

Roberto Lugo

Roberto Lugo is a Philadelphia-based artist, ceramicist, social activist, poet, and educator. Lugo utilizes classical pottery forms in conjunction with portraiture and surface design reminiscent of his North Philadelphia upbringing and Hip Hop culture to highlight themes of poverty, inequality, and racial injustice. Lugo's works utilize traditional European and Asian ceramic techniques reimagined with a 21st-century street sensibility. Their hand-painted surfaces feature classic decorative patterns and motifs combined with elements of modern urban graffiti and portraits of individuals whose faces are historically absent on this type of luxury item - people like Sojourner Truth, Dr. Cornel West, and The Notorious BIG, as well as Lugo's family members and, very often, himself.

Lugo holds a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute and an MFA from Penn State. 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.

Murjoni Merriweather

Sculptor Murjoni Merriweather grew up in Temple Hills, Maryland. During her time there, she fell in love with art at the age of 8 learning how to draw from trial and error and art kits her parents would give her. After dabbling in photography, drawing, painting and graphic design, Murjoni tried out ceramics by the time she was in 8th grade where her heart grew whole. While feeling so connected to clay, she started making work that reflected the black experience. In 2018 Murjoni graduated from The Maryland Institute College of Art with her BFA in Ceramics and concentration in Film/video. During this time, she explored celebrating blackness through figurative forms. Murjoni has been able to expand her knowledge and experiment at places like Creative Alliance

(Baltimore, 2019-2022), Fountainhead Residency (Miami, 2021) and The Alma | Lewis Residency (PA, 2022) in ways that talk about emotion through the clay itself. She has shown in institutions like Rubell Museum DC (2023), Baltimore Museum of Art (2023), St. Louis Art Museum (2023), The Walters Museum (2023), Jeffery Deitch LA (2021), and many more.

Murjoni currently resides in Baltimore Maryland with her cat, Kiva, where she continues to aim towards inspiring and celebrating black culture in ways that make us feel seen.

Larry Ossei-Mensah

Larry Ossei-Mensah is a Ghanaian-American artist, curator, and writer whose studio practice centers on ceramic forms. Through his work with clay and other materials, Ossei-Mensah explores cultural memory, identity, and the intimate ways objects carry meaning. His pieces translate complex narratives—spanning diasporic histories, ancestral connections, and contemporary life—into tactile, contemplative forms that invite viewers to engage physically and emotionally.

Paul S. Briggs

Gravity Series – Artist Statement

Although gravity is popularly thought of as a force that pulls objects down, scientifically it is understood as masses attracting one another. My inspiration from the contemplation of gravity is social. The Gravity series revolves intrinsically around Black perseverance. The work in the exhibit dramatizes resisting the seeming inevitability of being pulled in specific directions by external forces. In the words of the popular song from “Wicked” the theatre production and recent film, the work is about: Defying Gravity. Stephen Schwartz, the song’s composer, explains the song as literal and social.

The book on which the play and film are based, *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (1995, by Gregory Mguire), is a much darker revisionist version of, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, (1900, by L. Frank Baum). In *Wicked*, Elphaba, the witch, is a symptom of her nurturing and socialization due to her green skin. She develops into a compassionate overanxious person. Her life is nuanced and tragic as she tries to navigate the ethics and moralities of her times from the location of marginalized woman. In the song by John Mayer titled “Gravity,” he too longs to be kept “where the light is,” that is, living ethically and true against seemingly inexorable forces.

In my final analysis, the work is a celebration of the many--green, Black or otherwise--who have, against all odds, persevered and remain resilient though the weathering of the social forces they have resisted is evident in the heaviness, knots, scars and bindings that remain visible inside and out.