

We
here
KENSINGTON

We Here: A Community-Engaged Art Project, led by Roberto Lugo and Mural Arts Philadelphia

ISBN 979-8-9910069-2-7 eBook

ISBN 979-8-9910069-3-4 Paperback

© 2025 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program and Mural Arts Advocates

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form, or by any means, without written permission from the publisher. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Distributed by:

City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program

Lincoln Financial Mural Arts Center

1727-29 Mount Vernon Street

Philadelphia, PA 19130 USA

www.muralarts.org

Edited by Megan Voeller

Design by Amy Scheidegger Ducos

Copy edited by Celeste DiNucci

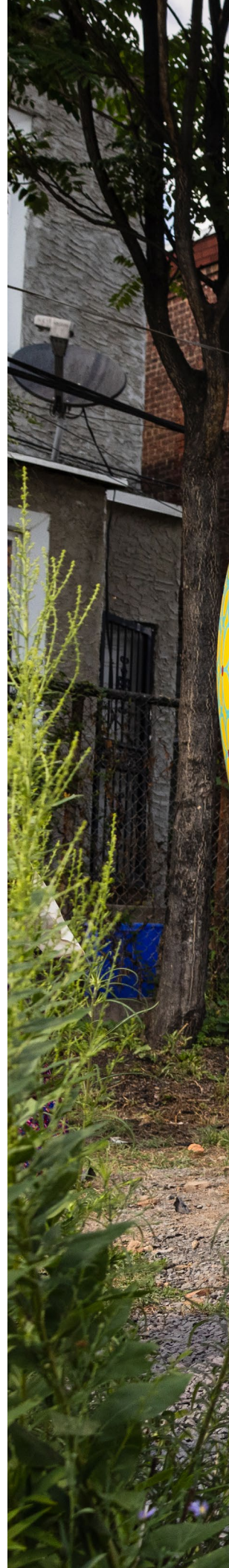
Cover photo and photo to the right by Steve Weinik

Cover art and art shown throughout: *We Here* © 2025 Roberto Lugo, Philadelphia Mural Arts Program and the Mural Arts Advocates. All rights reserved.

Back cover photo: Steve Weinik

Major support for *We Here* has been provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, with additional support from Hummingbird Foundation, City of Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disABILITY Services (DBHIDS), Katie Adams Schaeffer & Tony Schaeffer, Julia & David Fleischner, City of Philadelphia, and an anonymous donor. This project is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

The views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage or The Pew Charitable Trusts.







All photos by Steve Weinik





Contents

Pages 1 - 4

Foreword

Jane Golden

Pages 5 - 8

Our Journey in Kensington

Nadia Malik

Pages 9 - 12

About We Here

Pages 13 - 16

We Here Community Advisory Committee

Pages 17 - 18

Project Partners

Pages 19 - 20

Project Team

Pages 21 - 24

Tagged, You're It: Making Community Part of Art History in Roberto Lugo's We Here

Sarah Archer

Pages 25 - 32

We've Always Been Here

Kelli Morgan

Pages 33 - 46

We Here: Reframing Kensington Through Art and Community

Megan Voeller

Pages 47 - 56

We Here In Their Own Words

Interviews compiled by Megan Voeller

Pages 57 - 60

Tools for Tracing Transformation

Liz Green

Page 61

Contributors



Kensington
CORRIDOR

MONOPHONICS

Kensington
CORRIDOR

Foreword

Jane Golden

Executive Director | Mural Arts Philadelphia

Eleven years ago, in November 2013, I attended the exhibition “Juvenile in Justice” at InLiquid Gallery in the Crane Arts building. The exhibition featured three young artists, but the works that caught my eye were by Roberto Lugo. Roberto’s ceramic plates struck a chord and reminded me of some of the wall writers I had worked with in the early days of the Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network (PAGN)—self-assured and skilled, graphically strong, with bold color, pattern, and an unmistakable self-portrait.

At InLiquid, as Roberto and I talked about street art, where he was working, and what he was working on, I thought that a project with Mural Arts might be a great opportunity for

him. (Never mind the fact that working with Roberto might be an exceptional prospect for Mural Arts.) He made it clear that he had things to say, ceramic traditions to study, work to make, and relationships to develop. We agreed to stay in touch. Little did I know how quickly and brilliantly he would develop his practice as the Village Potter: a prolific maker, a formal and informal educator, an entrepreneur, and a designer of public art projects.

Lugo grew up in Kensington, where the Crane Arts building had developed into a seminal art space. He took advantage of every opportunity to learn about ceramic traditions, historic and current inequalities, Philadelphia history, and,

All photos by Steve Weinik



I am pleased to say, murals, too. Every time we spoke, Roberto had a new idea to explore. It wasn't long before he was invited by The Clay Studio to join their community advisory committee to help build their new home across American Street from the Crane. When he was invited to create the monumental ceramic façade on the south side of the new building, Roberto reached out to Mural Arts with a vision to create *The Talented Mr. Trotter: You Can Be Anything* (2022), his tribute to musician and artist Tarik Trotter (aka Black Thought), who studied art in Philadelphia schools before he co-founded the rap group The Roots.

When I approached Roberto about developing a new project with Mural Arts, he said he would love to do something in Kensington. Lugo is deeply committed to the gritty post-industrial neighborhood where he grew up, which is known for its strong sense of community but also, in recent years, for struggles related to the opioid crisis. At Mural Arts, we know Kensington well and have worked in the neighborhood for a decade through our Porch Light program. We are now in our eighteenth partnership year with the City's Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, which supports Porch Light. Through the program, our team of artists and social workers deploy art as an object, tool, catalyst, and process in the lives of people grappling with a range of mental health issues. The work is very hard but deeply inspiring. The thought of Roberto working in partnership with us in Kensington made my heart sing.

A week later I was reading his brilliant proposal—called *We Here*—for a public art

project about identity, representation, and the reclamation of space. Over the years, I have seen how the presence of an artist's work can shape conceptual thinking about place and how a public art project can generate community. While the vessels Roberto has created for *We Here* are powerful and lively monumental forms, the work goes far beyond the realm of beautification to something transformative. Fusing the practical and the poetic, *We Here* has become a deep part of the community.

Over the past five years, Lugo has developed his own multi-faceted practice spanning ceramics, storytelling, activism, spoken word poetry, and entrepreneurship. He has mentored a new generation of artists in Kensington and beyond and has helped them open their eyes to the powerful sources of culture and diversity of pattern and color that surround them every day. Roberto inspires everyone he meets to see artmaking in a range of forms along with practicing the values of generosity, curiosity, and team building. The beauty of *We Here* is that it has not only connected us more deeply to Roberto but also to artists Nitza Walesca Rosario and Yinka Orafidiya, who are carrying on the tradition of listening, leading, sharing, and creating.

This wonderful project is made possible through the generous support of the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage and the National Endowment for the Arts. We cannot thank them enough for the opportunity to bring *We Here* to life.

**To the right: Roberto Lugo, *The Talented Mr. Trotter: You Can Be Anything*, 2022
Location: The Clay Studio, 1425 N. American St., Philadelphia.
Photo by Steve Weinik**





Our Journey in Kensington

Nadia Malik, MSW

Director, Porch Light Program | Mural Arts Philadelphia

By this time, it had become a familiar sight: a dozen people filtering into a small storefront on Kensington Avenue after work, school, and other responsibilities had wrapped up for the day. They knew the deal by now. While the sun set outside, the train rattled overhead, and the neighborhood shut its doors to evening activities it would rather not witness at one of the most active corners in the city, the *We Here* community advisory committee gathered to talk about its hopes and dreams for this project.

What had also become somewhat ritualistic as they picked up slices of pizza was the conversation. This night, three CAC members—who didn't know each other months earlier—

started talking about their dogs and of a Kensington where a dog park would be a reality. The ideas and enthusiasm flowed freely. There was no doubt that this group could make a dog park happen. They'd all done bigger things and faced much larger challenges.

This is the essence of Kensington.

I've only worked in the neighborhood for six years, but what I will always take away from this community is its desire to be here. The people who live here see all of Kensington's faults and love it. They know their neighbors. They know the people who are sleeping on their blocks. They check in on each other. They fight for each other. They're in this together.



The work my department at Mural Arts does in Kensington is some of the hardest I've faced in my entire life. But this—these people, these moments—is exactly what keeps me and my team here.

Mural Arts has a somewhat long history in the neighborhood. The Porch Light Department, which is a partnership with the city's Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (DBHIDS), has a practice of embedding art spaces in communities. The idea is to use art as a pathway for mental health connections. My team strongly believes in the power of art as an avenue for trauma and healing; we've seen the proof firsthand in our programs. When very clear needs around opioid use disorder showed

up in Kensington in 2017, the Porch Light Program decided it was time to see if we could leverage this power to serve the Kensington community.

It was by no means an easy road. The artists, volunteers, and mental health workers who spent night and day in the Kensington Storefront were dedicated and gave their hearts and souls to the work. The Storefront was built on community partnerships and featured art classes and resources. But the community was hurting from decades of neglect. All the good intentions in the world couldn't solve that without dedication and trust-building. We tried to be humble and learn. We asked people what they wanted from our space. We

literally met people where they were, which the COVID-19 pandemic eventually made a necessity. We became a mobile team, going out to various parts of the neighborhood and setting up tents with artists. We gave out mini-grants to residents who had an art program they wanted to bring to fruition.

We did so many projects. We wanted to cover the neighborhood in art, a tool familiar in Kensington for community building and self-expression. We partnered with anyone who wanted to work with us. We did a creative placemaking project with Prevention Point to help them use a vacant lot in the most useful way possible for their clients. We worked with Impact Services along the Indiana Avenue corridor, connecting neighbors through four

murals that created a poem together and a procession that focused on memories. The Kensington Corridor Trust took over a huge vacant lot, and we were more than happy to brainstorm with them about a series of activations throughout the area and a mural in their community garden space. We expanded Color Me Back, a same-day work program, to a second site in Kensington. Every day, we paired unhoused residents and other residents in Kensington who needed economic assistance and paid them to do artmaking with us. Most importantly, we tried to show we were in this for the long haul.

I've said continuously that *We Here* would not be possible if we hadn't done the work in Kensington. Residents here can smell insincerity

Photo by Steve Weinik



a mile away. One of the most stressful moments of this project was right up front when Roberto Lugo—who grew up in this neighborhood and wanted to do something special here—presented his idea to a large group of residents at Cantina la Martina in April 2023. I knew that if the people in that room hated the idea and weren't behind it, we couldn't go forward. Luckily, they saw the beauty of Roberto's work and words, and they gave us their go ahead.

Hopefully, we've come through. The community advisory committee has been involved in this project from day one. We couldn't have found a better partner for this project than Roberto. He emphasized the importance of pattern making and pottery classes in the neighborhood so that

the vessels he created told the story of this community.

Now that Roberto's beautiful pieces are in the ground and this community has welcomed us in, I see our work as just beginning. We have to uphold our promise to Kensington. We are committed to this neighborhood. We're in this with you. This project has brought artmaking and opportunity and beauty to residents. They've let us into their lives, their homes, and their dreams. It has been an absolute privilege to be witness to personal conversations and aspirations as *We Here* has progressed. Now, it's our turn to reflect the Kensington community spirit and affirm that we're not going anywhere.

Photo by Steve Weinik



About We Here

Led by artist Roberto Lugo in collaboration with Mural Arts Philadelphia and a dedicated Community Advisory Council, *We Here* was a community-engaged art project envisioned to illuminate creativity and resilience in the vibrant Philadelphia neighborhood of Kensington.

Inspired by Lugo's journey as a professional artist who grew up in Kensington, *We Here* emphasized youth engagement through pattern-making and pottery workshops created

to actively involve local school groups and community members in an immersive artistic journey. Workshops were led by Lugo and collaborating artists, including Nitza Walesca Rosario and Yinka Orafidiya, as well as Mural Arts staff artists. The two-year project (2022–2024) culminated in the unveiling of three monumental outdoor sculptures designed by Lugo at community sites in Kensington. These large-scale sculptures embodied the spirit of the community by integrating pattern designs



Photo by Steve Weinik

and other input from Kensington residents, from workshop participants to the Community Advisory Council.

The *We Here* project was 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. Accompanying the sculptures, public programs including block parties, tours, and a symposium took place from June to November 2024, celebrating the project's impact and community stories.

In conjunction with *We Here*, Mural Arts published 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 and illustrator Meghan Galloway-Edgar, more than 1,000 copies of the illustrated book, in both English and Spanish, were distributed to families in Kensington for free.

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 B.I.G., 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. In 2023, Lugo received the esteemed Heinz Award for innovative contributions to the arts. He is also the recipient of a 2019 Pew Fellowship, a Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon Polsky Rome Prize, and a US Artist Award. His work



Photo by Steve Weinik

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.

Mural Arts Philadelphia is the nation's largest public art program, dedicated to the belief that art ignites change. For more than 40 years, 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."

Photo to the right by Kyla G. Photography



We Here Community Advisory Committee

Daisie Cardona has been devoted to community service since age three. Living in Kensington, she works at Rebel Arts, a tumbling, gymnastics and aerial skills school and is part of its circus company. Currently, she is diving back into music and working on their fantasy novel, *Life by Starlight*. Balancing professional dedication with artistic passion, Daisie continues to inspire and impact their community.

Margarita Gonzalez is a Community Engagement Coordinator/Community Connectors Supervisor for Impact Services in Kensington. She is also a Puerto Rican mother of two children, Savion & Neveah. Margarita is a community leader involved with many local organizations such as Townwatch with the 24-25th Police district, the KCT Stewardship Committee and the Friends of McPherson Park Friends Group. Margarita loves her work and the impact that she makes in others' lives.

Tyler Kline is an artist, educator, and curator living on Kensington Ave, the Rocky Block by Tusculum Farm, who believes deeply in art's transformative and regenerative properties. Kline has found Kensington to be an achingly beautiful landscape of resilience, collaboration, sacrifice, scarcity and excess. The confluence of these poetic, contradictory, and at times volatile aspects of the neighborhood have led to profound character incubation, the type of

meditations that crystalize in the predawn light, punctuated by the madrigals of the Ave and illuminated by the roaming klieg lights of the El. The gardens of this cinematic enclave have found me, and nurtured me, dripping in their mysteries under a Somerset Sunset.

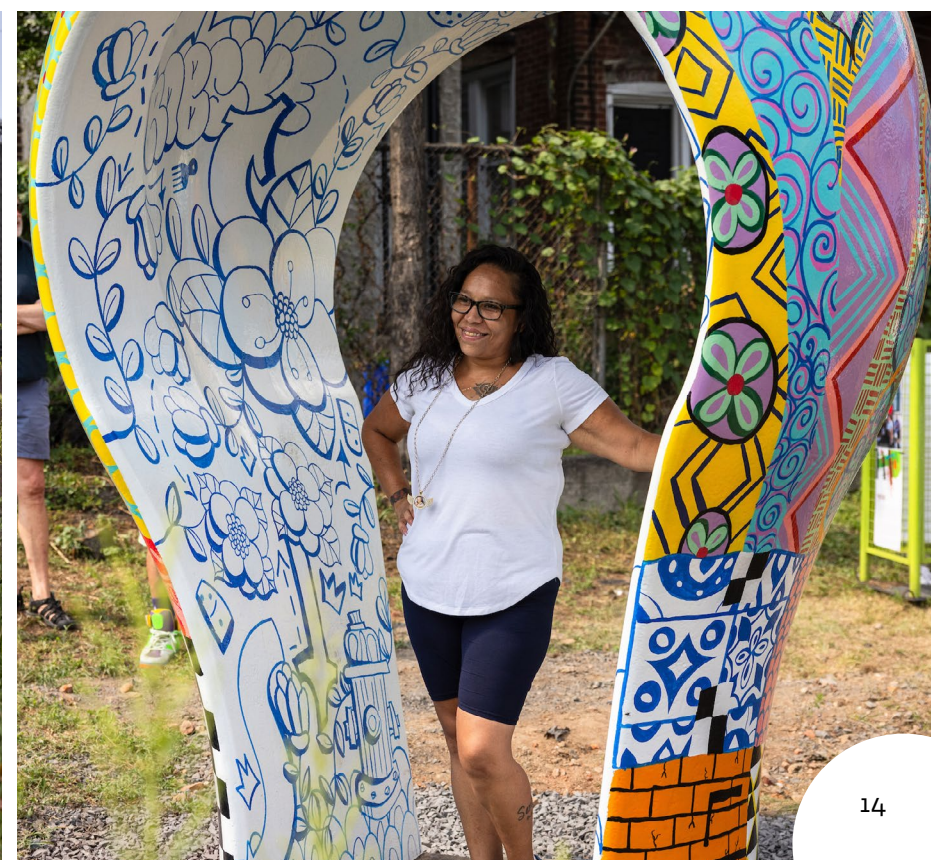
Brenda Mosley is the founder and executive director of By Faith Health and Healing, a nonprofit organization that addresses community trauma including addiction, gun violence and poverty in Kensington, where she lives. She was a member of the first graduating class of certified community health workers at the New Kensington Community Development Corporation, a community-driven, trauma-informed, and equity-focused nonprofit organization supporting residents and businesses in Kensington, Fishtown and Port Richmond, Philadelphia.

Sunny Phanthavong is the owner of Vientiane Bistro. She was born and raised in West Philadelphia, where the Phanthavong family launched Vientiane Cafe in 2002, creating a place for Lao culture to thrive in Philly. In 2018, Sunny expanded the family business by opening Vientiane Bistro in Kensington.

Top photo by Erin Blewett

Bottom photos by Steve Weinik





Neyda Rios has lived in Kensington for all her life. She has a passion for working together with the community, making sure people get what they need, and sending out a positive message about the neighborhood and its residents. Together with her kids, Daisie and Stanley, Neyda continues to fight for Kensington through her activism and educating people on their rights to support change.

Claire Sitarz is an artist and therapist who has lived in Kensington since 2016. In her work, Claire likes to explore how art can facilitate self-expression and help us to mend broken parts of ourselves. Claire learned how to sew at a young age and can often be found behind a sewing machine or involved in a knitting or textile project. Claire enjoys helping others to learn new skills, from art clubs to basketball, and she is active in youth mentorship in her public-school community and her neighborhood.

Drew Spence is a Philly native who has lived in Kensington since 2018. Drew is committed to working with others to make Kensington better and hopes to participate in more art projects in the future.

Kate Stoler has lived in Kensington since 2011. She is a recovered addict and spends most of her free time with the recovery community. Since 2020, Kate has been working to provide affordable housing options to women in Kensington in recovery from addiction. In her spare time,

she runs art classes, writing workshops and accountability groups for men and women in the neighborhood, and takes her puppy Bear for long walks.

John Walsh was born in the Wissinoming section of Philadelphia and has called Kensington home since 2016. John worked as a chef for most of his career and enjoys learning about and discussing the intersections between food, culture and community and how food can build understanding and conversation between people. John is an active resident in Kensington and enjoys gardening and photography in the neighborhood.

J. C. Zerbe is an artist, community activator, and advocate. Known for his graphic lines and expressionistic style work, he fuses street art elements with his techniques while using lines to create waves of energy throughout his work. The neighborhood of Kensington in Philadelphia is where you can often find Zerbe painting, participating in neighborhood projects, or connecting with the community. Zerbe has led art workshops to bring healing to those experiencing addiction, homelessness, or other forms of ongoing trauma. His work inspires and provokes movement toward social change within Kensington and beyond.

Top photo by Kyla C. Photography

Bottom photo by Erin Blewett



Project Partners



The Free Church of St. John

The Free Church of Saint John is an Episcopal mission in the Kensington neighborhood of North Philadelphia. This neighborhood is home to a large population of Irish Americans, Hispanic Americans (mainly Puerto Rican and Dominican), African Americans, Italian Americans, and Polish Americans. The mission is celebrating its 150th year of ministry.



Taller Puertorriqueño

Celebrating 50 years in 2024, Taller Puertorriqueño is a community-based cultural organization whose primary purpose is to preserve, develop, and promote Puerto Rican arts and culture, grounded in the conviction that embracing one's cultural heritage is empowering. Guided by the vision of a Latino community that is engaged, culturally aware, and economically vibrant, Taller catalyzes community development through its arts and cultural resources, building bridges between the local community, the region, and the Puerto Rican, Latin American, and Latinx Diaspora.



The Kensington Corridor Trust

The Kensington Corridor Trust (KCT) utilizes collective ownership to direct investments in the Kensington corridor that preserve culture and affordability while building neighborhood power and wealth. Activities focus on restoring cleanliness and safety, attracting and accelerating businesses to provide goods and services that meet local needs, and increasing job opportunities. Strategic property acquisition, development, and activation underpin the Trust's programming. KCT's vision is that Kensington Avenue becomes a safe, healthy, and socioeconomically diverse commercial corridor with accessible opportunities for Kensington's existing and future residents.

All photos by Steve Weinik



Project Team

Project Team

Roberto Lugo
Lead Artist

Isabel Oberlender
*Managing Creative Director,
Roberto Lugo Studio*

Anna Drozdowski
Project Manager

Megan Voeller
Curator of Public Engagement

Yinka Orafidiya
Pottery Instructor

Nitza Rosario Walesca
Pottery Instructor

Johnson Atelier
Vessel Fabrication

Leivas Contracting
Concrete

Frank Berrios
Author

Meghan Galloway-Edgar
Illustrator

Eric McLaughlin
Graphic Design

Gustavo Garcia & Joe Ronca,
*Video Production, Colibrí
Workshop*

Amy Scheidegger Ducos
Layout and Design

Kayla Johnson
Assistant Artist

Corey Cooper
*Color Me Back Studio
Coordinator*

Nicole Steinberg
Marketing

Liz Green
Project Evaluation

Jacob C. Hammes
Installation Fabrication

Pedro Ducos
Translation

Emilio Moldanado
Translation

Celeste DiNucci
Copy Editing

Roberto Lugo Studio

Charlie Cunningham
Studio Manager

Julianna Thompson
Artist Assistant

Spencer Dofflemeyer
Artist Assistant

Soso Capaldi
Artist Assistant

Site Partners

Kensington Corridor Trust:

Jasmin Velez

Adriana Abizadeh

Josh Harris

Smooches

Taller Puertorriqueño:

Rafael Damast

Erikka Goslin

Aida Devine

Lisa Moser

Raymond

Cynthia

The Free Church of St. John:

Joselius Memba

Jeanmarie Lugo

Mural Arts Philadelphia

Jane Golden
Mural Arts Executive Director

Nadia Malik
Porch Light Director

Paige Phillips
*Porch Light Curator/Project
Manager*

Jeff Evans
Porch Light Project Manager

Peggy Seiden
Porch Light Administrator

Emily Crane
*Color Me Back Program
Manager*

Mat Tomezsko
*Color Me Back Assistant
Program Manager*

Katie Brown
*Color Me Back Site Studio
Coordinator*

Chad Eric Smith
*Senior Director of
Communications and Brand
Management*

Steve Weinik
*Senior Photographer/Senior
Manager of Digital Media and
Technology*

Darnell Schoolfield
*Social Media and Marketing
Manager*

Jenny Donnelly Johnson
*Communications and Marketing
Manager*

Carolyn Nagy
Senior Director of Development

Sean Hughes
*Senior Manager of Institutional
Relations*

Katerina Lydon
*Senior Manager of Institutional
Relations*

Phil Coyne
ECBM

Tagged, You're It: Making Community Part of Art History in Roberto Lugo's *We Here*

Sarah Archer

Squint, and you may think you've seen this object before: a Janus-like figure holds a serpent as he gazes thoughtfully into a mirror, surrounded by a ring of flowering and fruiting plants. It's a ceramic object, perfectly round. Its surface is shiny and vividly chromatic. Bright yellow citrus fruits tartly catch the eye against a deep blue background. The portrait at its center is sculpted in bas-relief, hovering somewhere between two and three dimensions. Superficially, this work evokes that of Andrea della Robbia, a member of the famed della Robbia family of Florentine artisans who were active during the Italian Renaissance in the 15th and 16th centuries. But the title of this work will redirect your attention to the year 2023: it's called *Self Reflection* from the Della Robske series, by Roberto Lugo.

Robske? That's Roberto Lugo's tag, still in use decades since graffiti was his principal artistic medium. The reference work that inspired "Self Reflection" is a portrait tondo entitled *Prudence*, part of a group of tondi that depict the four cardinal virtues. (Temperance, Justice, and Faith are the other three, all housed in museums overseas.) Prudence is a young woman in della Robbia's creation, glazed in white, wearing a serene expression as she holds her serpent—a symbol of wisdom—and gazes into her mirror, which represents insight, clarity of thought, and understanding. Lugo's

self portrait also contemplates his reflection, serpent and mirror in hand. He's at the center, having changed the story by placing himself within it. He has defined his figure with color to shade his form and given himself a shirt with a contemporary geometric pattern. He has also been transformed by his careful attention and adherence to della Robbia's form: he's quite literally molded, glazed, and surrounded by the shapes and techniques of a ceramic tradition many centuries old.

Lugo's fascination with the expressive power of ceramics was ignited when he was an MFA student at Penn State. Learning about the medium's history, cross-cultural influences, and the imagery that made individual works of pottery the bearers of culture and ideas inspired him to use images in his own work. This was not an easy artistic innovation, practically or intellectually. One of the works that caught Lugo's eye early in his career was the *Century Vase* designed by Karl L. H. Müller (1820–1887) for the Union Porcelain Works in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. It was commissioned for the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and is exuberantly decorated with symbols of Americana: the vase's two handles take the form of heads of North American Bison, and there are illustrations of sewing machines and telegraph poles on the vase's body. George Washington's silhouette is featured in the center.



*Top photo by Joe Kramm courtesy of R & Company.
Pigeon Crib installation images from The Gilded Ghetto, 2023.*

*Bottom photo by Joe Kramm courtesy of R & Company.
Roberto Lugo, "Self Reflection," from the Della Robske series, 2023.
Glazed stoneware roundel, birch, and lacquer. 64.5" diameter x 5" wide.*



Lugo's series of works from 2015-16 inspired by the form of the Century Vase include "All About the Benjamins" which features a portrait of Benjamin Franklin, his mouth covered by a bandana, with visual elements like logo of the Wu-Tang Clan and the song titles "Hustle Hard" and "C.R.E.A.M." On the other side, a portrait of Lugo himself is framed by "To All the Killers and the Hundred Dollar Billas" and "Ain't No Such Thing as Halfway Crooks." Lugo had to dive headlong into historical technique to learn how to create this piece: the original was slipcast, meaning that it was made from



Top photo by Joe Kramm courtesy of R & Company.
Installation view of Roberto Lugo, *The Gilded Ghetto* solo exhibition, 2023.

Bottom photo by Joe Kramm courtesy of R & Company.
Pigeon Crib installation images from *The Gilded Ghetto*, 2023.

liquid clay poured into a mold. Ceramics MFA programs often emphasize wheel-throwing, and Lugo used that technique to make his Century Vases, giving them an earthy, more hand-crafted aesthetic. He quite literally put his hand to it and made it his own. It's impossible to look at the original Century Vases (there were numerous iterations of the design) and not think of Lugo's work.

The application of new patterns and symbols to recognizable forms was one of the key ways that individual potters and larger ceramic factories have attracted the attention of consumers throughout history. In *We Here*, Lugo's ability as a maker and remixer of patterns is on full display, starting with the process by which some of them came into being. "This project touches on my community-based work and what I'm trying to do with my art with the community I grew up in," he said in an interview. "It's representation and spaces where we normally are not. In that process I was able to teach some workshops, showing people how to make patterns. Some were artists and some weren't. I was able to teach them about African textiles, and the designs of William Morris, and sneaker design, and all these things that may seem like they are from different worlds."

And indeed, ceramic history has been made, quite literally, from things that come from different parts of the globe. Without kaolin from China, there would have been no

porcelain anywhere else on earth. Without the potters of Islamic Spain applying opaque white tin glaze to try to mimic white porcelain using earthenware or stoneware clay, there would be no majolica (no della Robbia roundels), no Dutch Delftware, and no French faience. Without global trade, Japanese and Korean ceramics would not have been imported to Europe and America, inspiring the Aesthetic Movement or the Arts and Crafts Movement. And they would not have influenced artists like James McNeil Whistler, whose ebullient Peacock Room provided Roberto Lugo with inspiration for his 2023 installation *Gilded Ghetto* at R & Co. in New York.

The gigantic vase forms made as part of *We Here* are designed to be climbed into. Lugo expects and even happily anticipates that they will be tagged. His work is always about centering the people who, like himself, have been outside the received narrative of art history and design. Having been shaped by it, and participating in ceramics' long history of cultural exchange, he is now shaping it. *We Here* invites the next generation of Philadelphians to place themselves, their ideas, and their original patterns at the center.

We've Always Been Here

Kelli Morgan, Ph.D.

Dr. Kelli Morgan is widely known as a leader in progressive museum practice whose work develops and advances anti-racist approaches to art, curation, and community engagement. She has developed a close familiarity with Roberto Lugo's work since their professional paths crossed through a chance encounter in 2018. She spoke with Megan Voeller, *We Here's* Curator of Public Engagement.

How did you first get to know Roberto Lugo and his work?

During my time as a curatorial fellow at PAFA, I worked closely with curators Jody Throckmorton and Jennifer Zwilling, so I'm sure it was from either one of them, if not both. By the time I became Associate Curator of American Art at Newfields in 2018, I knew Roberto's work well—but I had never met him. That's why I advocated for the acquisition of his piece, which was kind of what blew the lid off all the drama in Indiana that led me to resign.

My colleague, Shelley Selim, who at the time was the museum's Curator of Design, was acquiring one of Rob's floor vases for the Newfields collection. The piece was *The Expulsion of Colin Kaepernick and John Brown* (2017). Kaepernick's portrait is on

one side, and John Brown's portrait is on the other. Shelley did this fabulous presentation at our acquisitions committee meeting—like she always does—and, at the end of her presentation, deliberation began.

One of our donors, an older white guy, basically went on a racist rant about how the piece celebrated Kaepernick taking a knee for the national anthem. My first statement was, "Let me reiterate what Shelley has just said about who Roberto is as a potter, as a sculptor, as an artist, as a person—because clearly you missed all of that." What Roberto is trying to get us to see in terms of history is that, Black or white, whether in the 19th century or the 21st century, when you take a stand for Black life in the way these two men did, you can lose everything. In John Brown's case, he lost his life. In Kaepernick's case, he lost his lifestyle, his lifeblood: he can never play professional football again.

The donor couldn't follow that, so he attacked me. And when he attacked me, I just kind of lost it. This is why it's very difficult to be the only Black person or the only brown person in the room because, of course, nobody else said anything to this man.

Roberto Lugo. Maya Angelou, 2024. Teapot. Glazed stoneware. 11" (h) x 4.75" (w) x 10.25" (d). Photo by Logan Jackson Courtesy of R & Company





I think Roberto eventually caught wind of what was happening, and he called me, and was like, oh, my God! Thank you so much for advocating for my work. And I said that it wasn't even my acquisition—but I know your work, so I had to say something! Donors can say that shit to each other at the golf course or at home. Whatever. But you are not going to say that while I'm sitting at the table. Absolutely not. And that was really when Roberto and I started communicating through social media and I started following his work a lot more.

You've talked about institutional change as "blast work" and "blowing holes in traditional American portraiture." You use language that gives a sense of how difficult it is—and that there might be, and probably will be, fallout. That language pays tribute to how difficult and even perilous the work can be.

I started calling it that during the Newfields situation. In that moment, I was just like, here we go again. It's not unique to a particular institution. This is the field. The exhaustion,

*Roberto Lugo. Satchel Paige, 2022. Pitcher. Glazed stoneware. 18" (h) x 14" (w) x 14" (d).
Photos by Logan Jackson Courtesy of R & Company*



the fear, like you said, the perilousness of it... This is just what the work is for me. It hasn't been that way for every curator or every artist. But this is what the work has been for me.

Do you think institutions can be changed or rehabilitated? Or is it a question of breaking the mold or walking away from it?

I think that's an image that really works in conjunction with an artist like Roberto, because he works in ceramics. There's a way, very literally, that you can work a vase, a pot,

a bust to perfection—and then you put that piece in the kiln, and it blows up or part of it falls off.

It's also something that we embody and carry, those of us who walk in the room with our 80s and 90s hip-hop culture references, with our 'hood experiences. The way that the 'hood raised you is very different. Beyond the violence and the poverty porn that people like to hear, it's the survival mechanisms, but it's also a different way of knowing. When you have had to work a thing—whether

it's clay or a job, whether it's a class or just trying to survive, whether it's taking care of your younger siblings because your parents are working overtime or midnight shifts—it isn't foreign to you. It's not like you lose that when you go into traditional spaces where people aren't accustomed to it. What I came to understand, and I think Roberto has, too, is that it's a gift. Most of the people around you and above you in those hierarchies have no idea that gift exists, because of their own racial and class biases and ignorance. But you can really use that—it's a strength, the breaking down of barriers and breaking through walls.

Rob is doing a very particular thing. He's not making his work to sit on a mantle in Versailles. This is work that's meant to be used, but it's also art that does a type of socio-cultural work. He's doing it for his own people. He's doing it for a very different demographic of people, speaking to a demographic that had never been represented in traditional institutions—not only just not represented, but not even considered.

Rob's work has been so successful in museum settings in many ways, but in this case his monumental sculptures are going out onto the street. Instead of Rob's portrait there, or somebody's portrait there, they have this wonderful space that allows anybody to step inside and they become the portrait.

I think that is beautiful. That represents for me, both as a person and as a curator, Roberto's evolution. I think about life in terms

of cycles: how can I continue to cycle through growth and evolution on a human level, but also as an artist? For me, this is the ultimate expression of what he has been interested in communicating. I don't think it gets more poetic than that.

Think about where a project like *We Here* started for Roberto. First casting himself in that space on the sculpture, and then to come to this place of—well, shoot, if I can put myself here in ceramic form, why can't I create a space for other people to do the exact same thing? It gives me goosebumps, and it makes me wonder what his work will look like in five or ten years. He really has gone from an initial impetus of saying, "I need to place us here," to "Now I have to create a space for us all to place ourselves here," wherever it is we think we want to be—and to be able to do so safely and beautifully.

To me, that kind of creation is the core of the artist, their *raison d'être*. I'm always so impressed with the way artists create things that don't exist. They find ways to bring concepts that are just beautiful into existence. That is why projects like this are so important, because nobody thinks like that on a day-to-day basis.

It's a welcoming and hopeful vision, I hope, for members of the public who experience the project and haven't known about it until they come upon a vessel. On a project level, we have been trying to be very mindful about questions of 'who is



Roberto Lugo. "Butterfly"
(Muhammad Ali), 2024. Teapot.
Glazed stoneware.
11.75" (h) x 13" (w) x 7" (d).
Photo by Logan Jackson Courtesy of R
& Company



the project for,' prioritizing Kensington residents, and not turning it into people from around Philadelphia coming as tourists into Kensington.

This question makes me think of a series of sculptures by artist Kukuli Velarde called *Plunder Me, Baby*, 2017. The sculptures resemble pre-Columbian ceramics, and it's as if they are waking up and finding themselves in the anthropological museums where they are being held and put on display. You can see on the sculptures' faces that they are having all kinds of emotional responses to finding themselves looted and put on view. I love those works. Like Roberto, Kukuli has such strong associations with Kensington and specifically The Clay Studio.

Kukuli was the guest critic for Rob's design review through Mural Arts and gave him early feedback on the vessels.

I think one thing that Kensington represents on a national level is that in spite of gentrification, various communities remain centered here. For instance, I love The Clay Studio. I'm always raving about how they designed their building. In early conversations, they talked with community members, they talked with Taller [Puertorriqueño]—and those individuals said, "here's what we need you to do," and to a certain degree, "here's what you're going to do, if you're going to be part of this community." There's a way of responding in these types of relationships that really stamps and identifies who the project is for, whether it's using Tiny WPA to make the furniture or incorporating input on how the community space is laid out. It was just a beautiful process to watch. It really does work if an institution wants to do it. In the case of *We Here*, it's great to see Mural Arts doing this, because let's not forget that Mural Arts has come under fire...

Untitled (Vic Power), 2024, from the Pigeon Crib: Remix. Vase. Glazed stoneware. 10" (h) x 6" (w) x 6" (d). Photos by Logan Jackson Courtesy of R & Company



For its anti-graffiti roots?

That's right. Yesterday I was talking to a colleague, a mentor of mine and a well-known art historian, and I was telling her about the time that I was on a review committee for the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage. Where I am now in Detroit, I've been seeing how some of the major arts funders don't necessarily encourage cross-institutional collaboration—but Pew does. No wonder the art landscape looks like it does in Philadelphia, because Pew has a very strict rubric about what a project needs to be and who it has to be for. And if those boxes are not checked substantially, you're not going to get a grant.

Your application has got to demonstrate that you've done the work of figuring out those relationships. You can tell when major institutions are applying and that aspect of

what they're proposing to do is performative. You can tell when it's just boilerplate language. On the other hand, you can tell when institutions and individuals are really dug in. I was saying to my colleague, that's why the Philadelphia art landscape, particularly at the grassroots community level, looks amazing. Because you have a funder who is adamant about community engagement.

That was such an eye-opening experience for me, because afterwards I knew what to look for as people approach you. Because institutions will approach you and say, "please come do this thing with us"—and they have absolutely no desire to do the thing. Coming back to your original question, with this project the Kensington community has a say and can say "no" or "yes, but..." I think that is important in terms of who a project like this is for.

Untitled (Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass), 2024, from the Pigeon Crib: Remix. Miniature Century Vase. Glazed stoneware. 9.25" (h) x 8" (w) x 4.75" (d). Photos by Logan Jackson Courtesy of R & Company

We Here: Reframing Kensington Through Art and Community

Megan Voeller

On a cool and sunny Saturday in November, a dozen Philadelphians gathered in the community garden at the Free Church of St. John. Founded in 1863, the stone church stands at the corner of Emerald and Elkhart Streets in Kensington, a section of Philadelphia that has long witnessed waves of immigrants, from Irish and German immigrants of the 19th century to African Americans during the Great Migration of the mid-20th century to Latino immigrants in the late 20th century. In the garden, the group circled around the last plants of the season still bearing fruit—vibrant red cherry-sized peppers, some sweet, some hot, that fit two or three in the palm of a person’s hand. John Walsh, a neighbor whose rowhouse sits across the street from the church, explained how he planted the garden with vegetables intended to reflect the food traditions of the church’s Spanish-speaking congregation, particularly *sofrito*, the blend of onions, peppers, garlic, and herbs that underpins Puerto Rican and other Latino cooking. Walsh invited the group to pick peppers, which they did with delight, gently cradling the tiny crimson gifts in their hands.

A group of boys caught sight of Walsh in the garden, and an impromptu game of tossing the football began. The group wandered from the garden over to the objective of

the neighborhood tour: a 12-foot-tall vessel sculpture perched at the edge of the church’s grassy yard. The vessel’s shape recalled a giant Chinese ginger jar with a curving silhouette and a finial-topped lid. But instead of blue-and-white Chinese porcelain, this ginger jar was built from steel and polystyrene and adorned with colorful patterns inspired by the neighborhood. A cutout space in its center invited people to pop in and out of the vessel, posing for pictures inside it.

The vessel sculpture in the church garden was one of three placed strategically throughout Kensington as part of the *We Here* project, an initiative that aimed to highlight creativity and resilience in a neighborhood more widely known for its struggles than its triumphs. The tour group members had journeyed from Center City and Germantown to Kensington for the afternoon. As they explored the area surrounding the church, fellow guides Neyda Rios and Tyler Kline shared stories of their neighborhood activism. Kline spoke about the creation and imagery of nearby murals, including one he painted with his daughter, while Rios discussed her family’s longtime commitment to protecting neighborhood

Top photo by Andrew Hoffman for Colibri Workshop

Bottom left photo by Kyla G. Photography

Bottom right photo by Kyla G. Photography



resources such as McPherson Square and its library. Tour participants had seen Kensington's undeniable challenges—evidence of abandonment, poverty, and addiction. Yet more powerfully, they encountered signs of persistence, achievement, and joy that rarely appear in narratives that originate outside of the neighborhood.

For two hours, the group witnessed a side of Kensington that is too often overlooked: a community where neighbors connect across generations and diverse backgrounds, united in their fierce love of the neighborhood.

The Village Potter's Collaborative Vision

To say that artist Roberto Lugo hasn't forgotten where he comes from would be an understatement. Kensington—stamped by the blue elevated train tracks that run through the neighborhood and characterized by its multi-ethnic vibrancy—embodies that elusive Philadelphia characteristic known as “grit.” This environment has been intertwined with Lugo's artistic sense of self and has formed an essential part of his narrative since the beginning of his career. When Mural Arts, itself a long-running Philadelphia organization with 40 years of history in the city, reached out to him about collaborating on a project, Lugo's answer was clear: he wanted to do something in Kensington, the Philadelphia neighborhood where he grew up. Lugo already had a vision for the development of *We Here*: to bring clay workshops and pattern-making activities to the neighborhood. The project would culminate in three large vessels installed at

community-determined neighborhood sites, accompanied by a children's book designed to plant the seeds of art-making in local youth, inspiring them to envision themselves as future artists. The initiative would later expand to include a slate of public events, featuring block parties and a forum discussing the project's impact and significance.

While *We Here* marked Lugo's first large-scale community-engaged project, his practice as a sculptor has always been motivated by a deep sense of community and the importance of cultural representation for Latino and Black communities in the U.S. A cornerstone element of the initiative was meaningful participation from Kensington residents in the project's decision-making process, facilitated by Mural Arts' Porch Light program. The project developed over 18 months with the guidance of an 11-member Community Advisory Committee (CAC) composed of artists, activists, entrepreneurs, and longtime residents of Kensington. These individuals, including community health workers and a restaurateur, all shared a belief in the arts as key to neighborhood vitality. Their local expertise proved invaluable as they helped make critical decisions about sculpture locations and event programming. What united the diverse CAC members was their deep connection to Kensington and their commitment to highlighting the community's strengths.

Photo by Andrew Hoffman for Colibri Workshop

“I’m a firm believer that art brings about healing, and I’m here because I believe in what we’re doing with Roberto,” said CAC member Brenda Mosley, founder and executive director of the Kensington-based nonprofit 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. 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.”

The Healing Power of Recognition

Seeing and being seen have long been central themes in Lugo’s work. He is known for transforming classical ceramic forms traditionally associated with luxury and wealth, such as ginger jars, by adorning them with portraits of social justice figures ranging from Sojourner Truth to influential hip hop artists. The monumental vessels Lugo created for *We Here* extend this artistic vision directly into the Kensington community, by making the residents themselves part



of the artwork. Unlike traditional public art that positions viewers as passive observers, Lugo's vessels invite active participation. Scaled as immersive public objects, they encourage Kensington residents to physically step inside the frames, completing the artwork through their presence. Rather than dismissing the contemporary impulse to document experiences through photography, Lugo intentionally designed these works to embrace and elevate self-documentation. CAC member Daisie Cardona further documented such interaction by capturing Polaroid images of community members

with the vessels during neighborhood block parties. These photographs, along with countless selfies taken by participants, have become integral components of the artwork itself. Throughout the project's development, Lugo maintained a clear vision of his primary audience: people within the Kensington community who rarely see themselves centered in public art narratives.

Neighborhood residents actively shaped the artistic vision of *We Here* through their direct contributions. Over the course of a year, Lugo and Mural Arts staff artists hosted pattern-design workshops at the Porch Light

Photo by Kyla G. Photography



Kensington Storefront, where community members created designs reflecting their cultural backgrounds and personal identities. Lugo's studio later incorporated these designs into the final vessels. Additionally, clay artists Nitza Walesca and Yinka Orafidiya led hands-on sessions where participants engaged directly with the medium, creating tiles and other ceramic elements.

The project's emphasis on creativity as a form of community healing resonated deeply with Walesca, whose longstanding motto "Clay Heals Minds" drives her own practice

as both teacher and artist." You can see how clay opens up individuals to all possibilities. People say, 'I'm not an artist, I don't know how to create'—but when they pick up a piece of clay, they say, 'wow, look what I made!' It's just so special to see people who think that they can't play with clay and realize that they can."

The emphasis on community resilience and healing behind We Here resonates with recent research by sociologists and psychologists into the social impacts of trauma and stigmatization. In her study *Seeing Others: How Recognition Works—And*

Photo by Erin Blewett



How It Can Heal a Divided World, Michèle Lamont argues:

Being denied basic dignity can have a profound impact on people's lives. Health researchers have found that recognition, stigmatization, and discrimination all affect our well-being. When people are devalued by the larger society, this assault on worth can batter their health.¹

This understanding of dignity and recognition forms the foundation of Lamont's broader argument that "one of our nation's current challenges is to determine how to make white constituencies understand and respect the views of people of color."² The *We Here* initiative addresses this challenge directly by creating spaces where diverse perspectives are valued and amplified.

Lamont's research further challenges individualistic narratives about resilience,

¹ Michèle Lamont, *Seeing Others: How Recognition Works - And How It Can Heal a Divided World* (New York: Atria Books, 2023), 71.

² *Ibid.*

Photo by Steve Weinik



noting that “grit is not determined by individual will; it is facilitated by material resources and social networks, and by narratives and institutions (such as schools) that empower people and recognize the value of their identity and experiences.”³ This perspective aligns with *We Here’s* community-centered approach to empowerment and healing. Ultimately, both Lamont’s work and the *We Here* philosophy emphasize our collective responsibility: “We decide who matters—all of us, every day, by creating, supporting and spreading new narratives about the worth of all groups.”⁴ Through this lens, recognition becomes not just a personal act but a social practice with profound implications for community well-being and social justice.

Pioneering trauma researcher Judith Herman has emphasized the critical role of public recognition in achieving justice for survivors of trauma. This concept resonated deeply with CAC members, who identified trauma as a core experience shared by many Kensington residents. In her work, Herman argues that:

Monuments and memorials serve as enduring public proclamations that tell us whom our society honors and respects. Sometimes directly, more often by omission, they also tell us who is to be dishonored and disrespected, who is to be invisible.⁵

³ Lamont, *Seeing Others*, 5.

⁴ Lamont, *Seeing Others*, 4.

⁵ Judith L. Herman, *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 2023), 16-17.

Lugo’s ceramic vessels function precisely as this kind of monument—not to historic figures or events, but to the survivorship and resilience demonstrated daily in Kensington. By creating spaces where community members literally place themselves within the artwork, Lugo transforms abstract recognition into tangible experience. The vessels become dynamic monuments that counter the invisibility Herman warns against.

Site Partners: From Setback to Serendipity

When selecting locations for Lugo’s sculptures, a significant challenge led to unexpected opportunities. The City of Philadelphia initially rejected Mural Arts’ request to place the vessel sculptures in city parks, including McPherson Square. This park, the first choice of the CAC and home to the neighborhood’s iconic library, embodies Kensington’s complex reality. Here, where addiction plays out in public view and librarians routinely administer Narcan, the community’s strength simultaneously manifests through neighborhood clean-ups, arts programs, and a vibrant playground. The city’s rejection forced the project team to reconsider their approach. Returning to fundamental questions about meaningful visibility and accessibility, the team began exploring alternative spaces deeply embedded in neighborhood life. This recalibration would lead to three rewarding site partnerships.

Mural Arts knew it had a reliable partner in the Kensington Corridor Trust, a past collaborator at their nearby Community Garden lot on Kensington Avenue. This location positioned

one of the sculptures to be visible from the neighborhood's main commercial thoroughfare and the overhead El train. KCT, founded in 2018, is dedicated to securing neighborhood land from gentrification by purchasing lots and properties to contribute to a community land bank—an effort that felt deeply resonant with the goals of *We Here*. A key component of the garden was its key-sharing program, which ensured that various neighborhood groups would engage with the lot and interact with the sculpture at least once a week, despite the lot being gated for safety and sanitation reasons.

There, the vessel was nestled among tall grass and vibrant yellow and purple buds in the spring. When installation day arrived in May 2024, the team braved the rain to install the sculpture with members of the KCT team present. Adriana Abizadeh, Executive Director of KCT, voiced the importance of the sculpture: “At the Kensington Corridor Trust, we’re really committed to solidarity and restorative economics, which means we have a real focus on folks who grew up in this neighborhood, who call Kensington home, who do business here—and so, having this piece by Roberto, who grew up in the

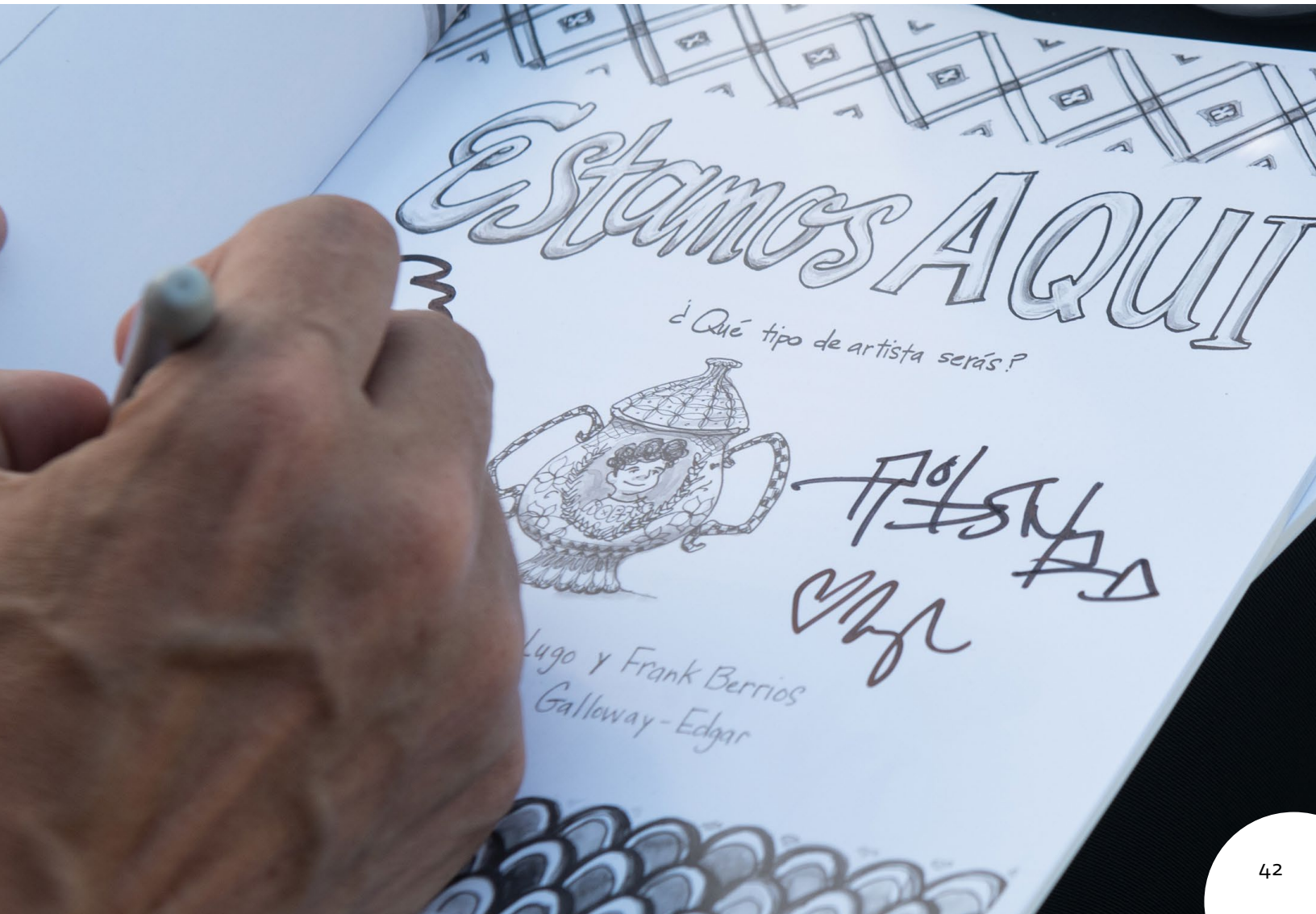
All photos by Erin Blewett



neighborhood, at the garden adds to the artistic flair that is this space.”

Although not located directly in Kensington, Taller Puertorriqueño emerged as another favored site. Founded in 1974, this cultural center has a rich history of promoting Puerto Rican art and activism, particularly through printmaking as an accessible medium for spreading messages of solidarity, social justice, and Latino pride. Today, it functions as a hub for contemporary art exhibitions and youth programs in the nearby Fairhill neighborhood, just east of Kensington. Lugo’s

sculpture was placed in the corridor, a lively area that regularly hosts community events. The sculpture quickly became a focal point of activity, especially during the Feria del Barrio festival, where traditional bomba performers (bomberos) incorporated the vessel into their performance. The collaboration took on additional significance when the project team discovered a remarkable coincidence: Taller Puertorriqueño was celebrating its 50th anniversary while Mural Arts was marking its 40th. Further, Taller was planning a project about the Fairhill community titled *Estamos Aquí* (We Are Here). This alignment



of milestone anniversaries and echoing of project themes between the organizations felt serendipitous.

The Free Church of St. John, with its history dating back to the 19th century, proved to be the most unexpected partner. Suggested by Walsh because of its proximity to a public school, it was also the most tucked-away location, offering a unique opportunity to reach a very special audience: kids and families. Rev. Fr. Joseluis Memba, Vicar of the Free Church of St. John, noted, “The people of the neighborhood, the parents and the students, really appreciate this sculpture, and it is accessible to them because they can come in and take a picture and realize that in the neighborhood there are beautiful sculptures like this one. They appreciate seeing that in their neighborhood they have an artist [like Roberto Lugo].”

“What Kind of Artist Will You Be?”

The idea of being seen was brought to the project’s most experimental aspect: creating a children’s book. When acclaimed children’s book writer and editor Frank Berrios first spoke with Lugo, he wasn’t sure how they would collaborate on crafting a book for kids. The two had connected on social media after Berrios reached out to Lugo, admiring his ceramic sculptures and noting their shared Puerto Rican heritage. Later, when Lugo approached him about working together on *We Here*, Berrios eagerly accepted the opportunity to

team up with the artist. Their creative process began with a phone call, brainstorming ideas. In an early draft, the book’s main characters were modeled after Lugo’s two sons. But as Berrios listened to Lugo describe the book’s narrative arc, he realized that he was hearing the artist reflect on his childhood dreams and his desire to inspire a younger generation to follow in those footsteps. Berrios responded by advising Lugo: “The book needs to be about you and how you discovered that you wanted to be an artist. But hand that down to younger kids so they can soak it in.”

As part of *We Here*, Mural Arts distributed over 1,150 copies of the children’s book throughout Kensington through school and library giveaways. Written by Lugo and Berrios, with vibrant illustrations by Meghan Galloway-Edgar, the publication appeared in both Spanish and English to serve the neighborhood’s diverse population. The narrative follows young Roberto growing up in Kensington, celebrating both family bonds and the neighborhood’s distinctive cultural landscape—from a corner bodega to the area’s vivid murals—while tracing his journey toward deciding to become an artist. Lugo, Berrios, and Galloway-Edgar participated in public readings at Kensington libraries, the Free Church of St. John, and Taller Puertorriqueño. These gatherings transformed the book from object to community experience, directly engaging children to envision their own creative futures and possibilities.



We Here and the Evolution of Community-Engaged Art

Community-engaged art has occupied a contested space in American art discourse for more than three decades. During the 1990s, artist Suzanne Lacy sparked a broader conversation when she began referring to her own work, which often involved dialogues and collaborations with community groups, as “new genre public art.”⁶ By coining the term, Lacy distinguished projects developed through collaborative processes between artists and communities from those imposed on communities by decision-makers. For

more than two decades, a lively debate about the merits and challenges of community-engaged art followed. Art historian Miwon Kwon’s influential and often debated critique argued that such work, rather than drawing on existing community relationships and self-definition, can invent and instrumentalize communities, even when the intentions are good.⁷ Similarly, Claire Bishop pointed out that community-engaged art often fosters a false sense of harmony, overlooking the

⁶ Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1995), 19.

⁷ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 118–120.

Photo by Steve Weinik

fact that communities inevitably include dissent and disagreement.⁸ These critiques have been important contributions to the discourse, ultimately enabling a space where projects like *We Here* can be realized with careful attention to power dynamics, participation, and ongoing relationships between institutions and communities.

More recently, Carlos Garrido Castellano has expanded upon Tom Finkelpearl's earlier explorations of socially engaged art in *What We Made* (2013). Garrido Castellano calls for a broader examination of community-engaged art genealogies beyond those rooted in the traditional art world, urging recognition of the deep histories of activism within communities of color and immigrant groups. He argues:

Under this view, the 'expanded field' in which socially engaged art operates has nothing to do with mainstream artists helping disenfranchised communities but rather with a decades-long process of bottom-up migrant solidarity that was essential in creating and maintaining public space.⁹

Through its partnerships, the sharing of neighborhood histories by CAC members, and its alignment with Lugo's longstanding focus on cross-generational struggles for social justice, *We Here* seeks to illuminate such grassroots histories in Kensington. The project deliberately positions itself within this evolving understanding of community art practice—not as an intervention from outside, but as a contribution to an existing infrastructure of community resilience that will continue to develop long after the project's formal conclusion.

Photo by Steve Weinik

⁸ Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October*, Autumn 2004, Vol. 110, 51-79.

⁹ Carlos Garrido Castellano, *Art Activism for an Anticolonial Future* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2021), 79. Garrido Castellano builds on an argument made by Tom Finkelpearl in *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 35.



We Here In Their Own Words

Interviews compiled by Megan Voeller

In the heart of Philadelphia's Kensington neighborhood, the *We Here* project has brought together artists, residents, and community leaders in a collaborative effort to create public art that reflects and celebrates the community's spirit.

Through sculpture, clay work, and storytelling, participants have explored the healing power of creative expression while challenging outside perceptions of their neighborhood. In these interviews, the diverse collaborators behind *We Here* share their personal connections to the project, revealing how art can transform both individual lives and the collective identity of a place.

What have you learned through *We Here*?

Nadia Malik (Project Director): I feel like I really came to understand how much of a community

Kensington is, and I feel like this community is way more close-knit than I think a lot of other communities are that I see in the city. There are such genuine folks here—and I knew that to begin with—but just the constant commitment, people talking to their neighbors and the stories that we hear and the people that I just genuinely feel that I know now—I was not expecting that.

Daisie Cardona (CAC): I'm learning to put my art forward as much as I do my community service. I've spent a lot of time putting a big focus on community service and not my art and creativity. Now I'm planning on going to university next year. It's been nice to work with other artists but also work in a way that almost everyone in the community who's on the CAC is just really happy with how we're being allowed to have a say in things.

Drew Spence (CAC): I learned that there are a lot of people trying very hard to improve the conditions of their neighborhood. It's very impressive. Between Zerbe and Daisie and her mom, that alone—I wasn't aware that people were so dedicated. I thought everyone had given up, but now I know that I was wrong. It's just good vibes, really – it's really that simple, especially with this party going on. It just makes me feel hopeful.

Frank Berrios (Author): The one thing I'm just amazed by is the community that came together, because you could have just a sculpture, but then Roberto added all these other pieces to it. I'm amazed at how there are so many people in the community that came together to make a lot of different things happen around this object, this art piece. Seeing people come together from all different kinds of backgrounds and have them be focused on this one mission is amazing.


Claire Sitarz (CAC): It's been great to meet so many other people who are involved in different ways in the community. There's so much need in Kensington. You can really get siloed into your own interests or your own immediate community. So just to learn about people, what they're doing, who they are, what their interests are, has been really great.

Tyler Kline (CAC): I have learned from the multiple different ways people view the same situation, which is the street level challenges and the addiction [in Kensington]. I come out of addiction myself, and I don't believe in tough love and I don't believe in incarcerating people, but it can be challenging to retain your humanity when it directly interferes with your life on basic levels like getting in your [front] door. It has helped me retain my humanity to

understand the different ways people interact and honor the humanity of others and to maintain my own humanity.

Meghan Galloway-Edgar (Illustrator): I learned a lot about myself. I learned a lot about how I work and what I have and what people need of me. I learned a lot more about Roberto. He has been a friend for a really long time, and I knew that we had a very special connection from a very early point in our relationship, but I didn't know how deep it was just based on the things that I learned about him and his childhood. I'd never been to Philadelphia. Learning about the people and the community and the thrive that the *We Here* project has incited was really very cool. It made me realize that my voice, though I think sometimes is very small, can uplift all places.

Yinka Orafidiya (Project Artist): What was affirmed for me is that there really is a demand for clay in the neighborhood. It's something that I suspected but really had no evidence to back it up. The workshop gave me that anecdotal evidence that people were hungry to participate in these workshops. Not just because they were a random activity, but specifically wanting to work with clay. People talked about working with clay and wanting to try it since they were a kid. So it was really



eye-opening to me that the demand is there, but there's not much access for these participants.

Kate Stoler (CAC): One of the things that has impressed me about being on the CAC is how fair and equal and really democratic it is. This felt like a nice way to work with others that everybody actually was heard and got a fair say, and I was just really impressed by the whole process of how we could have really hard conversations as well and we were always heard and appreciated for our opinions.

John Walsh (CAC): Hearing other people's perspectives of the neighborhood is the best thing I learned. The conversation about Mural Arts or anything else that goes along with funding, the materials, the corporate... but hearing Daisy, Neyda, Kate talk about their experiences here and getting to figure out what matters most to people. The best learning experiences were just sitting around and talking with everyone about what their intentions were with this project.

Anna Drozdowski (Project Manager): The thing that I've learned from *We Here* is that my Philadelphia is not the same as somebody else's Philadelphia. Our neighborhoods dictate so much the experience that we have of the city. Working in Kensington has really opened

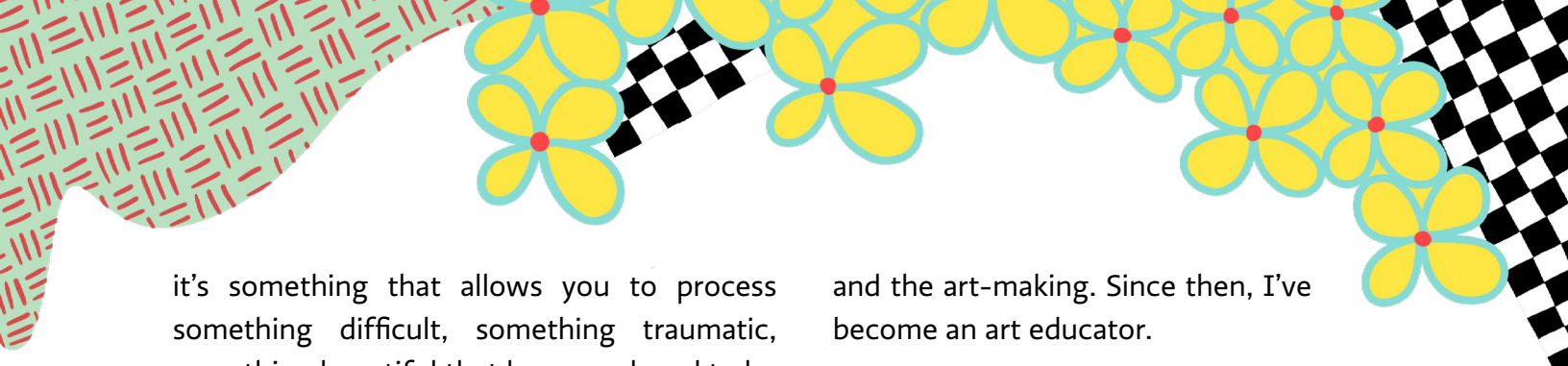
my eyes to a different corner of a zip code that I don't touch very often. That's been transformational for me.

How has art played a healing role in your own life?

Brenda Mosley (CAC): It's brought a lot of joy, peace, clarity. It gives me the opportunity to see my inner self. Sometimes that inner self is not revealed until I do art and it becomes a reality, it comes out and I can see it. Sometimes it's not good, but sometimes it's not good and I can make it beautiful. You know, I can change it into what I would like for it to be. Art has always played a healing role in my life. I use it with the ladies. I'm a strong believer that art brings about healing in its own individual way.

Daisy Cardona: For me, art has always been my way of expressing myself and letting the world see things from my perspective but also showing the world what can be done with even a little bit of resources. Art is a really big catalyst. Music is art, and music can be used to get people to stand up and fight for what they believe in.

Claire Sitarz: I am a therapist for kids in public schools. Working with them I try to incorporate art as much as possible. I think



it's something that allows you to process something difficult, something traumatic, something beautiful that happened, and to be able to tell the story in a way that you might not be able to articulate with words or with writing it down.

Kate Stoler: I am really big on reading, writing, and making art. I really love cartooning, too, as a way to zone out. I'm an addict in recovery, and I've always found that in recovery—like, I used to use drugs and alcohol to escape reality and art and reading and writing are equally as effective for me in that way. It's a way for me to—it's not even escaping reality, it's more like commenting on reality in a way that feels comfortable.

Tyler Kline: I'm here at this Mural Arts project because I was part of another Mural Arts project as a volunteer—"Journaling for Survivors" at the old Kensington Storefront, and that was really instrumental at a time where I was in the neighborhood. It wasn't the dope that was my addiction, it was drinking, but I was getting out of that. It was a positive aspect, states of grace. I could go in, I could calm myself and help set up, help break down, but then also participate in the journaling project. And I watched others do the same. They were agitated by things coming in the door, and then they entered states of grace in the journaling

and the art-making. Since then, I've become an art educator.

Anna Drozdowski: I think I have the same story that Rob does, in that I had a lucky situation where I had a little bit of extracurricular that I somehow held onto, and it really carved the path for my career and future profession. I feel lucky that I get to do that every day in a way that mostly pays my bills. Without that, I think my life would look very sad and dull.

What are some of the things that you love about Kensington?

Brenda Mosley: I love the residents. I love Kensington, period. Because Kensington has a greater version of itself. Living in Kensington, you get to see the full measure of Kensington. You get to see the good, the bad, the indifferent. You get to be a part of the good, to take away the bad. You're part of something that's positive, that's forceful, that brings healing to a broken community. Kensington gives me light, it gives me joy, it gives me an opportunity to live [where] god has given me.

Kate Stoler: It would be easier to ask me what I *don't* like about Kensington because this is the only place that's ever felt like home to me.



I love how weird everybody is. I just feel like I can be myself and I fit in. I just love everything about it here. It can be hard to live here, but I just can't imagine being anywhere else.

Tyler Kline: I see people that I know on the street all the time – it is a real community. I see my neighbors, I see people I garden with, I see people that kind of are passing through for certain workshops. I see people on my rooftop. On the fourth of July I had a beautiful moment of watching fireworks on the rooftop where I have a clear line of what's happening in Camden, fireworks along the Delaware on the Philly side, and then fireworks downtown on the other side of the El. That's my Kensington, the people that live here and they live here because it is a community.

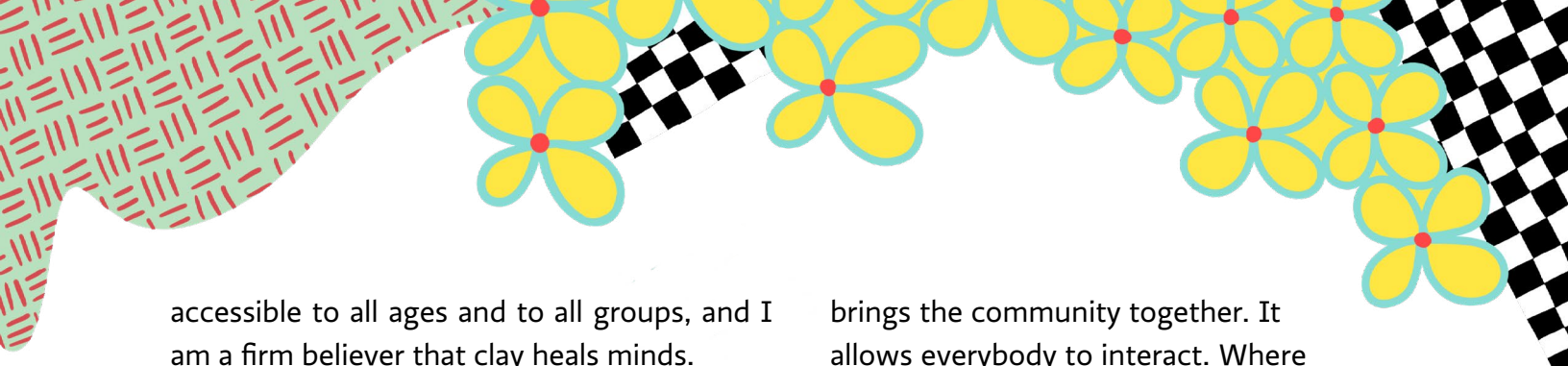
John Walsh: For me, when I grew up in Philly, you remember how much neighbors were dependent on one another and how much a community matters in the sense that you're attached to people's houses and you need to know everyone from the crossing guard to the corner store person to the business owner on the block and how all those things stitch together. I've lived at my house for eight years now and the crossing guards have been the same on three corners; they know my dog's name and they know when my last dog passed.

You have neighbors looking out for you and watching for everything on the block.

What about *We Here* amplifies your practice and your values?

Anna Drozdowski: I work in social practice almost exclusively now, and this project is doing it in a way [pauses]...We get the Kensington pause with the train. [laughter] This project is doing it in a way that is deeply authentic and community-led. The more I get to feel that in practice, the more that is the only thing I want to be doing. The opportunities that have been created for this community, led by the community, feel both useful for me in my practice and, I hope, useful for the CAC members guiding this process.

Nitza Walesca (Project Artist): Like Roberto Lugo, I'm from this neighborhood. I went to Mastbaum High School. We used to walk on Saturdays—there were no Walmarts, there were no Home Depots. My mom has four children, we would walk up K&A to go shopping for our meats, for our vegetables. I'm from this neighborhood, and I've seen it go from bad to good, and now hopefully back up to good. The same way the school district said "no students left behind," I think no people should be left behind. Clay is something that's



accessible to all ages and to all groups, and I am a firm believer that clay heals minds.

What does “Clay Heals Minds” mean to you?

Nitza Walesca: With my full-time running the Claymobile, we used to go to the juvenile detention center on Saturdays, and every Wednesday night I would go to a women-against-abuse shelter. You can see it. I remember clearly there was a young lady. The first week we were there, I asked them their names, and she was shell-shocked, wouldn't speak. By the fifth week, she was teaching everyone how to make pinch pots. You can see how clay opens up individuals to all possibilities. People say, I'm not an artist, I don't know how to create—but when they pick up a piece of clay, they say, wow, look what I made.

What about *We Here* made you think, This is something I want to be part of?

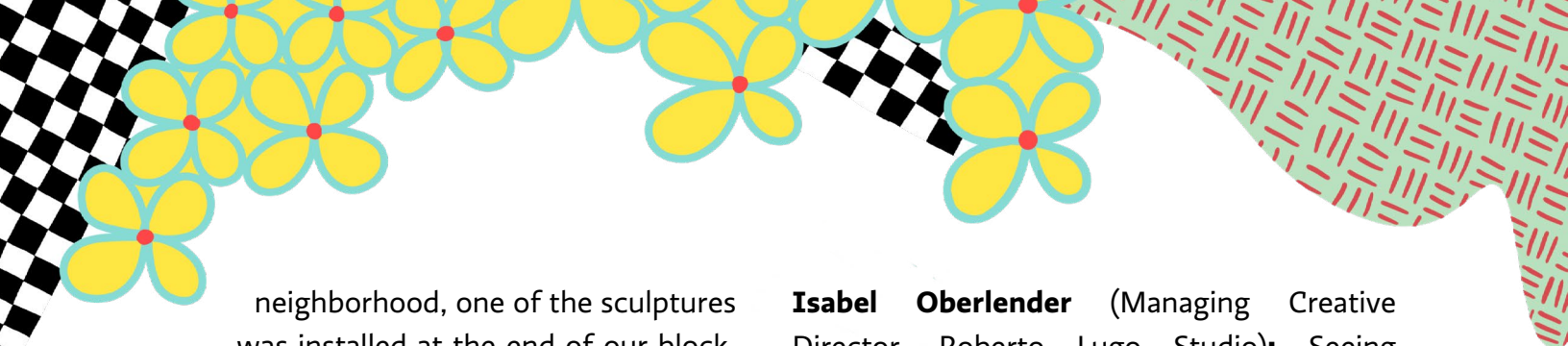
Brenda Mosley: Well, because it's on a bigger frame and includes the whole community. It allows the community to see the beauty in Kensington and all that they can get from it. It brings about the peace of a whole society. It

brings the community together. It allows everybody to interact. Where someone might not believe, they have a chance to grow in a belief factor. Everybody's working together in a common cause, to bring joy, to bring peace, to evolve into something and bring the positiveness out.

What has been a favorite aspect of the project or a *We Here* moment where you felt a sense that the project had achieved something?

Tyler Kline: For me, it was meeting a lot of neighbors that I wouldn't normally meet. And then meeting Rob again. I met him years ago at Haystack when we were both educators in a very nice environment in Maine, and we talked about Kensington because I was doing art projects with the Little Berlin art collective in community gardens. But really to meet all the people that I feel like might get lost in the mix... it really has given me an in on a unique culture.

John Walsh: There were a few moments that from a personal perspective were just nerdy – getting to see the factory in which the sculptures were built, the scale of that, just things that I like, goofy engineering kind of crap. But from a perspective in the



neighborhood, one of the sculptures was installed at the end of our block.

As it was being installed, ten neighbors were walking past. Everyone was asking questions and asking to come see it, asking what it was. Overall the general consensus – seeing it installed very close to my home and close to people I have known for a decent amount of time – it was really cool to see an overwhelming positive effect.


Could you share one aspect of *We Here* that has given you particular joy?

Nadia Malik: This is a weird one because nobody will see this part. Because I was working on the L&I permits on the cement contracting, and there were about five or six very specific City steps that we had to take to get the concrete into the ground, I literally, when they sent a picture of the concrete in the ground, I cried. It was just a little circle in the ground, but the amount of work it took to get there. I thought, this is so weird that I'm so happy about this little circle of concrete, but just the fact that it took L&I and an architect and all these different steps just to make that happen was amazing.

Isabel Oberlender (Managing Creative Director, Roberto Lugo Studio): Seeing people's reactions to this joyful sculpture that is entering their neighborhood just makes the project feel worth it and thinking of the opportunities that are posed by this project where there could be future placemaking and creative opportunities. There can only be so many people who attend a workshop or an art class, but I feel like the children's book will be widely distributed in the neighborhood and that message will be able to pervade the area. People will get to learn Roberto's story and hopefully feel empowered to believe in themselves.

Claire Sitarz: I would say today [block party at the KCT garden] is really cool. To see people interact with and enjoy the sculpture. It just seemed like this ethereal thing that we were planning, even seeing the designs and seeing the pictures of what it would look like here, it's amazing to look over and see kids playing in it. To see people just coming up and looking at all the designs that people in the community put together.

Anna Drozdowski: Watching people come together who would not otherwise sit at the same table and then recognize that they live



one block from one another and are now going to be friends because they've spent almost two years trying to solve the challenges in their own community with the vehicle, or the tool, of art.

Kate Stoler: I really enjoy the community part, the regularity of getting together with different people who I don't see all the time on a regular basis and working together on something fun. There are a lot of tough aspects to this neighborhood, but there's also a lot of really good, beautiful positive things—and it's just nice to be doing something that might be talked about in the rest of the city that is outside of the expected things that go on here, in a positive way.

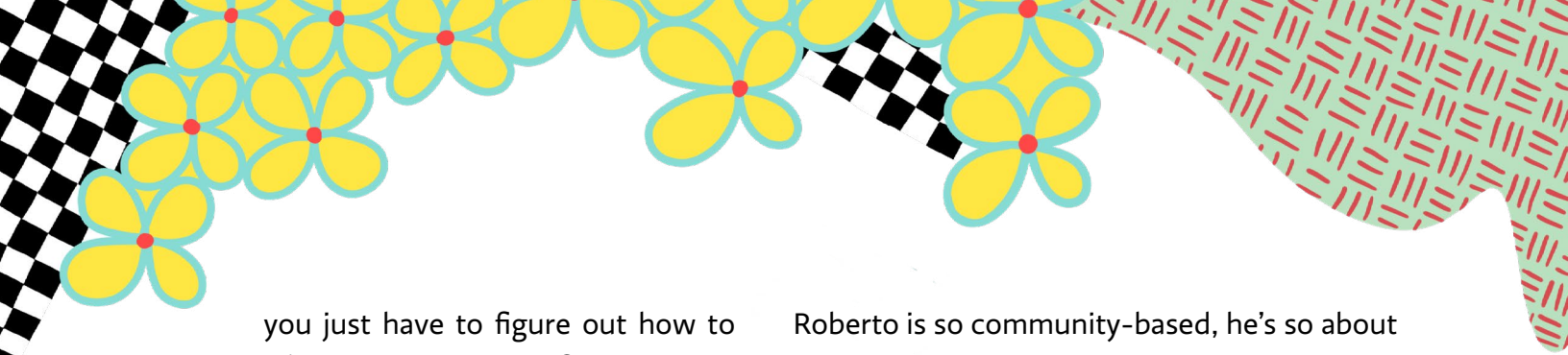
Yinka Orafidiya: There were [workshop participants] who instead of making an object like a mug for themselves, they were making it for a loved one—and I could tell by the amount of attention to detail they were putting into it how valuable the object became for them. Because after you do ceramics for a while, it's just clay, right? If you're working on a piece and it cracks, you're like, oh, I'll just make it again. As someone who's done it for years, you don't get obsessed about it. But if it's your first time, you feel like "this is my only shot," that we won't have this opportunity again, which

goes back to access. The amount of detail and care [shows that] someone is putting love into a piece. When they passed it off to me to take it back for drying, really honoring the piece, that stood out to me.

A project like this is never 100% easy or smooth. What's been a hard moment in We Here and how did you get through it?

Isabel Oberlender: For me, the hardest moment was during the proposal, as crazy as that sounds, and I say that in a privileged position because you and Anna and Nadia have done a lot of the lift of figuring out all the logistics. At the beginning, figuring out what this project would be and what Roberto's capacity would be – that was my major lift. Ever since, we've had this clear idea of what this project was going to be, I've felt really confident.

Anna Drozdowski: In a place that deeply needs infrastructure, figuring out how to partner with folks that don't have it has been a challenge but one the project is designed to meet. When you encounter a lack or a gulf,



you just have to figure out how to make stone soup out of it. How can you bring one thing and someone else can bring another thing? Sometimes that's money, and sometimes that's people—but, honestly, the people solve most of it.

Nadia Malik: There were definitely hard moments. This project, of all the projects, went—I don't want to jinx it—about as smoothly as it possibly could. The hardest was not really getting a space, because people were enthusiastic, but the timeline shift because of Parks & Rec, which we knew was going to happen. Getting a “no” was fine, they just didn't give us an indication of when they would tell us.


How does *We Here* intersect with your existing practice?

Frank Berrios: Roberto Lugo is an amazing artist. When I found out about him, I reached out to him because I'm Puerto Rican also and it was just amazing to see someone out there doing art and just existing in life, doing what he wanted to do. I'm an editor and a writer; I work at Random House children's books. I'm just honored to be part of this project because

Roberto is so community-based, he's so about his surroundings. He hasn't forgotten where he has come from, and he's just doing amazing things. This sculpture here is eye-popping. I'm amazed at the audacity to come up with this idea.

Meghan Galloway-Edgar: I am someone who doesn't get to make art for a living. I have a full-time job at Costco as a merchant, and when I was offered this opportunity, it really gave me the chance to see what it's like to participate in the art world in a way in which I had not been able to since art school. And working with Frank and Roberto made me a better artist. It gave me the practice that I have been longing for but haven't really taken the time for. It's ignited an understanding that I can do more with what I have.

Yinka Orafidiya: In terms of intersecting with my practice, it was spot on. I define and identify myself as a potter foremost, but the other arm of my practice is social engagement. I have a socially engaged practice where I like working with the community, and it was something that I was doing very actively pre-COVID. Since the pandemic, I have been struggling to make those connections again. So for me, the *We Here* project allowed me to



get right back to the heart of what my practice is. It intersected nicely with the mission and the principles that I believe in.

How does this project build on the previous work of Mural Arts and the Porch Light Program?

Nadia Malik: I keep saying: there's no way this project would have happened if we didn't set the stage with our past work in Kensington, so I do see this as a culmination. I've personally been working in the neighborhood for six years, Mural Arts has been in the neighborhood for about eight years, and we've had ups and downs. There's no way this would have happened otherwise. This for me was a real indicator of how I hoped Porch Light would work. We used to just have one person overseeing Kensington; they felt really siloed, which makes sense. They were out here on their own, and this project is a full staff effort.

Brenda Mosley: I have a women's group – mothers helping mothers – they're a group of ladies, and we do trauma-informed services to help them heal from the loss of loved ones from gun violence, addiction, overdoses, and incarceration, addressing loss. We do

grief counseling [related to] drug addiction. We've been meeting for five years, and each year Mural Arts has played a vital role in their lives. I've been using Mural Arts and their artists every year, and some of the things they have done are remarkable. There's one lady who swore that she couldn't do art, now she has evolved into one of the greatest artists that she could ever believe.

Tools for Tracing Transformation

Liz Green, LCSW

The impact of arts and culture is obvious to everyone in the room. Transformation is shown in a participant's eyes. It can be seen in the way they leave the classroom, or heard in a collective audience response. As teaching artist Nitza Rosario says, "Clay heals." For anyone who has felt or observed that healing, it needs no further explanation. But for those who aren't in the room—those who should be in the room next time, who seek to support future rooms, or want to better understand

what is happening inside these rooms—words seem to fall short.

Evaluation seems to require outside expertise, someone who understands measurement to come in and measure things. I am an outside evaluator that fits that bill; but as a therapist, I know better than to presume that I can be the source of any definitive answers. I have learned that explanations are usually inside those looking for them the entire time and

Photo by Gavin Wilson



require the right questions, facilitation, and unconditional support to uncover.

By asking the folks who touched this project to weigh in, we incorporated these questions into every possible aspect of the project, providing periodic reminders of what we set out to do. Instead of saving all those learnings until the end, they were fed back into the process as the project grew, so that change became part of the developmental evaluation.

Our perception of the patterns on one of Roberto's monumental vessel sculptures might change depending on how close we stand. Likewise, when we view the work in the full context of its landscape, we see things we may not see close up. This is why

Photo by Erin Blewett



evaluation urges us to keep “backing up.”

One evaluation tool we developed was inspired by the therapeutic intervention of a “mood check.” With artist Amy Scheidegger, we developed posters with various emotions that workshop participants engaged with before and after that day’s claymaking workshop. Participants selected an emotion they came in with and one they left with at the end of the workshop. Beyond what we learned from these changes, we noticed the act of naming how you feel is an act of self-reflection, transformative in itself.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people were faced with the need to cultivate a resource those in Kensington had known for a long time: resilience. Psychological resilience means adapting to challenging experiences and demonstrating flexibility and adjustment despite external and internal demands. What we witnessed in the project but found hard to put into words is that art is a “resilience-making machine.” A blank clay tile is an invitation to imagine what we want and take steps towards it. Artists, as empathetic stewards, transform workshop space into a place to more safely practice trying, failing, pivoting, reframing, changing course, and asking for help. Art helps us to practice a “reframe,” changing how we engage with a world we can’t control. When practiced communally, it amplifies the availability and quality of social connections.

In Kensington, where residents have long been resilient in the face of challenges, the *We Here* project demonstrated how

collaborative art-making can create spaces of dignity, healing, and possibility. As project collaborators have shown through their words and work, when we create art together, we don’t just make objects—we remake ourselves, rewrite narratives, and reimagine what our communities can become.

Guiding Questions for *We Here*

Infrastructure:

- How did this project expand the cultural infrastructure of the neighborhood?
- What is the lasting impact? For example, what opportunities exist in the neighborhood that weren’t here before the project?
- What relational infrastructure has been created?

Well-being:

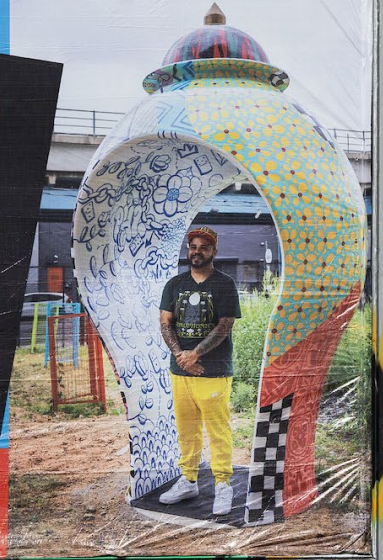
- How did this project impact participants in the neighborhood?
- How did the works themselves reframe the narrative of Kensington? Can reframing the narrative inform the future self-concept of participants?
- Does artmaking in this project improve general mental health, mood, or well-being?

CLEAR CHANNEL

Get to know
the real
Kensington.

M Mural Arts
Philadelphia

Learn more: muralarts.org/we-here



093373

CLEAR CHANNEL

Exhibition On View



All photos by Erin Blewett

We [heart] HERE



Contributors

Sarah Archer is the award-winning author of several books, including *The Midcentury Kitchen*, *Midcentury Christmas*, and *Catland: the Soft Power of Cat Culture in Japan*. Her writing has appeared in *Architectural Digest*, *The New York Times*, *The Journal of Modern Craft*, and *Material Intelligence*, among other outlets. She has contributed essays to exhibition catalogs for institutions such as the Wharton Esherick Museum, the Brandywine Museum, the Print Center New York, the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, the Peabody Essex Museum, and the Museum of Arts and Design.

Dr. Kelli Morgan is the Founding Executive Director and CEO of the Black Artists Archive in Detroit, Michigan, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating a safe, supportive, and dynamic space for people to make, exhibit, learn, and preserve Black art history and visual culture. Widely known as a leader in progressive museum practice whose work develops and advances anti-racist approaches to art, curation, fundraising, and community engagement, Morgan regularly trains staff and emerging curators at various institutions across the globe. She is a leading and influential voice in championing museum practices that are safer for and more responsible to individuals and communities of color.

Megan Voeller is an educator, curator, and writer whose research focuses on how contemporary artists engage with concepts and practices of health, healing, and medicine. As Director of Humanities at Thomas Jefferson University since 2016, Megan leads the medical humanities curriculum at Sidney Kimmel Medical College as well as public and patient-centering initiatives, including an Artist-in-Residence program with Jefferson Health partners and the Helix Gallery exhibition space. Megan began their career as a curator at the University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum. They are a PhD candidate in art history at Tyler School of Art & Architecture, Temple University.

Photo by Steve Weinik



We
here
KENSINGTON

ISBN 979-8-9910069-2-7 eBook
ISBN 979-8-9910069-3-4 Paperback