

MURAL ARTS PHILADELPHIA UNVEILS “WE HERE”: A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PUBLIC ART PROGRAM IN KENSINGTON

Led by esteemed artist and Kensington native Roberto Lugo

March 26, 2024 (Philadelphia) - [Mural Arts Philadelphia](#), in collaboration with artist and Kensington native [Roberto Lugo](#) and a dedicated Community Advisory Council, is proud to announce the launch of *We Here*, a community-engaged art project set to illuminate the vibrant neighborhood of Kensington with creativity and resilience.



We Here is a two-year project spearheaded by Mural Arts’ Porch Light program, a collaborative effort with the City of Philadelphia’s Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, which has worked to broaden access to the arts in Kensington since 2017. Inspired by Lugo’s journey as a professional artist who grew up in Kensington, *We Here* emphasizes youth engagement through pottery. The project features pattern-making and pottery workshops designed to actively involve local school groups and community members in an immersive artistic journey that will culminate in unveiling three monumental outdoor sculptures in Kensington

during the Summer of 2024. Workshops will be led by Lugo and collaborating artists, including Yinka Orafidiya and Nitza Walesca Rosario.

Three monumental outdoor sculptures, designed by Roberto Lugo, will embody the spirit of the community, integrating pattern designs and other input from Kensington residents. Accompanying the installations, public programs, including tours and a symposium, will occur from June to October 2024, celebrating the project’s impact and community stories.

In conjunction with *We Here*, Mural Arts will publish a children’s book based on the story of Lugo’s discovery of art. Co-developed by Lugo and acclaimed children’s book author Frank Berrios, the bilingual (English-Spanish) illustrated book will be distributed to families in Kensington for free.

Along with Lugo and the project team, *We Here* is led by a Community Advisory Committee consisting of Kensington residents Daisie Cardona, Margarita Gonzalez, Tyler Kline, Brenda Mosley, Sunny Phanthavong, Neyda Rios, Claire Sitarz, Drew Spence, Katelyn Stoler, John Walsh, and J.C. Zerbe.



“I’m a firm believer that art brings about healing, and I’m here because I believe in what we’re doing with Roberto,” says **CAC member Brenda Mosley, founder and executive director of the Kensington-based non-profit By Faith Health and Healing, Inc.**

“A lot of people in Kensington are dealing with tragedy and trauma and loss, and Roberto’s art provides the joy that’s needed in healing,” Mosley explains. “What’s really important is that Kensington residents know who Roberto is and all that he has come from, and how he has established himself. He’s a true vision of hope that people can connect with.”

A visionary artist, Roberto Lugo redefines traditional ceramics with a unique blend of 21st-century urban flair and hip-hop culture. His works, deeply rooted in his Kensington upbringing, showcase a fusion of classical forms, graffiti, and portraiture, often featuring influential figures absent from luxury ceramics. Lugo's involvement in *We Here* showcases his artistic prowess and strengthens the bond between art and community in Kensington.

"*We Here* is a project I started in collaboration with Mural Arts Philadelphia’s Porch Light program to celebrate and create art in Kensington, the community where I grew up. There are artists and visual thinkers in every community, and with access and the support to express themselves creatively, everyone can have the opportunity to thrive,” said **Lead Artist Roberto Lugo**.

“With the larger-than-life vessel sculptures that will be installed in the neighborhood, my goal is for folks to take pride in our community and see themselves as artists in the colorful patterns derived from and inspired by Kensington that will adorn the artwork,” said Lugo. “The sculptures themselves are an invitation for the community to interact; by stepping inside, you complete the artwork’s vignette as the portrait subject. I was inspired to create these sculptures and debut them in the community that raised me after taking notice of the stigma surrounding people taking selfies or photos with artwork. Above the criticism, I saw the natural inclination of people yearning to be reflected in something beautiful. With *We Here*, I’m bringing art back to my neighborhood and urging the people of my community to step into their absolute talent and creativity.”

"*We Here* embodies the essence of Kensington's resilience and creativity, transforming the neighborhood into a living canvas,” said **Jane Golden, Executive Director of Mural Arts Philadelphia**. “Through Roberto Lugo's inspiring work and our collaborative community efforts, we're not just making art – we're weaving a vibrant tapestry of hope and unity. This project is a powerful testament to the transformative role of art in community building.”

Major support for *We Here* has been provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Hummingbird Foundation, the City of Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services and private individual support. Partners on this project include Impact Services, Kensington Corridor Trust, McPherson Library, Harrowgate Park, Taller Puertorriqueño, Free Church of St. John, Jules E. Mastbaum High School, and Frances E. Willard School. The works are being produced in collaboration with the Johnson Atelier team in Hamilton, New Jersey where Lugo’s first monumental public artwork “Put Yourself in the Picture” was produced in 2022 for his residency and solo show at Grounds for Sculpture.

Roberto Lugo’s Bio

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 reimagine traditional European and Asian ceramics, adding a 21st-century street sensibility. Their hand-painted surfaces feature classic decorative patterns and motifs combined with elements of urban life, graffiti, and portraits of individuals who have been historically absent from traditional luxury vessels... individuals such as 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.

Recently, Lugo received the esteemed [Heinz Award](#), granting 250,000 in unrestricted funds. He is also the recipient of numerous awards, including 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 High Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Walters Art Museum, and more. He is currently an Assistant Professor at Tyler School of Art and Architecture in Philadelphia.

ABOUT MURAL ARTS PHILADELPHIA

Mural Arts Philadelphia is the nation's largest public art program, dedicated to the belief that art ignites change. Now celebrating its 40th Anniversary with the theme **Roots & Reimagination**, Mural Arts has united artists and communities through a collaborative and equitable process, creating over 4,000 artworks that have transformed public spaces and individual lives. Mural Arts aims to empower people, stimulate dialogue, and build bridges to mutual understanding through projects that attract artists from Philadelphia and around the world and programs that focus on youth education, restorative justice, mental health and wellness, and public arts preservation. Popular mural tours offer a firsthand glimpse into the inspiring stories behind Mural Arts' iconic and unparalleled collection, earning Philadelphia worldwide recognition as the "Mural Capital of the World." For more information, call 215-685-0750 or visit muralarts.org.

###

Media contacts:

Kaitlyn Haney, Signature 57
khaney@signature57.com
215.514.6495

Tamara Yvette Day, Signature 57
tday@signature57.com

Visit the [We Here Webpage](#).