

Pottery Making Illustrated

Artist Q&A: Meet Ceramic Artist of the Year: Robert Lugo

The annual Ceramic Artist of the Year award is presented to an artist whose work reflects current aesthetics and sets an example for ceramic artists by embracing current trends, technology, studio, marketing, and/or community-focused practices. The Ceramic Artist of the Year is determined by the editorial staff of *Ceramics Monthly* and *Pottery Making Illustrated* and receives \$1,000 cash award and a \$500 purchase award.



Ceramic Arts Network Editors: In addition to making artwork and teaching, you recently received a United States Artist Fellowship, and are highly involved in many other aspects of our field—as an organizer, speaker, curator, NCECA Director-at-Large, and serving on the board of trustees at Haystack, where you’ve also established a scholarship for people of color. How are all of these different roles connected? Do you have any advice for artists who would like to make a positive impact in the ceramic arts beyond making work?

Robert Lugo: I feel it is difficult to promote involvement of people of color without practicing what I preach. I would often complain when decisions were made by organizations, so I felt it was important to be on the other side of table to see what decisions are made and how they are made. This work helps me to be more informed in how I can help these organizations that want more diversity as well

as the artists who want to be involved but often give up because of rejection. Through my involvement, I have seen that there is a sincere desire to seek diversity and these organizations are in need of people of color to educate them on ways that their efforts can progress.

To those who want to make an impact on the field, beyond their work, I would say focus on that thing you really, really want to do and stop thinking it is just a dream. When you approach something with passion and consistency people will follow. No one can do what you do like you can. Another important aspect is to choose ventures that benefit others. This selflessness is part of being kind. One element I think folks forget is that being kind is more important than having talent or being creative. If you are kind and selfless, people will always want to help you. Talent can be achieved with time, but it is difficult to change a person who is cynical or selfish. When you do for others, inevitably reciprocity takes place; people will remember how much they love working with you and invite you to participate in different opportunities. Being selfless and kind is also more effective as a leader because if there is no hierarchy in the way that you treat others, then people are more likely to follow you rather than mistrust you.



Fred Sanford (Redd Foxx)/Freddie Gray Urn, 16½ in. (42 cm) in height, porcelain, china paint, gold luster, 2017. Photo by Kenek Photography. Courtesy of Wexler Gallery.



Frederick Douglass/Arthur Ashe Urn, 18 in. (46 cm) in height, porcelain, china paint, gold luster, 2017. Photo: KeneK Photography.

Eds: What additional roles do you think makers can play in expanding access to the field?

RL: I think they can play the role of advocates by pursuing fundraising for folks other than themselves. What if you know a young artist who really wants to take a workshop but can't afford it? Why not sell some of your work in order to sponsor them? We often see fundraising done for personal projects but what if we saw an influx of pots being sold to support someone else? Institutions and organizations like Haystack and NCECA are doing incredible jobs to create accessibility. If all else fails, I would consider supporting them financially.