



R & Company to Open Artist Roberto Lugo's First Solo Exhibition in New York This Fall

***The Gilded Ghetto* to Feature Wide Selection of New Works, Including the Artist's Reimagining of the Famed Peacock Room**

On View September 7 - October 27, 2023

New York—On September 7, R & Company will open *The Gilded Ghetto*, artist Roberto Lugo's first New York solo exhibition. Over the past several years, Lugo has been recognized for creating ornate ceramics that reflect his Afro-Latino heritage and depict the portraits and lived experiences of underrepresented communities. His work powerfully expands the voices celebrated within artistic practice and complicates the history of ceramics. The upcoming presentation marks an important shift for the artist, as he moves further from representations of important historical and cultural figures to sharing intimate narratives from his own life. While the iconography in his newest works is deeply personal, it has strong communal resonance, allowing it to be understood and appreciated from a range of perspectives and by a broad audience. *The Gilded Ghetto* features a wide selection of new work, including life-size pottery, wall-mounted sculptural roundels, and the artist's interpretation of The Peacock Room at the National Museum of Asian Art. The exhibition will remain on view through October 27, 2023, at R & Company's White Street location.



Works in Progress for 'Roberto Lugo: The Gilded Ghetto.' Photo by Joe Kramm, courtesy R &

Of the vision for the exhibition, Lugo said:

"As a child I moved into a new neighborhood and was overjoyed to see there was a playground and a baseball field. On my first morning there, I woke up and walked to the field with my baseball glove and was excited to see other kids playing. When I asked if I could join, they quickly surrounded me. One of the kids pushed me down and another put a baseball bat to my face and said, 'spics mow the grass, they don't get to play on it.'

*This is a core memory that continues to influence my life. The notion that there are places where I am not welcome is central to my focus as a ceramic artist. I find myself trying to claim spaces that were previously not meant for me, in the hopes that I am paving the way for others to exist in those places. With *The Gilded Ghetto*, I am sharing imagery and narratives that are specific to my life and the neighborhood where I grew up. At the same time, the iconography is relatable and what someone brings of themselves to the work will change how it is experienced.*

My purpose as an artist, and in this exhibition, is to tell stories from my childhood that also represent the lives of many people who otherwise are voiceless in contemporary art and craft."

The Gilded Ghetto will feature Lugo's interpretation of the famed Peacock Room, which opened at the Freer Gallery of Art in 1923. The Room was originally designed by artist James McNeill Whistler to showcase a Chinese blue-and-white porcelain collection and includes an eponymous avian motif. Lugo's homage to the iconic space reflects a longstanding interest in understanding individual approaches to collecting and the ways in which an array of objects can convey a dialogue and overarching narrative beyond the experience of each piece. The installation in *The Gilded Ghetto* will include a panel painting and a mantle with mosaic-tiled accents—both created by Lugo—as well as a shelving system displaying a selection of the artist's pots, vases, and decorative objects produced at varying scales. The installation will capture Lugo's distinct approach to color, pattern, and form, further highlighting his singular visual language which references traditional cultural textiles and motifs, Taino symbolism, graffiti, '90s hip hop, and other aspects of his heritage and upbringing. With his reimagining of the Peacock Room, Lugo creates an Afro-Futuristic space that celebrates his culture and community.



Works in Progress for 'Roberto Lugo: The Gilded Ghetto.' Photo by Joe Kramm, courtesy R & Company.

The exhibition will also feature a broad selection of works that reflect Lugo's engagement with Luca della Robbia's lauded Renaissance wall statuary. The artist's "*Della Robbia*" series continues the artist's exploration of important evolutions in art and craft history, bringing his own experiences to bear on centuries-old traditions. For Lugo, the labor-intensive process to create these intricate and elaborate pieces serves to honor and bring forward the lives and spirits of people of color, positioning them within the pantheon of revered historical figures and symbols. The wall-mounted sculptural objects mark an important conceptual and formal expansion within Lugo's oeuvre.

The Gilded Ghetto also includes examples of Lugo's orange and black pottery inspired by Greco-Roman black and red figure vessels. Varying in size and poignantly titled *School to Prison Pipeline*, *The Day We Had Church and Tires Were Stolen*, and *Stealing Cable*, among others, the pottery presents evocative narratives and everyday moments from Lugo's life. While intimate in nature, the works also address wider social implications related to the prison industrial complex, which disproportionately targets men of color and profits from their labor. Drawing a connection between this pottery tradition and the orange and black of prison uniforms, Lugo both highlights the significant ongoing impacts of the judicial and prison systems on his community and leverages the power of clay to encapsulate memory and meaning. In this way, the artist extends the history of ceramics as a vehicle for activism and storytelling, sharing experiences rarely explored in gallery contexts.

Finally, *The Gilded Ghetto* will include a selection of *Putti* statuettes—Lugo's appropriation of religious cherubs from the Italian Renaissance. The *Putti* feature characteristics and likenesses of people of color—an homage to contemporary figures that represent Lugo's own heritage and varied cultural background. These objects capture Lugo's innate ability to create visual and conceptual impact on both a small and large scale.

*“I often speak about how many people from my community are not involved in clay, because if you are worried about food, you are not worried about the dish from which you are eating. My people have different priorities, because of their circumstances and the way they inherited this world. When someone leaves the ghetto and gets the opportunity to be a potter, it is imperative that we show the world the beauty that can come from that. In this work, I am putting our faces in places where they “don’t belong” and showing *The Gilded Ghetto*.” — Roberto Lugo*

About Roberto Lugo

Lugo holds a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute and an MFA from Penn State. His work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions at the Baltimore Museum of Art (2023), Cincinnati Art Museum (2023), The Wolfsonian-FIU (2022), Metropolitan Museum of Art (2021), Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (2021), and New Orleans Museum of Art (2020), among numerous others. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including a 2019 Pew Fellowship, the Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon Polsky Rome Prize, and the US Artist Award. His work is found in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The High Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Brooklyn Museum, Walters Art Museum, and more. He is currently an Assistant Professor at the Tyler School of Art and Architecture in Philadelphia, PA.

About R & Company

For over 20 years, R & Company has championed collectible design, advancing the contemporary marketplace and actively growing a global collector base and clientele. Its founders, Zesty Meyers and Evan Snyderman, are widely recognized for identifying rising talent, deepening scholarship about collectible design, and developing new avenues for growth in the industry. R & Company maintains two dynamic spaces in New York: its expansive, inaugural space at 82 Franklin Street features a rotating display of interior environments highlighting gallery designers, while 64 White Street offers an active roster of solo and group exhibitions and includes a Library and Archive of more than 4,000 books, journals, and other materials. The gallery is committed to nurturing and sustaining the markets and careers of both emerging and established designers, as well as to maintaining and expanding commercial and academic interest in historic design. Its roster of international designers includes Wendell Castle, Rogan Gregory, the Estate of Greta Grossman, Serban Ionescu, Hun-Chung Lee, Joyce Lin, Roberto Lugo, Jolie Ngo, Katie Stout, Johnny Swing, Studio Job, Joaquim Tenreiro, and Jeff Zimmerman, among many others. With its vision, passion, and expertise, R & Company serves as a critical platform for experiencing 20th and 21st-century objects and discovering innovative, rare, and significant design.

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