

**ROBERTO  
LUGO**

**Hi-Def Archives**

**Large Print Labels**



Roberto Lugo (b. 1981) designed a t-shirt that says, "Pottery Saved My Life." He emblazoned the front of his potter's wheel with "This Machine Kills Hate." These succinct tags, written in graffiti-style letters, speak volumes about Lugo's experiences and artistic mission.

Roberto Lugo was born into a close-knit Puerto Rican family and raised in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia, an area marked by poverty and violence. As a seasoned graffiti artist searching for a way out, he enrolled in a community college pottery class—a move that would set him on the course from ghetto to gallery. Today, the most prestigious art museums in the country collect Lugo's work.

Lugo's artistic talent has given him clear joy and purpose. He equates pottery to archival documents. Consider how archeologists have used excavated ceramics to piece together information about past histories and cultures. Lugo works to represent his culture, experience, and history in the enduring medium of ceramics and takes particular pride in representing people, communities, and lifestyles traditionally left out of ceramic histories. Centering them, he helps to ensure their legacy.

Lugo is a connector of people, art, and possibilities. Through his story, work, and role as an educator, he endeavors to create opportunities and inspiration for others.

# Cup Wall

2021–2022

## Roberto Lugo

(Puerto Rican American, b. 1981)

wood, glazed stoneware  
Courtesy of the artist

This selection of cups presents a mini-retrospective of Roberto Lugo's work. "I use the cup to create vessels that are accessible to a variety of different audiences," the artist explains. The themes and decoration of Lugo's cups vary monthly and "reference how sneaker culture, for example, Air Jordans, change every month in their design, but threads remain the same, such as the style and aesthetics of the shoes." Lugo savors the intimacy of a cup, the ritual of holding it, warm with liquid, in your hand. Mismatched cups, representing different places, times, and people, feel like home to him and emphasize the beauty found in diversity.

# Plates

1887–1898

## **Kitaro Shirayamadani**

(American, b. Japan, 1865–1948), decorator

## **Haviland & Co.**

(French, est. 1842), maker of form

porcelain with overglaze paint

Gift of W. W. Taylor

1913.363, 1913.364, 1913.365

These plates depict elf-like figures creating Rookwood Pottery: molding and decorating their wares and filling the kiln. The processes illustrated here and practiced at Cincinnati's preeminent art pottery, founded in 1880, are the same as those performed today by Roberto Lugo and his studio.

Japanese artist Kitaro Shirayamadani, one of Rookwood's most talented and beloved artists, painted these whimsical plates that document the creative teamwork at the art pottery. Shirayamadani allegedly made them as gifts for Rookwood's

director, William Watts Taylor. As director, Taylor managed production, sales, advertising, and sometimes designed the shapes that Rookwood produced. He ensured that the pottery maintained its reputation for beauty, innovation, and quality in ceramics, just as Roberto Lugo does in his studio today.

## **Roberto Lugo & the Rookwood Pottery**

This gallery features works created by contemporary artist Roberto Lugo in conversation with historical objects by the Rookwood Pottery drawn from the museum's collection—the most extensive public archive of the art pottery's artistic legacy. Founded in Cincinnati in 1880 by Maria Longworth Storer, Rookwood Pottery was one of the first female-owned manufacturing companies in the United States. The firm employed hundreds at its height, including new American citizens from England, Germany, Japan, and beyond. Together, the artists of Rookwood achieved remarkable success through innovation and excellence. Within a decade, the company attained recognition as the best in the world, surpassing European and Asian ceramic manufacturers that had operated for centuries.

Lugo paired these Rookwood pieces with his work to pay homage to the firm's legacy and to the "village" that raised him. Seen together, his selections emphasize shared themes of identity, place, and community, ideas key to his work. Like other American art potteries founded in the 1800s, Rookwood was largely inspired by European and Asian histories. In contrast, Lugo's work brings



more diverse cultural influences into the mix. His European and Asian-inspired forms and decorations mingle with references to his Puerto Rican heritage (derived from Latinx and African traditions), American hip-hop culture, and the realities of urban life. This visual hybridization of cultures and influences speaks to the complexity of the human experience, the similarities we share, and the beauty of diversity.

View additional Rookwood works in galleries 114, 115, and 126.

# Rookwood in Hi-Def

2022

**Roberto Lugo**  
(Puerto Rican  
American, b. 1981)

glazed porcelain,  
enamel paint  
The Nancy and  
David Wolf Collection  
2022.111



Roberto Lugo created this monumental vessel for the museum's collection. After visiting the Hungarian porcelain manufactory, Herend (est. 1826), he designed its shape. Historically, Herend made luxury ceramics for the powerful and wealthy. Lugo's piece bears a portrait of our city and Cincinnati-born hip-hop artist Hi-Tek surrounded by decoration inspired by Rookwood Pottery ceramics and cover art from the musician's albums. Use of such a staid material as ceramic, the traditional urn form, and the historic luxury brand

of Rookwood, paired with the portrait of a Black hip-hop icon, imagery referencing Cincinnati as a gateway to freedom in the 1800s, and street graffiti questions why people of color and their stories have been historically underrepresented in fine art spaces. "Inspired by the tradition of hip-hop," Lugo writes, "the urn pulls these seemingly disparate elements together, forging a connection between two traditions that emerged from the same place."

# Vase

circa 1930

## The Rookwood Pottery

(American, est. 1880)

### William E. Hentschel

(American, 1892–1962), decorator

porcelain, Ivory Jewel Porcelain glaze line

Museum Purchase: Edwin J. Kircher

Art Purchase Fund

2010.33

Even before international displays at the 1925 world's fair in Paris introduced the style we now call Art Deco, Rookwood Pottery artists were creating designs in this new mode. Aiming to capture the spirit of the times, artists working in this modern style found inspiration in contemporary urban life, technological advances that promoted speed and efficiency, jazz music, and more. You can almost hear the music as you watch the spirited couples dancing about the body of this vase. Their movements and the composition of the design suggest a rapid-paced performance. William "Billy"

Hentschel began working at Rookwood in 1907, and his first wife, Halina Feodorova, was a well-known dance instructor. Hentschel designed her stage settings, and his involvement in the performing arts of his day likely led him to document this subject.

Both Rookwood Pottery and Roberto Lugo have created small-scale, more intimate ceramic works, intended for the home. As industrialization and the rise of the city increased pollution levels and urban development of natural lands in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Rookwood brought elements of nature and calm inside with these rook-shaped bookends and the decoration of this dainty chocolate pot. Conversely, Lugo celebrates his contemporary urban surroundings in the graffiti-covered water tower coffee pour-over and his subway train butter dish. His statuettes and bookends take the form of angelic cherubs traditionally featured in European mythological and religious art. Yet here, they have the hair and likenesses of people of color. "They are covered with ornamentation and patterning that reference the variety of cultures that compose my DNA," Lugo states. "Representation is important to me."

**Paper Weight III, II**  
2022

**Roberto Lugo**  
(Puerto Rican  
American, b. 1981)

glazed stoneware, luster  
Courtesy of the artist



**Chocolate Pot**  
1884

**The Rookwood Pottery**  
(American, est. 1880)

**Albert Robert Valentien**  
(American, 1862–1925), decorator

earthenware, Limoges glaze line  
From the Collection of Julian L. and  
Amelia W. Solinger, 1984.17

# Septa Train Butter Dish

2022

**Roberto Lugo**  
(Puerto Rican American, b. 1981)

glazed stoneware  
Courtesy of the artist

# Water Tower

## Pour Over

2022

**Roberto Lugo**  
(Puerto Rican  
American, b. 1981)  
in collaboration with  
**Charlie Cunningham**  
(American, b. 1986)

glazed stoneware  
Courtesy of the artist





## **Bookends**

1919

### **The Rookwood Pottery**

(American, est. 1880)

### **William Purcell McDonald**

(American, 1863–1931), shape designer

porcelain, Yellow Mat glaze line

Gift of Mrs. Mark Herschede

1969.28a–b

## **Cherub Bookends**

2022

### **Roberto Lugo**

(Puerto Rican American, b. 1981)

glazed stoneware, luster

Courtesy of the artist

# Pigeon Composition

2022

**Roberto Lugo**  
(Puerto Rican  
American, b. 1981)

glazed stoneware  
Courtesy of the artist



“My work often hybridizes culture,” states Roberto Lugo. “This particular piece makes reference to the textiles of William Morris [the English designer active in the mid- to late-1900s] as well as ancient Greek pottery... [and it is] a nod to where I come from through the actions of the minotaur at the bottom and the pigeon with the crown. This hybridization of cultures is important to me, to make a visual representation of how beautiful diversity can be.” Lugo frequently incorporates a crown into his work, honoring this “symbol [that has been] used throughout the history of graffiti and hip-hop, from artist Jean-Michel Basquiat signing his name [with a crown] to The Notorious B.I.G. wearing one in his iconic portrait [by photographer Barron Claiborne].”

# Bloods and Crips Lamps

2021

## Roberto Lugo

(Puerto Rican American, b. 1981)

glazed stoneware, enamel, stained glass

Courtesy of the artist

*Here, I wanted to make a connection between the duality of lamps that come in sets and the Bloods and the Crips, two rival street gangs. The Bloods wear red, and the Crips wear blue. Tupac (1971–1996) was a Blood, and Snoop Dogg (b. 1971) was a Crip. A lot of my work deals with the realities of urban areas that are made up predominately of Black and Brown people. Gang life and violence are part of that struggle.*

–Roberto Lugo

# **Dragon Bowl**

2021

## **Roberto Lugo**

(Puerto Rican American, b. 1981)

glazed stoneware

Courtesy of the artist

## **Punch Bowl**

1882

## **The Rookwood Pottery**

(American, est. 1880)

## **Maria Longworth Nichols Storer**

(American, 1849–1932), attributed decorator

earthenware, Limoges glaze line

Gift of Women's Art Museum Association

1881.25

The founder of Rookwood Pottery, Maria Longworth Nichols Storer, likely painted the fierce blue dragon—emerging from white clouds—that chases small demonic figures around this punch bowl. Storer was fascinated with the motifs she observed in Japanese art, such as dragons, bats, and owls, and often incorporated them into her decorated wares. Eager to imbue the work produced at Rookwood with a more “authentic” Japanese flair, in 1887, she hired Japanese-born artist Kitaro Shirayamadani (1865–1948). For nearly six decades, Shirayamadani was one of Rookwood’s most influential and prolific designers.

## **Vase**

1885

## **The Rookwood Pottery**

(American, est. 1880)

## **Albert Robert Valentien**

(American, 1862–1925), decorator

earthenware, Dull Finish glaze line

Estate of Charlotte Johnson, Art Purchase Fund,

Altrusa Club, John J. Emery Memorial, Mrs.

Edwards Memorial and Becker Memorial

1982.66

## **Koi Fish Bowl**

2021

## **Roberto Lugo**

(Puerto Rican

American, b. 1981)



glazed stoneware

Courtesy of the artist and R & Company, New York

## **The Power of Portraiture**

“Placing [portraits of] people of color or others who have historically been absent on a material [like clay] that lasts thousands of years archives their work and contributions,” explains Roberto Lugo. As this concept is central to the artist’s work, the portrait vessels created by Rookwood Pottery artists in the late 1800s and early 1900s naturally drew his attention. However, their motivations for portraying Black Americans, Indigenous Americans, and other marginalized people differed. The white artists at Rookwood, who painted these portraits, did not directly identify with their subjects, like Lugo. Rather, they presented these figures as “others” in an era marked by the circulation of racist stereotypes alongside the growth and sustainment of imperial and colonial systems. The power and privilege held by artist and subject was not equal, an imbalance that Lugo’s work aims to change.

**Annie Ruth and  
Robert O'Neal Teapot**  
2022

**Roberto Lugo**  
(Puerto Rican  
American, b. 1981)

glazed stoneware  
Courtesy of the artist

“With this particular exhibition being in Cincinnati,” Roberto Lugo explains, “I wanted to make a connection to local Black and Brown heroes, which is in line with how I’ve worked historically.” For this teapot, Lugo worked from photographs of Annie Ruth and Robert O’Neal to make prints that he transferred and fired onto the surface of his work.





Cincinnati artists and activists Annie Ruth (b. 1963) and Robert O'Neal (1940–2018), like Lugo, have dedicated their lives to connecting art and communities to promote dialogue, build relationships, and create equity. Artist, poet, educator, and author, Ruth leads by using her talents to build bridges and empower people—especially women and girls. O'Neal was a founder of Cincinnati's Arts Consortium, a hub that nurtured cultural identity, supported Black artists, and provided arts education to inner-city youth. His legacy endures at the Robert O'Neal Multicultural Arts Center, founded by his daughter Toilynn O'Neal Turner, in the West End.

# **Vase: Unidentified Japanese Woman**

1902

## **The Rookwood Pottery**

(American, est. 1880)

### **Grace Young**

(American, 1869–1947), decorator

earthenware, Iris glaze line

Gift of Jay and Emma Lewis

2011.65

The arts of Japan were displayed en masse for the first time to international audiences at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. Enamored by what they saw and informed by their limited exposure to and knowledge of Japanese art, American and European artists began to appropriate Japanese design elements and subjects and incorporated them in their work. Rookwood Pottery founder Maria Longworth Nichols Storer returned from Philadelphia with the desire to open a "Japanese pottery." Motifs such as dragons, carp, and bamboo characterized her distinctive brand of Japanese creations. In 1887, she hired Japanese artist Kitaro Shirayamadani (1865–1948) to work

at the pottery. Nichols also assembled a trove of Japanese materials for her artists to reference, a collection that ranged from photographs and prints to volumes of artist Katsushika Hokusai's *Manga* (published 1814–1878)—which held hundreds of sketches of Japanese subjects—and more than 650 Japanese ceramics. Artist Grace Young likely referenced a photograph to paint this portrait of a woman whose identity is unknown.

# Vase

1895

## The Rookwood Pottery

(American, est. 1880)

### Harriet R. Strafer

(American, 1873–1935), decorator

stoneware, Standard glaze line

Museum Purchase: Lawrence Archer Wachs Fund  
2013.50

Rookwood Pottery's management encouraged artists to vary the subjects of their portrait vases to appeal to wide segments of the purchasing public. Artist Harriet Strafer, a skilled portraiturist, likely painted this vase to appeal to Cincinnati's significant and influential Jewish community, established over 200 years ago. Curators and historians have not yet positively identified the individual depicted here.

## **Tankard: Buffalo Hump**

1898

## **The Rookwood Pottery**

(American, est. 1880)

**Sadie Markland** (American, 1871–1899),  
decorator

earthenware, Standard glaze line  
Gift of Mary Mills Ford  
1978.288

Pochanaw-quoip, known by the English name Buffalo Hump, was a member of the Penateka, the south-ernmost population of the Comanche Nation.

In the 1890s, a time marked by the rise of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, there was a push to define American identity. Several white historians and leaders identified the colonization of the western frontier as central to shaping the country's character. As a result, a nostalgic reminiscence of the West began to permeate all genres of American art, from painting to pottery. This focus on Indigenous peoples fed white sentimentality for the "vanishing race" who

supposedly embraced a simpler way of life tied to nature, further supporting baseless theories about racial hierarchies and imperial acquisition. Noting the growing popularity of Indigenous subjects, Rookwood Pottery began, in earnest, to feature Indigenous American portraits on vases in 1893. The firm's decorators relied heavily on photographs made by the Bureau of American Ethnology to create these portraits.

**Two-Handled Cup:  
Unidentified African American Boy  
1895**

**The Rookwood Pottery**

(American, est. 1880)

**Bruce Horsfall**

(American, 1869–1948), decorator

earthenware, Standard glaze line

Museum Purchase: The Rookwood Fountain

Purchase Fund

2001.15

Historians note that in the late 1800s, Black Americans were rarely, if ever, specifically targeted as consumers—especially by white-owned and largely white-employed manufacturers such as Rookwood Pottery. Therefore, it is unlikely that the art pottery intentionally developed portraits of Black subjects to attract Black buyers. Although Cincinnati was home to many notable people of color in the 1890s, their portraits are not known to have graced Rookwood's vases. Instead, decorators turned to published Black portrait paintings, photographs, advertisements, and illustrations for inspiration. These sources often perpetuated racial stereotypes and normalized and reinforced erroneous theories about racial inferiority. This boy, wearing a tattered hat, appears on several examples of Rookwood.

**Bootsy Collins and  
Kathryne Gardette  
Teapot**  
2022

**Roberto Lugo**  
(Puerto Rican  
American, b. 1981)

glazed stoneware, luster  
Courtesy of the artist

Like the teapot at the other end of this case, this work celebrates two of Cincinnati's Black and Brown heroes. Lugo's transfer-printed portraits feature musical legend Bootsy Collins (b.1951) and Walnut Hills organizer Kathryne Gardette (b. 1961). A gilded clenched fist—a symbol of power, pride, and perseverance—forms the teapot lid's handle.





Cincinnati-born Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Bootsy Collins has led through his contributions to American Funk music, his mentorship of young musicians, and his foundation, which supports education and healthcare in the community.

Gardette is a fifth-generation fiber artist and a member of Drums for Peace. Encouraging everyone she meets to "share your joy," her energy and dedication to inclusion are integral to collaboration within and the success of our local community.

# Kobe Amphora

2022

**Roberto Lugo**  
(Puerto Rican  
American, b. 1981)

glazed stoneware  
Courtesy of the artist



Referencing the funerary urns of ancient Greece and Rome, Roberto Lugo memorializes the late basketball player Kobe Bryant (1978–2020) in a way that captures the athletic movement for which Bryant was so well known. “I wanted to embed his imagery within the decoration rather than [positioning it] in my traditional vignettes. I have drawn him in action so that you can see his whole body in movement,” notes the artist.

# **Crushed Vase**

1882

## **The Rookwood Pottery**

(American, est. 1880)

### **Unidentified Artist**

earthenware, Limoges glaze line

Gift of Florence I. Balasny-Barnes in memory  
of Parents Elizabeth C. and Joseph Balasny

1992.84

# **"Della Robbia" Foundling Plaque**

1926

attributed to **The Rookwood Pottery**

(American, est. 1880)

**Clement J. Barnhorn**

(American, 1857–1935), attributed artist

architectural faience

Gift of Dr. James M. Sutherland

and Dr. Betty S. Sutherland

2000.141

The artwork of the della Robbia family, active in Florence, Italy, during the 1400s and 1500s, inspired the makers of this plaque that once graced the pediatrics wing of Cincinnati Children's Hospital. The façade of Florence's *Ospedale degli Innocenti* (Hospital of the Innocents), a building designed by the Renaissance artist Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) to house abandoned infants, displayed several della Robbia plaques and served as the inspiration for this piece that features a swaddled baby. The della Robbias specialized in architectural sculpture made from baked terracotta clay covered

in shiny opaque glazes containing tin oxide, lead, and other minerals. These sculptures most frequently depicted Biblical figures, such as the Madonna and Child, in a palette of white and blue, like the example illustrated below.



Giovanni della Robbia (Italian, 1469–1529),  
*Madonna and Child*, circa 1500, glazed terracotta,  
Gift of the Duke and Duchess of Talleyrand-Perigord,  
1949.142. On view in gallery 201.

# The Cycle Continues (Della Robske Series)

2021

## Roberto Lugo

(Puerto Rican American, b. 1981)

glazed stoneware, oil paint, wood

Courtesy of the artist

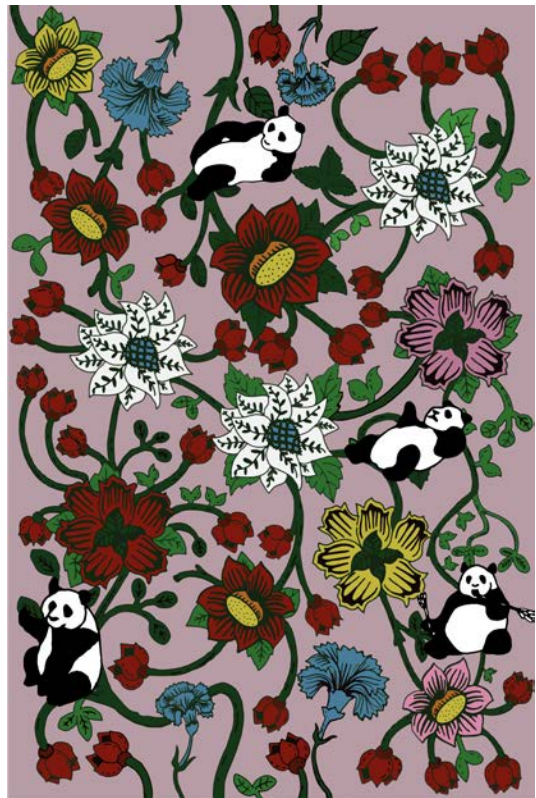
This work, part of Lugo's *Della Robske* series ("Robske" was Lugo's graffiti tag), also references the Italian Renaissance work of the della Robbia family. Here, the artist and his son Otto pose like the Madonna and Child. Otto wears an orange and black fabric with patterns inspired by ancient Greek art, while Lugo dons a Coogi-patterned drape. Coogi, an Australian luxury brand founded in the 1990s, made colorful sweaters with bright patterns meant to represent the curvilinear dunes and vibrant landscape of the outback and designs found in Aboriginal Australian art. While originally marketed to wealthy tourists, the brand became part of hip-hop culture when rappers like The Notorious B.I.G. began wearing Coogi and referring to the brand in their lyrics.

**William Morris Study I**  
2022

**William Morris Study II**  
2022

**Roberto Lugo**  
(Puerto Rican  
American, b. 1981)

digital illustration  
Courtesy of the artist



# Philadelphia Pottery Artist Roberto Lugo

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