Philadelphia, see: <https://www.theclaystudio.org/claymobile>.
5. Roberto Lugo, "A Village Potter," from the Clarice Smith Distinguished Lectures in American Art series, uploaded by Smithsonian American Art Museum, streamed live by SAAM on September 14, 2022, YouTube video, 1:03:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9KnV3IDrv8>.
6. Roberto Lugo, "Ghetto is Resourceful," uploaded by Wexler Gallery on February 9, 2016, YouTube video, 8:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPD0dHjc52o> from 2014.
7. "Philadelphia pottery artist Roberto Lugo," uploaded by CBS Sunday Morning on October 3, 2021, YouTube video, 5:14, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHO2Hrj60Bo>.





Public Programs

MAY 20, 2026

Public Opening

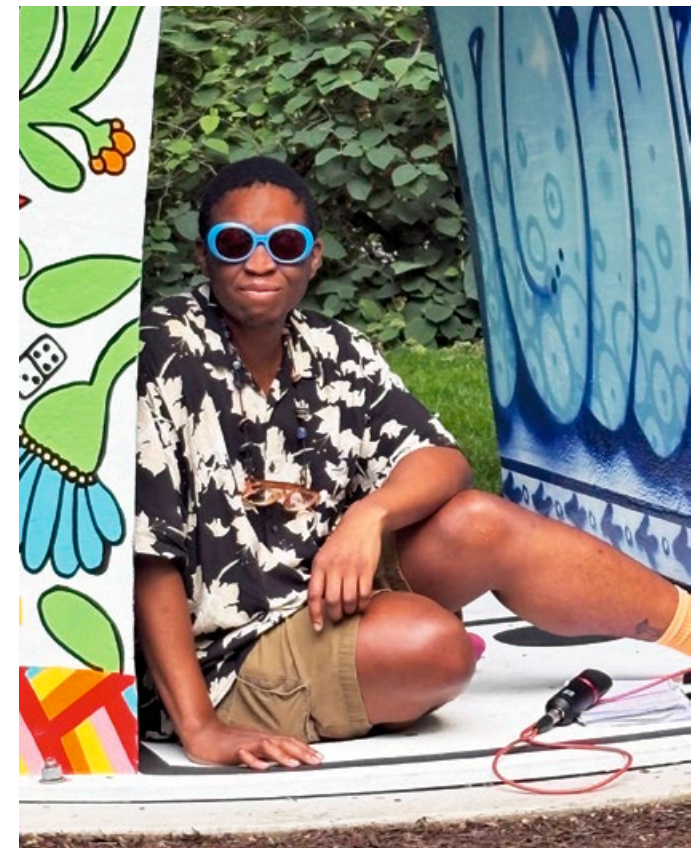
featuring performances by EZENWA and Tyson Ritter
joined by Reinaldo Ayala, Jose Ayala, Chris Gaylor,
and Sam Schneider

SEPTEMBER 19, 2026

Tea Ceremony

NOVEMBER 13, 2026

Madison Square Park Conservancy's Annual Public Art
Symposium



Above: Tyson Ritter, Sam Schneider, Chris Gaylor, and Jose Ayala (left to right)
Right: EZENWA, all performing at opening reception

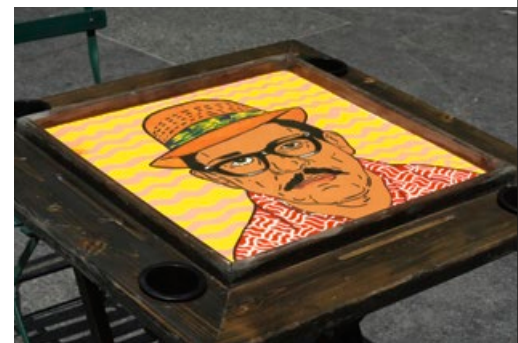


Works in the Exhibition

Roberto Lugo: *Alfarero del Barrio* (*Village Potter*)

All works in the exhibition are courtesy the artist and R & Company.

- 2026** *Capicú de Cariño (I Heard It Both Ways)*
Foam, paint, steel
20 ft. x 11 ft. 1 inch x 11 ft. 1 inch (240 x 133 x 133 inches)
- 2026** *Para Los Días Caliente (This Is For The Hot Ones)*
Foam, paint, steel
15 ft. x 11 ft. 5 inches x 8 ft. 5 inches
(180¾ x 137⅝ x 101 inches)
- 2026** *Domino Tables (Roberto Lugo, Roberto Clemente, Celia Cruz, Lugo's Grandfather)*
Wood, paint, resin
36 x 36 inches







Roberto Lugo

- 2014–2015** Doctor of Philosophy Candidacy
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
- 2012–2014** Masters of Fine Arts
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
- 2008–2012** Bachelor of Fine Arts, concentration in Ceramics, Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO
- 2007** attended School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Concentration in Interdisciplinary Arts, Chicago, IL

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2026** American Crib: What's Happening? The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, PA

in(visible) ink. Robert Lehman Art Center, Brooks School, North Andover, MA
- 2025** Pigeon Crib: Houston Edition. Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, TX

Boston Tea Party Remix: Roberto Lugo
Praise Shadows Art Gallery, Brookline, MA
Roberto Lugo: Drip. R & Company, New York, NY
Roberto Lugo: Orange / Black, Art@Bainbridge. Princeton University, Princeton, NJ
- 2023** Roberto Lugo: Hi-Def Archives. Cincinnati Museum of Art, OH

Gilded Ghetto. R & Company, New York, NY
- 2022** Roberto Lugo: Village Potter. Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ

Roberto Lugo: Pottery with Purpose. The Hermitage Museum and Gardens, Norfolk, VA
Roberto Lugo. The Wolfsonian-Florida International University, Miami Beach, FL
- 2021** Roberto Lugo: Te Traigo Mi Le Lo Lai (I bring you my joy), The Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH

God Complex: Different Philadelphia. Arthur Ross Gallery, The University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
Roberto Lugo: New Ceramics. Fairfield University Art Museum, Fairfield, CT, 2020
Stunting. New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA

- 2019** Design Miami / Curio. Solo exhibition presented by Wexler Gallery, Miami, FL
- 2018** Roberto Lugo at 1 West. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD
- Boricua, Barrio, Barro. Taller Puertorriqueño, Philadelphia, PA, 2017
- Jarring. Delaware Contemporary, Wilmington, DE
- Art Miami. presented by Wexler Gallery, Miami, FL
- New Life: A Table for Everyone. University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, 2016
- The Life and Times of Roberto Lugo. Wexler Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2015** Roberto Lugo Solo Exhibition. Eutectic Gallery, Portland, OR
- Ghetto Garniture: Wu Tang Worcester. Independent Arts Project, MASS MoCA campus, North Adams, MA

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2025** The Vessel Revisited. The Torggler Fine Arts Center, Newport News, VA
- 2024** The Shape of Power: Stories of Race and American Sculpture. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
- It Takes a Village: From Artist & Mentor Roberto Lugo. Main Line Art Center, Haverford, PA
- Reflect & Remix: Art Inspiring Artists. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD
- 50 Years in the Making. The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, PA
- Get in the Game: Sports, Art, Culture. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA
- The Time is Always Now: Artists Reframe the Black Figure. Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA
- Gyeonggi Ceramics Biennale (GCB). South Korea
- 2023** The Culture: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art in the 21st Century. Touring exhibition
- Figuring Space. The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, PA
- 2022** Smoke, Jason Jacques Gallery x Last Prisoner Project, New York, NY
- The Luxury of Clay: Porcelain Past and Present. Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, Washington, D.C.
- Past Is Present: Black Artists Respond to the Complicated Histories of Slavery. Herron Gallery, Indiana University-Purdue University of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN

- 2021** Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room from Seneca Village. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
- Back and Forth: Red and Meth. Wexler Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- Crafting America. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR
- Estamos Bien: La Trienal 20/21. El Museo del Barrio, New York, NY
- New Grit: Art & Philly Now. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
- Objects USA, 2020. R & Company, New York, NY
- 2020** Design Miami/ Podium, Miami, FL
- In a Perfect World: Optimism in an Age of Anxiety. Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN
- 2019** OBJECTS: USA REDUX. Houston Center For Contemporary Craft, Houston, TX
- Wynorrific Times. Two-person exhibition, Wexler Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- Making A Difference. Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, PA
- Graffiti And Ornament. The Woodlands, Past Present Projects, Wexler Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- Reconstructing Identities. Fowler-Kellogg Art Center, Chautauqua Institution, Chautauqua, NY
- EXPO CHICAGO, presented by Wexler Gallery, Chicago, IL
- Salon Art + Design. presented by Wexler Gallery, New York, NY
- Art Miami. presented by Wexler Gallery, Miami, FL
- 2018** The Burke Prize 2018: The Future Of Craft Part 2. Museum of Arts & Design, New York, NY
- Making Change: The Art and Craft of Activism. The Museum of Design/Atlanta, Atlanta, GA
- EXPO CHICAGO presented by Wexler Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2017** Collective Design. Wexler Gallery, New York, NY
- 2016** Simple Forms Stunning Glazes. Cranbrook Academy, Bloomfield Hills, MI
- Art Axis Exhibition, North Clay Center, Minneapolis, MN
- Government Cheese. Lillstreet Art Center, Chicago, IL
- Recorded Matter. Center for Craft, Asheville, NC
- Wild Mouth. Baltimore Clayworks, Baltimore, MD
- FOG, presented by Wexler Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- Collective Design. Wexler Gallery, New York, NY

- 2015 The City Real & Imagined. The Painted Bride, Philadelphia, PA
- Theoretical Show. The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Project Space, New York, NY
- Collective Design. Wexler Gallery, New York, NY
- SOFA, presented by Wexler Gallery, Chicago, IL

AWARDS

- 2023 Heinz Award, The Heinz Family Foundation
- Masters of Medium Awards, James Renwick Alliance for Craft
- 2022 Artist Fellowship, Philadelphia's Cultural Treasures, Philadelphia, PA
- Visionary Artist Award, Mural Arts Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA
- Honorary Doctorate, Saint Joseph's University
- 2021 Delphi Award, The Smithsonian Women's Committee
- 2020 Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon Polsky Rome Prize
- 2018 Ceramics Arts Network, Artist of the Year
- Burke Prize (Nomination), MAD Museum, New York, NY
- 2016 US Artist Award
- 2015 NCECA Emerging Artist, Providence, RI
- Victor Spinski Memorial Award, NCECA, Providence, RI



Writers' Biographies

Sarah Archer is an independent scholar and design journalist based in Philadelphia. She is the author of several books, including *The Midcentury Kitchen*, *Midcentury Christmas*, and *Catland: the Soft Power of Cat Culture in Japan*; and her writing can be found in numerous museum publications, most recently for the Wharton Esherick Museum and the Print Center New York; in print (*The New York Times*, *Material Intelligence*, *Architectural Digest*) and online (*The New Yorker*, *T Magazine*, *Hyperallergic*). Previously, she was senior curator at the Philadelphia Art Alliance and the Director of Greenwich House Pottery; more recently, she has appeared as a regular guest on the podcast *You're Wrong About* and in the CNN documentary *The Many Lives of Martha Stewart*.

Denise Markonish is the Martin Friedman Chief Curator at Madison Square Park Conservancy. Previously she was Chief Curator at MASS MoCA where she organized over 50 exhibitions and produced more than a dozen publications. Recent exhibitions include *Vincent Valdez: Just a Dream . . .* (co-organized with the Contemporary Art Museum Houston; Catalogue: X Artists' Books) and *Jeffrey Gibson: POWER FULL BECAUSE WE'RE DIFFERENT* (Catalogue: Radius Books).



Support

Support for *Roberto Lugo: Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter)* is made possible by

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Madison Square Park Conservancy is a public/private partnership with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation.

Acknowledgments

Madison Square Park Conservancy would like to thank our Board of Trustees, Art Committee, Art Council, and the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation for their continued support of our program.

The realization of *Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter)* was made possible with the help of Mariano Brothers Rigging, Thornton Tomasetti, NY, the team at R & Company, and Resnicow + Associates. Thank you to LDV Hospitality for generous hosting our opening celebration. Special thanks to Roberto Lugo's studio assistants: Ruby Anyanwu, Soso Capaladi, Charlie Cunningham, Kyle Mello Dixon, Zack Dulchin, Mbhali Edwards, Griff Jurchak, John Kuiphoff, Elianna Perez, Angelique Scott, and Julianna Thompson.

Thank you, also, to Sarah Archer for your contributions to the catalogue. The entire staff of MSPC is beyond amazing: our art program could not happen without them.

The Conservancy would also like to thank The Johnson Atelier and Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton, New Jersey.

These newly commissioned works were fabricated in partnership with The Atelier. Since 2022, The Atelier has collaborated with Roberto Lugo to explore new materials and large-scale fabrication processes, expanding his practice into monumental public artworks. This partnership has produced *Alfarero del Barrio* as well as major works for *The Village Potter* at Grounds For Sculpture and *We Here* at Mural Arts Philadelphia and ArtWorks Cincinnati. The Atelier's facility serves as an extension of the artist's studio, providing a dedicated workspace for Lugo to paint his large-scale sculptures on-site.

In addition to the above, the artist would like to thank Gilberto, Maribel, Marisol, Luis, and Otto Lugo, Sarah McCann, Kiki Connell, John Martinec, Ayesha Selden, Sasha and Ed Bass, R & Company, Erykah Badu, Rob Free, Daniel Simmons, Sam Schneider, Hughie Stone Fish, Jennifer Zwilling, Suzi Cordish, Cary Esser, Margaret Kinkeade, Brooks Oliver, Mark Andrew Elmer, Reinaldo Ayala, Jon Voigtman, Gillian Bryce, The Clay Studio, Michael Forman and Jennifer Rice, Isabel Oberlender, Charlie Cunningham, and Julianna Thompson.

About Madison Square Park Conservancy

Madison Square Park Conservancy is the nonprofit entrusted by the City of New York to operate Madison Square Park, a 6.2-acre public space in the heart of Manhattan. Our mission is to conserve, maintain, and program this ever-evolving historic green space, including raising 100 percent of the park's operating budget. Our dedicated team takes great pride in caring for and shaping an urban oasis for all to enjoy.

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Land Acknowledgment

Madison Square Park is located on Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape (Delaware) people. We recognize that this land was forcibly taken, resulting in the displacement and genocide of the Lenape (Delaware) Nations. Madison Square Park Conservancy respectfully acknowledges the Lenape (Delaware) people — past, present, and future — who continue to live, work, and connect to this land.

The Conservancy honors the Lenape (Delaware) people, the original stewards of this land, through our commitment to a series of sustainability and restoration initiatives. In the coming years, we aim to reduce our carbon imprint, promote sustainable land management, and reintroduce to the park species of fauna and flora indigenous to Lenapehoking.

For more information on Madison Square Park Conservancy and its programs, please visit madisonsquarepark.org.

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Madison Square Park Conservancy Exhibitions

2025	Larry Bell <i>Improvisations in the Park</i> Lily Kwong <i>Gardens of Renewal</i>
2024	Nicole Eisenman <i>Fixed Crane</i> María Magdalena Campos-Pons <i>Procession of Angels for Radical Love and Unity</i> Rose B. Simpson <i>Seed</i> Ana María Hernando <i>To Let the Sky Know / Dejar que el cielo sepa</i>
2023	Sheila Pepe <i>My Neighbor's Garden</i> Shahzia Sikander <i>Havah . . . to breathe, air, life</i>
2022	Cristina Iglesias <i>Landscape and Memory</i> Hugh Hayden <i>Brier Patch</i>
2021	Maya Lin <i>Ghost Forest</i>
2020	Krzysztof Wodiczko <i>Monument</i> Abigail DeVille <i>Light of Freedom</i>
2019	Leonardo Drew <i>City in the Grass</i>
2018	Arlene Shechet <i>Full Steam Ahead</i> Diana Al-Hadid <i>Delirious Matter</i>
2017	Erwin Redl <i>Whiteout</i> Josiah McElheny <i>Prismatic Park</i>
2016	Martin Puryear <i>Big Bling</i>
2015	Teresita Fernández <i>Fata Morgana</i> Paula Hayes <i>Gazing Globes</i>
2014	Tony Cragg <i>Walks of Life</i> Rachel Feinstein <i>Folly</i> Iván Navarro <i>This Land Is Your Land</i>
2013	Giuseppe Penone <i>Ideas of Stone (Idee di pietra)</i> Orly Genger <i>Red, Yellow and Blue</i> Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder <i>Topsy-Turvy: A Camera Obscura Installation</i>
2012	Leo Villareal <i>BUCKYBALL</i>

Charles Long *Pet Sounds*

2011	Jacco Olivier <i>Stumble, Hide, Rabbit Hole, Bird, Deer, Home</i> Alison Saar <i>Feallan and Fallow</i> Jaume Plensa <i>Echo</i> Kota Ezawa <i>City of Nature</i>
2010	Jim Campbell <i>Scattered Light</i> Antony Gormley <i>Event Horizon</i> Ernie Gehr <i>Surveillance</i>
2009	Shannon Plumb <i>The Park</i> Jessica Stockholder <i>Flooded Chambers Maid</i> Mel Kendrick <i>Markers</i> Bill Beirne <i>Madison Square Trapezoids, with Performances by the Vigilant Groundsman</i>
2008	Olia Lialina & Dragan Espenschied <i>Online Newspapers: New York Edition</i> Richard Deacon <i>Assembly</i> Tadashi Kawamata <i>Tree Huts</i> Rafael Lozano-Hemmer <i>Pulse Park</i>
2007	Bill Fontana <i>Panoramic Echoes</i> Roxy Paine <i>Conjoined, Defunct, Erratic</i> William Wegman <i>Around the Park</i>
2006	Ursula von Rydingsvard <i>Bowl with Fins, Czara z Babelkami, Damski Czepek, Ted's Desert Reigns</i>
2005	Jene Highstein <i>Eleven Works</i> Sol LeWitt <i>Circle with Towers, Curved Wall with Towers</i>
2004	Mark di Suvero <i>Aesop's Fable, Double Tetrahedron, Beyond</i>
2003	Wim Delvoye <i>Gothic</i>
2002	Dan Graham <i>Bisected Triangle, Interior Curve</i> Mark Dion <i>Urban Wildlife Observation Unit</i> Dalziel + Scullion <i>Voyager</i>
2001	Navin Rawanchaikul <i>I ♥ Taxi</i> Teresita Fernández <i>Bamboo Cinema</i> Tobias Rehberger <i>Tsutsumu N.Y.</i>
2000	Tony Oursler <i>The Influence Machine</i> From 2000 to 2003, the Public Art Fund presented exhibitions on behalf of the Campaign for the New Madison Square Park.

Photography and Figure Credits

All images of *Alfarero del Barrio (Village Potter)* in Madison Square Park by Timothy Schenck.

All installation progress and opening reception images are courtesy of Madison Square Park Conservancy.

Unless otherwise noted, all works are courtesy of the artist and R & Company.



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