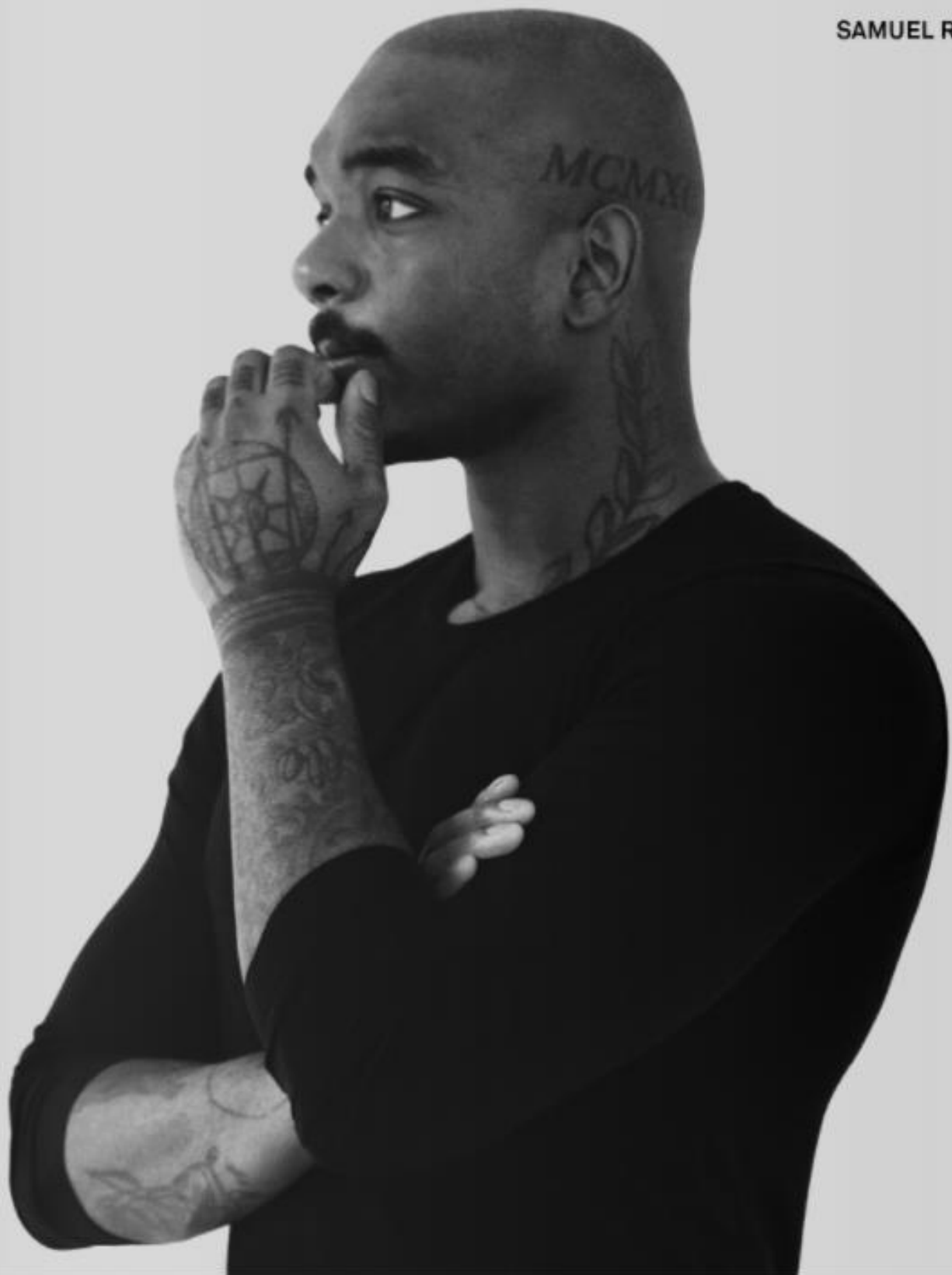


# DESIGN MIAMI /

SAMUEL ROSS



# BEAUTY

With a dual presence in Philadelphia and New York City, Wexler Gallery's Design Miami/ debut captures the diversity, grace and artistry of its contemporary makers.

By Janelle Zara

Photos courtesy of Wexler Gallery



# BY

From left: Wexler Gallery in New York City, Reynold Rodriguez, Bajo Tu Sombra (Under Your Shadow) Lamp Pair, 2021.

# DESIGN



From top: Roberto Lugo, Street Pot: DMX and Pit Bulls, 2021; Reynold Rodriguez, Acuoetate Y No Jodas Mas Loungo, 2021; Gregory Nangle, Cloaving Ghost Vase, 2021; Westler Gallery in New York City.

Husband and wife gallerists Lewis and Sherri Apter Westler didn't always gravitate to modern makers. Before founding their eponymous gallery in Philadelphia's Old City historic district in 2000—and then later expanding with a New York location in 2018—the design veterans cut their teeth on antiques and fine art. The Westlers met nearly 30 years ago working at Christie's in New York, where Lewis was assistant vice president of 20th-Century Decorative Arts and Sherri specialized in contemporary, Latin American, and modern prints. While their initial business was vintage, secondary market works, today the couple's focus is on contemporary makers.

Westler Gallery's ideal designer is "someone dedicated in their field who can create beautiful objects that have a beautiful presence, an incredible use of materials, and functionality," says Lewis. "That's kind of the Holy Grail—not that easy to find, to be honest. Those are the works that speak to us."

"Gravity + Grace," which marks Westler Gallery's inaugural booth at Design Miami/, brims with the elusive items the duo so painstakingly curates, featuring works by creatives straddling the worlds of art and design while reflecting a fusion of different cultures. "It was important to us to represent the diversity of the work that we show at the gallery," says Lewis.



Among the exhibiting artists are Japanese-born, Philadelphia-based Mami Kato, who shapes unusual materials—think eggshells, rice paper and milk paint—into organic, faintly familiar decorative forms that might resemble a bodily organ or even a furry animal. "She's using rice stalks to create these beautiful sculptural objects," adds Lewis.

Puerto Rican-based designer Reynold Rodriguez will be showing furniture of gypsum plaster and marble. "His work has an almost dreamlike quality to it," Sherri remarks. "His forms are very fluid, very graceful, but they're playful at the same time."

The duo considers matter over medium when finding artists to work with. Turkish artist Feyza Kemahlioglu, for instance, designs lighting with meerschaum, a soft white clay mineral carved by artisans with intricate patterns and perforations. Meanwhile, American activist and ceramicist Roberto Lugo casts porcelain clay into hybrid European- and Asian-inspired vessels and paints the surfaces with images of Black cultural icons in the style of urban graffiti.

Despite their varied sensibilities and techniques, there's an obvious through-line for the couple. "Whether it's clay, glass, bronze or rice, the common language between a lot of the people we're showing is their use of natural materials," says Lewis.



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