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dossier de presse

sterling ruby  
25.05.12-26.08.12

# frac champagne- ardenne

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# 1

STERLING RUBY  
EXPOSITION DU 25 MAI AU 26 AOUT 2012  
VERNISSAGE LE JEUDI 24 MAI 2012 A 18H00

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# communiqué de presse

STERLING RUBY

SOFT WORK

EXPOSITION DU 25 MAI AU 26 AOUT 2012

VERNISSAGE LE JEUDI 24 MAI 2012 A 18H00

visite privée pour les amis du frac champagne-ardenne : lundi 4 juin à 19h00

visites publiques : tous les dimanches à 16h00

visite pour les enseignants : mercredi 30 mai à 14h30

visite pour les étudiants : jeudi 31 mai à 18h30

Commissaire de l'exposition : Florence Derieux

En 2008, la célèbre critique d'art du New York Times, Roberta Smith, décrivait Sterling Ruby comme l'un des artistes majeurs du début du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle et ajoutait « cela fait seulement huit ans, bien sûr, mais cette prédiction pourrait bien se révéler exacte ». Sterling Ruby est aujourd'hui l'un des artistes les plus importants sur la scène artistique internationale. Son œuvre, prolifique, comprend tout à la fois des céramiques biomorphiques abondamment vernies, des sculptures en uréthane expansé, des toiles peintes au spray, des dessins au vernis à ongles et des collages ou vidéos hypnotiques, qui prennent leur source dans des champs extrêmement variés allant de l'architecture moderniste à la culture urbaine ou à l'esthétique du bodybuilding, pointant les mécanismes de coercition.

Pour sa toute première exposition en France, intitulée SOFT WORK, Sterling Ruby réalise une importante installation inédite et spécialement conçue pour le lieu, dense et riche d'éléments qui se jouent de l'ensemble des espaces d'exposition du FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, présentant un aspect particulier et significatif de son œuvre que sont les « soft sculptures » (sculptures molles). Prenant possession de l'espace d'exposition, l'installation s'approprie ses hauteurs et joue de superpositions et d'entassements, entraînant le spectateur dans un maelstrôm esthétique. Cette installation, qui n'a encore jamais été présentée auparavant, réunit des pièces d'une grande radicalité formelle, telle que les séries Vampire et Husband & Child, ainsi qu'un ensemble intitulé Flags. À l'étage sont par ailleurs exposées un grand nombre de « bouches de Vampire », qui investissent tout l'espace.

Sterling Ruby propose un contrepoint à l'héritage moderniste à travers un corpus d'œuvres multiformes, qui opèrent par transformation, imitation et assimilation, ce que les « soft sculptures » révèlent tout particulièrement. Dans ces œuvres, l'utilisation qui est faite de larges pièces de tissus renvoie à l'univers domestique. L'artiste transforme les oreillers, couvertures et autres kilts qu'il utilise en objets sculpturaux, révélant que les sentiments de sûreté et de sécurité qui leurs sont associés ne sont finalement qu'une illusion. Ces sculptures

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monumentales, pop et ludiques, sont également l'occasion de questionner l'espace et la notion de « genre ».

Né en 1972 à Bitburg (Allemagne), Sterling Ruby vit et travaille à Los Angeles. Il a exposé dans de nombreuses institutions et galeries, parmi lesquelles le Museum of Contemporary Art de Los Angeles et la Galleria d'arte Moderna e Contemporanea de Bergame. Il est représenté par les galeries Xavier Hufkens (Bruxelles), Sprüth Magers (Berlin/Londres), Taka Ishii Gallery (Tokyo) et Foxy Production (New York).

Cette exposition est organisée en collaboration avec le Centre d'art contemporain de Genève.

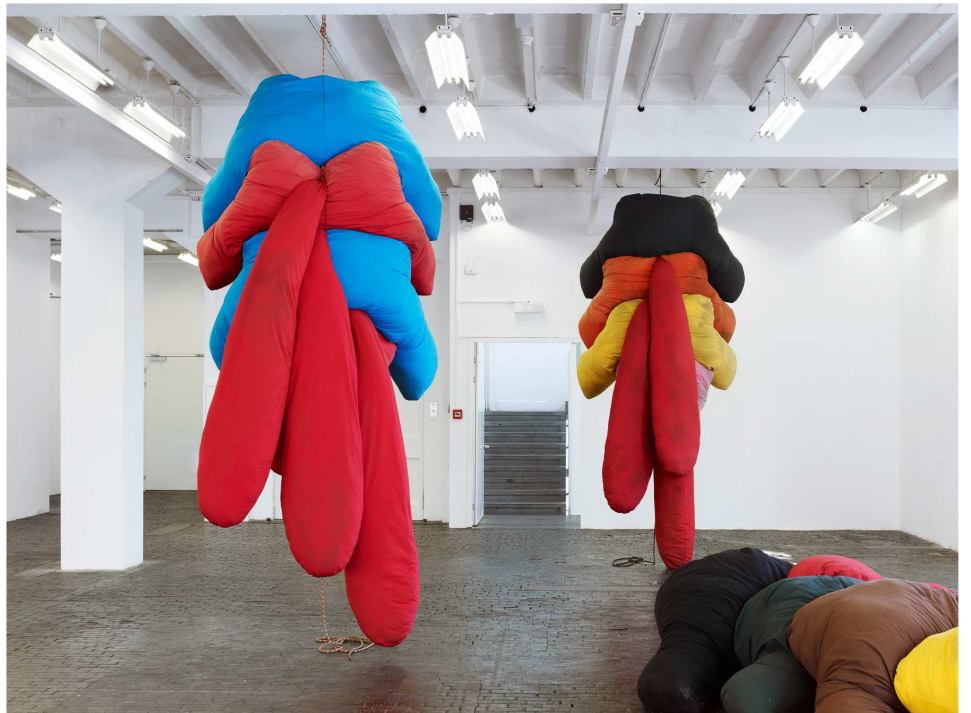
L'exposition de Sterling Ruby a reçu le soutien d'État donnés, Fonds franco-américain pour l'art contemporain et des galeries Xavier Hufkens, Bruxelles et Sprüth Magers, Berlin/Londres.



Avec le soutien de Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin, Maison fondée en 1772

le frac champagne-ardenne reçoit le soutien du conseil régional de champagne-ardenne, du ministère de la culture et de la communication et de la ville de reims. il est membre du art center social club et du réseau platform.

Vues de l'exposition SOFT WORK, 2012  
Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève, Suisse



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Double Vampire 6, 2011  
Tissu et remplissage en fibre  
330 x 394 x 18 cm  
Courtesy de l'artiste



# 6

RWB Drops, 2011

Tissu et remplissage en fibre

291 x 20 x 10 cm chacun / 739 x 51 x 25,5 cm (l'ensemble)

Courtesy de l'artiste



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Vue de l'exposition I AM NOT FREE BECAUSE I CAN BE EXPLODED ANYTIME, 2011  
Sprüth Magers, Berlin (Allemagne)





Vue de l'exposition VAMPIRE, 2011  
The Pace Gallery, Pékin (Chine)



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HUSBANDS/SUNBURN P.O.P, 2010

Tissu, remplissage en fibre, fermetures éclair, formica, bois

264 x 198 x 122 cm (l'ensemble) / 61 x 198 x 122 cm (dimensions socle)

Courtesy de l'artiste



# 10

## STERLING RUBY

Né en 1972 à Bitburg (Allemagne) ; vit et travaille à Los Angeles (États-Unis)

## FORMATION

2003-2005

Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, États-Unis  
Master of Fine Art

2000-2002

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, États-Unis

1992-1996

Pennsylvania School of Art & Design, Lancaster, États-Unis

## EXPOSITIONS PERSONNELLES

2011

Sterling Ruby & Lucio Fontana, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, États-Unis

PAINTINGS, Xavier Hufkens, Bruxelles, Belgique

I AM NOT FREE BECAUSE I CAN BE EXPLODED ANYTIME,  
Sprüth/Magers, Berlin, Allemagne

VAMPIRE, The Pace Gallery, Pékin, Chine

2010

Metal Works, Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Bruxelles, Belgique

ASHTRAYS, Galerie Pierre Marie Giraud, Bruxelles, Belgique

New Works, Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo, Japon

2TRAPS, The Pace Gallery, New York, États-Unis

2009

Sterling Ruby / Robert Mapplethorpe, Xavier Hufkens, Bruxelles, Belgique

The Masturbators, Foxy Productions, New York, États-Unis

2008

Spectrum Ripper, Sprüth/Magers, Londres, Royaume-Uni

Grid Ripper, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergame, Italie

Zen Ripper, Galleria Emi Fontana, Milan, Italie

MOCA Focus: Sterling Ruby - SUPERMAX 2008, Museum of Contemporary Art, Pacific Design Center, Los Angeles, États-Unis

KILN Works, Metro Pictures, New York, États-Unis

Chron, The Drawing Center, New York, États-Unis

2007

Paintings & Benches, Galerie Christian Nagel, Berlin, Allemagne  
Slasher Posters & Pillow Works, Bernier/Eliades Gallery, Athènes, Grèce  
Superoverpass, Foxy Production, New York, États-Unis  
Killing the Recondite, Metro Pictures, New York, États-Unis

2006

Interior Designer, Marc Foxx Gallery, Los Angeles, États-Unis  
Recombines, Galleria Emi Fontana, Milan, Italie  
SUPERMAX 2006, Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne, Allemagne

#### EXPOSITIONS COLLECTIVES

2011

Soft Machines, The Pace Gallery, New York, États-Unis  
 Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo, Japon  
George Herms: Xenophilia (Love of the Unknown), Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, États-Unis  
The Shape of Things to Come: New Sculpture, Saatchi Gallery, Londres, Royaume-Unis  
Silence and Time, Dallas Museum of Art, Texas, États-Unis  
At Capacity: Large Scale Works from the Permanent Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, États-Unis  
 Paul Clay, Salon 94, New York, États-Unis  
After Hours: Murals on the Bowery, Art Production Fund & The New Museum, New York, États-Unis  
Greater L.A., New York, États-Unis  
DYSTOPIA, An exhibition written by Mark von Schlegell, CAPC, Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux, France  
LustWarande11 - RAW, Park De Oude Warande, Museum De Pont, Tilburg, Pays Bas  
Artprox Cinema, SVA Theatre, New York, États-Unis  
Lustwarande 2011 - Blemishes, Park De Oude Warande, Museum De Pont, Tilburg, Pays Bas  
New York Minute, The Garage: Center for Contemporary Culture, Moscou, Russie  
California Dreamin' - Myths and Legends of Los Angeles, Almine Rech Gallery, Paris, France  
Highways Connect and Divide, Foxy Production, New York, États-Unis  
13th San Francisco Indie Fest: Offensive!, Roxie Cinema, San Francisco, États-Unis

2010

Aftermath, Taka Ishii Gallery, Kyoto, Japon  
The Transformation Show, Gallery 400, Chicago, États-Unis  
The Artist's Museum: Los Angeles Artists, 1980-2010, The Geffen Contemporary at Museum Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, États-Unis  
Misericordia, Prism Gallery, Los Angeles, États-Unis

50 Years at Pace, The Pace Gallery, New York, États-Unis  
Psychotrope, Institute of Visual Arts (Inova), University of Wisconsin-MilwaRoyaume-Unisee, MilwaRoyaume-Unisee, États-Unis  
The Pencil Show, Foxy Production, New York, États-Unis  
Endless Bummer/Surf Elsewhere, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, États-Unis  
Rive Gauche/Rive Droite, Marc Jancou Contemporary, Paris, France  
Permanent Mimesis: An Exhibition on Realism and Simulation, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, Italie  
Carol Bove, Sterling Ruby, Dana Schutz, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, États-Unis  
Other than Beauty, Friedman Benda Gallery, New York, États-Unis  
28th Turin Film Festival: Waves, Museo Nazionale Del Cinema, Turin, Italie  
Rethinking Location, Sprüth/Magers, Berlin, Allemagne  
New Art for a New Century: Recent Acquisitions 2000-2009, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, États-Unis  
The Secret Knows: A LAND Exhibition, The Virgin Mobile Freehouse, Austin, États-Unis  
Permanent trouble: Kunst aus der Sammlung Kopp München, Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg, Allemagne  
It's All American, The New Jersey Museum of Contemporary Art, Wickatunk, États-Unis  
Painting Extravaganza, Cardi Black Box, Milan, Italie  
Group exhibition, Xavier Hufkens, Bruxelles, Belgique  
Misericordia, PRISM, West Hollywood, États-Unis  
Setouchi International Art Festival 2010, Meigima, Japon  
Arte 10, Rossio Square, Lisbonne, Portugal  
Pure, Personal or Abstract, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Turin, Italie  
Spray!, D'Amelio Terres, New York, États-Unis  
Melanie Schiff and Sterling Ruby, Kavi Gupta Gallery, Berlin, Allemagne  
Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art since the 1960's, San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, Texas, États-Unis  
Permanent Trouble: Art from the Collection Kopp Munich, East German Art Forum Gallery, Regensburg, Allemagne  
The Quiet Edition, White Slab Palace, New York, États-Unis  
This That & Then Some, Independent, New York, États-Unis  
Long Live the Amorphous Law: Videos by Sterling Ruby 2002-2009, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, États-Unis  
Supernature: An Exercise in Loads, AMP, Athènes, Grèce  
Suitable Video: Works form the Suitable Exhibitions Archive, Western Exhibitions, Chicago, États-Unis

2009

In Bed Together, Royal/T, Culver City, États-Unis  
California Maximalism, Nyehaus, New York, États-Unis  
Beg, Borrow, and Steal, Rubell Family Collection/Contemporary Arts Foundation, Miami, États-Unis (cat.)  
Sterling Ruby / Robert Mapplethorpe, Xavier Hufkens, Bruxelles, Belgique

Why Painting Now?, Blondeau Fine Art Services, Genève, Suisse  
Cave Painting, curated by Bob Nickas, New York, NY, États-Unis  
New Photography 2009, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, États-Unis  
Breaking New Ground Underground, Stonescape, Calistoga, États-Unis  
New York Minute: 60 Artists from the New York Art Scene, Macro Future Museum, Rome, Italie  
Second Nature: The Valentine-Adelson Collection at the Hammer Museum, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, États-Unis  
Works on View, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, États-Unis  
Your Gold Teeth II, curated by Todd Levin, Marianne Boesky, New York, États-Unis  
Abstract America: New Painting and Sculpture, The Saatchi Gallery, Londres, Royaume-Unis  
Five, Baibakov Art Projects, Red Octobre Chocolate Factory, Moscou, Russie  
Nothingness and Being, Seventh Interpretation of La Colección Jumex, Fundación/ Colección Jumex, Mexico, Mexique  
Modern Mondays: An Evening with Sterling Ruby, Museum of Modern Art, New York, États-Unis  
Beaufort 03. Art by the Sea, PMMK, Provincial Museum for Modern Art in Ostende, Belgique

2008

The Station, Midblock East, Miami, États-Unis  
Endless Summer, Glendale College Art Gallery, Glendale, États-Unis  
Base: Object, curated by Cory Nomura, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, États-Unis  
Dirt on Delight: Impulses that Form Clay, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, États-Unis  
The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, États-Unis  
Begin Again Right Back Here, curated by B. Wurtz, White Columns, États-Unis  
If You Destroy the Image, You Destroy the Thing Itself, Kunsthall, Bergen, Norvege  
Now: Selections from the Ovitz Family Collection, Deitch Projects, New York, États-Unis  
Stray Alchemists, Ullens Center of Contemporary Art, Beijing, China  
New Acquisitions 2, The Rachofsky House, Dallas, États-Unis

2007

Uneasy Angel/Imagine Los Angeles, Galerie Spruth/Magers, Munich, Allemagne  
Fit to Print, Gagolian Gallery, New York, États-Unis  
Fearful Objects, Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago, États-Unis  
POST ROSE, Galerie Christian Nagel, Berlin, Allemagne  
Raise High The Roof Beam, Rainbo Club, Chicago, États-Unis  
Circumventing the City, D'Amelio Terras Gallery, New York, États-Unis  
Dark Mirror, Netherlands Media Art Institute, Amsterdam, Pays Bas

Stuff: International Contemporary Art from the Collection of Burt Aaron,  
Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, États-Unis  
Seattle Art Museum at 75, Building a Collection for Seattle, Seattle Art  
Museum, Seattle, États-Unis  
I Want to Believe, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich, Suisse  
The Second Moscou Biennale of Contemporary Art, Moscou, Russie  
Group exhibition, Metro Pictures, New York, États-Unis  
Mixed Signals, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, États-Unis  
Material Photographs, Shane Campbell Gallery, Oak Park, États-Unis

2006

Red Eye: L.A. Artists from the Rubell Family Collection, Rubell Family  
Collection, Miami, États-Unis  
Only The Paranoid Survive, Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art,  
New York, États-Unis  
California Biennial, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach,  
États-Unis  
Into Black, Western Bridge, Seattle, États-Unis  
Behind the Pedestal, Jonathan Viner, Londres, Royaume-Unis  
Back From the End of the Earth, Galerie Ben Kaufmann, Berlin,  
Allemagne  
Having New Eyes, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, États-Unis

2005

The Pantagruel Syndrome, T1-Turin Triennial, Galleria Civica d'Arte  
Moderne e Contemporanea, Turin, Italie  
Having New Eyes, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, États-Unis  
All the Pretty Corpses, The Renaissance Society at The University of  
Chicago, Chicago, États-Unis  
Voiceovers, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, États-  
Unis  
Untitled, Marc Foxx, Los Angeles  
Sugartown, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York and Participant Inc, New  
York, États-Unis  
5 X U, Team Gallery, New York, États-Unis  
Exploding Plastic Inevitable, curated by Scenic, Bergdorf Goodman, New  
York, États-Unis  
Excessive Projections / Projections of Excess, Open Screen CAA: New  
Media Caucus, Atlanta, États-Unis  
Resonance, Netherlands Media Art Institute/Montevideo, Amsterdam,  
Pays Bas  
Exploding Plastic Inevitable: 40 Fun Galleries, Bergdorf Goodman, New  
York, États-Unis  
GEO, Foxy Production, New York, États-Unis

2004

Face-Off, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, États-Unis  
Dark Side of the Sun, Wight Gallery / UCLA, Los Angeles, États-Unis

21st Kasseler Documentary Film and Video Festival, Filmladen Kassel, Kassel, Allemagne

Mystery Blaze in Holiday Cottage, Monya Rowe, New York, États-Unis

LOOP 04 Video Art Fair and Festival, Associacio Art Barcelona, Barcelo

Hotel Sants Barcelona Imitations of Life, De Balie Cinema, Amsterdam, Pays Bas

Chicago Expérimental, Les Musees de Strasbourg-Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg, France

Tapestry from an Asteroid, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, États-Unis

Depression: What Is It Good For?, Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago, États-Unis

Signal and Noise Festival 2004, Video In Studios, Vancouver B.C., Canada

Material Eyes (collaborations with Kirsten Stoltmann), Zach Feuer (LFL), New York, États-Unis

Works On Paper, Southfirst Art, Brooklyn, New York, États-Unis

2003

America Annihilates Consciousness, Smart Project Space, Amsterdam, Pays Bas

See How The Land Lies, Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York, États-Unis

When Darkness Falls (part 2), Midway, Saint Paul, États-Unis

When Darkness Falls, Gallery 400, UIC College of Architecture & Arts, Chicago, États-Unis

Blinky 2: The Screening, Tate Britain, Londres, Royaume-Unis

Red Beats, Salina Art Center, Kansas

Behind the Pedestal (collaborative exhibit), Bower Gallery, San Antonio, États-Unis

Hysterical Pastoral, The Royaume-Unisrainian Institute of Modern Art, Chicago, États-Unis

Fiction In Video, WORM, Nighttown Theater, Rotterdam, Pays Bas

Video Mundi, Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, États-Unis

Chicago's Own: New Work by Jennifer Reeder and Sterling Ruby, Chicago Filmmakers, Chicago, États-Unis

Rethinking Landscape, Pennsylvania College of Art and Design, Lancaster, États-Unis

Recess and In the Shadow of Summer Bliss, Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, États-Unis

Subtle, not so subtle, 1R Gallery, Chicago, États-Unis

2002

Video with Headphones, Royaume-Unisrainian Institute Of Modern Art, Chicago, États-Unis

Landformed, 1R Gallery, Chicago

Media Art Festival Friesland, Theatre Romein and Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, Pays Bas

Love, Landscape, Mirrors, Death, Ideotech, Chicago, États-Unis

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2012

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2011

David Spalding, « Sterling Ruby "Vampire" », 8 novembre

Sterling Ruby, « Custom Clay », Kaleidoscope, n°12, octobre - novembre, p. 44-49

« 21 Questions for Artist Sterling Ruby », Artinfo.com, octobre 2011

Ana Finel Honigman, « L is look and learn : Sterling Ruby », i-D, été, p. 252-253

« Works in Progress », V Magazine, printemps, p. 105

Brienne Walsh, "The Survivalist: Q+A With Sterling Ruby", Art in America, mars

Georgina Adam, « The Hard Sell », The Financial Times, 25 février, p. 5

Tom Austin, « Smart art from the de la Cruz Collection », The Miami Herald, 9 janvier

2010

Georgina Adam, Charlotte Burns, Melanie Gerlis, Marissa Mazria Katz, « Art Market Report: Who needs Celebrities? It's the Serious Collectors that Count » The Art Newspaper, décembre

Christopher Bollen, « L.A. Artworld: Sterling Ruby », Interview Magazine, décembre, p. 114

Giacomo Nicoletta Maschietti, « Painting Extravaganza », Flash Art, décembre

Jill Conner, « Sterling Ruby », ArtUS

Jonathan Griffin, « Fluid Nature » Mousse Magazine, septembre-octobre

Daniel Kunitz, « Carol Bove/Sterling Ruby/Dana Schutz », Modern Painters, 5 août

Merrily Kerr, « Carol Bove, Sterling Ruby, Dana Schutz », Time Out New York

Marina Cashdan, « The Promised Land? Will Portugal Arte 10 Become a Fixture on the Art World Calendar? » Huffingtonpost.com, 3 août

Jonathan Olivares, « Sterling Ruby. » Interni Magazine, avril

Paul Young, « The Masculine Mystique. » Angelino Magazine, avril, p. 56.

Matt Kelley, « Art and Incarceration: Sterling Ruby's Stark Cages » change.org, 25 mars

James Glisson, « Sterling Ruby, Critic's Picks », Artforum.com, 25 février

Roberta Smith, « Swagger and Sideburns: Bad Boys in Galleries », The New York Times, 12 février

Linda Yablonsky, « Best in Show: Sterling Ruby's Caged Heat », New York Times Style Magazine, 11 février

Brienne Walsh, « Sterling Ruby's Evening Trap », Art in America, février

Charlie Finch, « Cagey », [Artnet.com](#), 10 février  
 Roberta Smith, « New York Times Round Up : Make Room for Video, Performance and Paint », [The New York Times](#)  
 Brent Birnbaum, « Sterling Ruby at Pace? Sterling Ruby at Pace! », [Artcards Review.cc](#)  
 Peter Yeoh, « Artistic Transgresso », [Glass](#), hiver, p. 179

2009

Ingrid Schaffer, Janelle Porter, [Dirt on Delight: Impulses that Form Clay](#), Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, p. 38-39  
[Beg, Borrow, Steal](#), Miami, The Rubell Family Collection, p. 206-207  
 Shelly Bancroft, Peter Nesbett, Rebecca Sears, [Diaries of a Young Artist](#), New York, Darte Publishing, p. 45-47  
[New York Minute: Sixty Artists on the New York Scenes](#), Rome, MACRO FUTURE, Museum of Contemporary Art, Rome  
 Jerry Saltz, « Unearthed Classics and Reinvented Forms: The Best Art of 2009 », [New York Magazine](#)  
 « Seeing Stars », [W Magazine: The Art Issue](#), novembre  
 Andrew Russeth, « Sterling Ruby in New York », [Artinfo.com](#), 6 novembre  
 Alessandro Rabottini, « Ruin Value », [Kaleidoscope](#), p. 50-55  
 Bob Nickas, [Painting Abstraction: New Elements in Abstract Painting](#), Phaidon, p. 220-223  
 Jerry Saltz, « A New Kind of Boom », [New York Magazine](#), 4 octobre  
 Shamim Momin, [Vitamin 3-D: New Perspectives in Sculpture and Installation](#), Phaidon, p. 256-259  
 Alessandro Rabottini, « Sterling Ruby », JRP Ringier, GAMeC, Emi Fontana Gallery  
 Walter Robinson, « Weekend Update, Filmmaker Sterling Ruby », [Artnet.com](#)  
 Julian Myers, « Who is Sterling Ruby? », [Frieze](#), avril  
 Katya Kazakina, « MoMA Fast-Tracks Six Young Artists for New Photography Show », [Bloomberg Press](#), 25 mars  
 Roberta Smith, « Crucible of Creativity, Stoking Earth Into Art », [The New York Times](#), 20 mars  
 Laura Mulleavy, « Inside Out », [V Magazine](#), printemps, p. 86

2008

Milovan Farronato, « Spray-painted Vandalism », [Mousse](#), octobre-novembre, p.15-17  
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 Tauba Auerbach, « Top Ten: Sterling Ruby SUPERMAX 2008 », [Artforum](#), octobre, p. 205  
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Christopher Miles, « Baroque Then and Now », LA Weekly, 4 septembre

Catherine Taft, « In Focus: Sterling Ruby », The Journal, p. 172-183

« Diaries of a Young Artist », Art on Paper, juillet/août, p. 51

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Nicola Trezzi, « Sterling Ruby », Flash Art, mai-juin, p. 153

Roberta Smith, « Substraction », The New York Times, 25 avril

Roberta Smith, « Sterling Ruby / CHRON & Kiln Works », The New York Times, 21 mars

Adam Eaker, « One to Watch », ArtKrush, 19 mars

#### 2007

Jason Foumberg, Eye Eyam: External Pleasure, New City Chicago, 27 décembre

Roberta Smith, « It's Just Clay, but How About a Little Respect », The New York Times, 7 septembre

Roberta Smith, « In These Shows, the Material is the Message », The New York Times, 10 août

Jan Tumlir, « Sci-Fi Historicism: part 2 Desertshore », Flash Art, mai-juin, p. 118-121

Pictures and Foxy Production », New York, Saatchi Gallery Daily Magazine, 9 juin

Nuit Banai, Sterling Ruby, Time Out New York, mai, p. 89

Doug McClellmont, « Doug Mc Clellmont on Sterling Ruby at Metro

Linda Yablonsky, « Black Reign », The Village Voice, 9 mai, p. 53

Abraham Orden, « The Minute », Artnet.com, 7 mai

#### 2006

Holly Myers, « Shape Shifter », Art Review, décembre

Michael Duncan, « Opening Salvos in LA », Art in America, décembre, p. 76-83

Catherine Taft, « Introducing », Modern Painters, décembre, p. 75-77

Catherine Taft, « Sterling Ruby », Modern Painters, novembre, p. 104-105

Richard Hawkins, « Sterling Ruby: Long Live the Amorphous Law », Flash Art, octobre

Emma Gray, « LA Confidential », Artnet.com, 13 octobre

Christopher Knight, « The Faces of This Place », The Los Angeles Times, 7 octobre

Amra Brooks, « Must See Art: Sterling Ruby Interior Designer at Marc Foxx », LA Weekly, 20 septembre

Natascha Sofia Snellman, « I Heart Darkness », Los Angeles Times: 2nd Cannons Publication, 15 septembre

Holly Meyers, « Hovering just at the periphery », Los Angeles Times, 15 septembre

# 19

Nicolas Trembley, « L'expo du mois, La folie des grandeurs », Numéro, février 2012, p. 58

l'expo du mois

# 58

**La folie des grandeurs** par Nicolas Trembley

Adeptes du minimalisme, du street art et des grandes dimensions, l'artiste Sterling Ruby expose enfin ses sculptures "anti-form". Un travail insolite et rare à découvrir à Genève et à Reims.



*Monument Stalagmite/  
Survival Horror* (2011).  
Conduit en PVC, mousse,  
uréthane, bois, peinture  
à la bombe et Formica,  
548,6 x 160 x 91,4 cm.

Né en Allemagne d'un père américain et d'une mère hollandaise, Sterling Ruby a passé son enfance dans une ferme de Pennsylvanie avant d'atterrir en Californie. Assistant de Mike Kelley au Art Center College of Design à Pasadena, il ne terminera pas ses études mais s'appliquera à créer une œuvre qui va très vite rencontrer le succès.

Chez Sterling Ruby, tout est de grande dimension : de son atelier, en passant par ses fameuses stalagmites qui s'élancent à plusieurs mètres de hauteur, jusqu'aux prix de ses œuvres. Son énergie, il la tire de la rue, du graffiti, de la contre-culture, celle qui conteste l'ordre établi, qui vandalise. Son travail évoque la sociologie urbaine et l'histoire de l'art, les contraintes sociales et l'architecture. Ses monumentales peintures abstraites sont réalisées exclusivement à la bombe et ses gigantesques sculptures taguées à la manière d'une palissade de Los Angeles, où d'ailleurs il réside. Véritable fusion entre art minimal et street art, son travail aborde également la céramique de style « Fat Lava », la vidéo où des acteurs pornos se masturbent ou encore des images de chirurgie esthétique.

L'artiste a encore rarement été exposé en France, si ce n'est à la galerie Rosenblum. L'exposition qui s'ouvre à Genève, et qui sera ensuite présentée au FRAC Champagne-Ardenne à Reims, permet de pallier ce manque. Le plasticien y présente ses nouvelles créations en tissus, apparentées à une tradition de l'« anti-form ». Ses sculptures « molles », qu'il appelle ses « soft sculptures », semblent indiquer qu'après une période où tout s'élançait vers le haut, les choses semblent désormais s'affaisser.

Exposition Sterling Ruby, au Centre d'art contemporain, Genève, jusqu'au 22 avril, [www.centre.ch](http://www.centre.ch). Au FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, du 25 mai au 26 août, [www.frac-champagneardenne.org](http://www.frac-champagneardenne.org).

David Spalding, « Sterling Ruby “Vampire” », 8 novembre 2011

***Sterling Ruby’s “Vampire”***

THE PACE GALLERY, Beijing

24 September–5 November, 2011

Caught in that dark crawlspace between the living and the dead, hounded by a destructive, unending hunger and burdened with the need to indoctrinate: this is today’s American empire as it appears in “Vampire,” Sterling Ruby’s exhibition of new and recent work at The Pace Gallery, Beijing. Ruby has always needed to tag and topple monuments dedicated to the old order. For his 2008 exhibition SUPERMAX at the Geffen Contemporary, MOCA, Los Angeles, Ruby scratched, scarred, and defiled Minimalist-derived sculptural forms until they confessed their sins, creating a claustrophobic installation that forged links between 1960s American Minimalism and incarceration. For his first solo show in China, Ruby returns to the period’s obdurate, block-headed muteness, finding an unspoken desire for power in the geometric, reductive, and “objective” approaches made famous by Minimalists and the critics that championed them. Here Ruby reinterprets these forms, along with historically contiguous modes of painting and sculpture, dragging the whole lot squarely into a present marked by desperate consumption, global war, and economic collapse. Ruby has a flair for the theatrical. With its star-spangled smile and dripping fangs, the soft sculpture *Double Vampire 6* (unless otherwise stated, all works 2011) evokes the Rolling Stones’s lascivious tongue-and-lips logo, high on meth and out for blood. It’s plagued by a grimacing hunger without conscience, sitting in a gridlocked SUV, gobbling Oldenburg’s burgers after a visit to art history’s drive-thru. Though undead, it must continue to feast: gluttony has become its eternal curse. The only word it knows is “more.” America’s endless conflicts in the Middle East are palpable here. An inclined, rectilinear form made of spray-painted aluminum, *Predator Monolith* rises from the floor as if it’s about to take flight. The work simultaneously suggests the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the wing or cockpit of a “hunterkiller” MQ-1 Predator, those unmanned aerial vehicles used by the US Air Force and CIA for classified bombings in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan...wherever the war on terror takes us. A related work, *Consolidator* (2010-2011), repossessed from Ruby’s junkyard of spray-painted geometries, is a Euclidian take on an all-in-one cannon-cum-coffin. *Predator Monolith* appears to be aimed at *Monument Stalagmite / Vampire Empire*. The work is a monument to erectile dysfunction: a sinewy, psychedelic tower of shiny red and blue supported by an unpainted board (a “crutch,” in Ruby-speak) on which is written, in prison-jumpsuit orange, the phrase “VAMPIRE EMPIRE.” Surrounding these works are three large bronze *Debt Basins*: sutured, roughly circular structures containing what look like artifacts unearthed from the site of a post-credit crisis Pompeii. Each of these reliquaries contains petrified dioramas —miniature landscapes of scavenged junk where stacked kilns become towering crematoria. Though they seem to have been sent from the tombs of an ancient, ruined culture in order to warn us, they arrive too late, foretelling a future that has already been set into motion. A series of three works called *JIGS* are solemnly arranged in an adjacent room: abstracted American flags made of rebar and displayed atop configurations of what looks like scrap metal—an improvised, solemn tribute to fading glory. With their overlapping bands, scribbles and blasts of hazy, electric color, Ruby’s enormous, spray-painted canvases play at transcendence through an irreverent, day-glo nod to Rothko’s color fields. They also give a shout-out to artists such as Jane Kaufman and Jules Olitski, who continued to expand the medium of painting during the mid-60s, despite the limitations touted by Minimalism’s critical cabal. The distinction in these works is not between figure and ground, but between a series of competing planes of atmospheric color that alternately float against the painting’s surface

and then recede like so many after-images. Their fuming magnetic fields draw viewers toward an imploding horizon. If the paintings sometimes suggest the luscious sunsets of Los Angeles, it's the LA of Synanon and the Crips, seen in hindsight through the rear view mirror of an apocalyptic present. Sterling Ruby is at the forefront of a generation of LA artists whose training enables them to successfully mine the legacy of recent sculpture, particularly Minimalism and its aftereffects—artists as different as Jason Meadows, Taft Green, Won Ju Lim, and Rachel Lachowicz. Ruby is also a storyteller, motivated by formal and ethical questions. It doesn't matter whether Beijing audiences can identify the art historical references in Ruby's work. His point is not to stage a solipsistic conversation about the art of the 60s, but to use his knowledge of these forms to speak to something far more pressing—the vampiric impulses of an undead empire, one that continues to devour resources because it cannot be laid to rest. To present this work in Beijing, the political heart of an economically ascendant country widely prophesized to be the next global superpower, couldn't be more fitting.

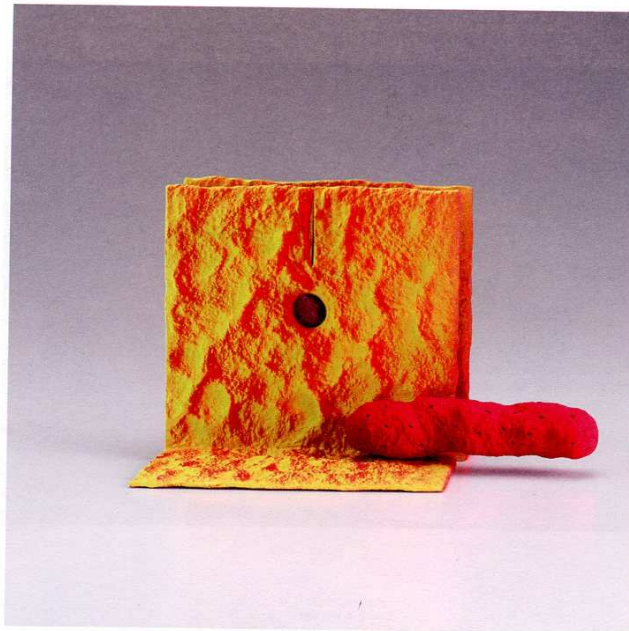
DAVID SPALDING is an art writer and curator based in Beijing, China.

Sterling Ruby, « Custom Clay », *Kaleidoscope*, n°12, octobre - novembre 2011, p. 44-49

a contemporary magazine / ISSUE 12 / fall 2011

# KALEIDOSCOPE

HIGHLIGHTS: RON NAGLE



## CUSTOM CLAY

Associated with both the California Clay Revolution and San Francisco's hot rod culture, RON NAGLE talks with a colleague about postwar painting, unpretentious restaurant-ware and the craftsmanship of his parents' generation.

interview by  
STERLING RUBY

This page, from left:  
*Chez Monieu*, 2009; *Knights of Franconia*, 2008

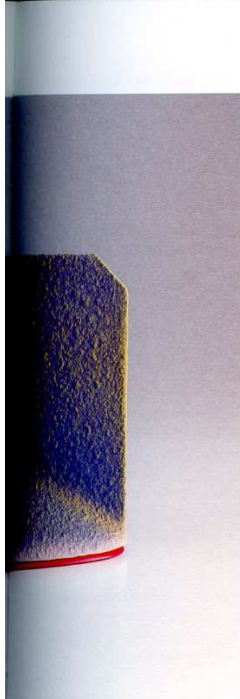
Next page: *Psychodynamics*, 2011

Page 46, from top:  
*Do Process*, 2011; *Extended Bender*, 2008

Page 47, from top:  
*Knights of Franconia*, 2008; *Blue Weeorama*, 2009

Photos: Don Tuttle  
All images courtesy: the artist





**ARTIST'S BIO**

RON NAGLE (b. 1939) lives and works in San Francisco. Solo exhibitions of his work has been presented at the Mills College Arty Gallery, Oakland; the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; the Natalie and James Thompson Gallery at San Jose State University; the Frank Lloyd Gallery, Los Angeles; the Rena Branstein Gallery, San Francisco; and Galerie Pierre Marie Giraud, Brussels. His work has also been featured in group shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

**CURRENT & FORTHCOMING**

RON NAGLE will have a solo exhibition at the Rena Branstein Gallery, San Francisco, until October 15. Galerie Pierre Marie Giraud will present his work in December as part of Design/Miami and the in April 2012 in Brussels. A monograph on his work was recently published by Silvergate, Inc. He has also recorded a new album, *She Lied*.

**HIGHLIGHTS: RON NAGLE**



I AM SITTING HERE LOOKING AT A YELLOW WORK OF YOURS THAT I OWN CALLED *WALL STREET GERBIL*. IT HAS HAD A PLACE IN OUR HOUSE FOR A FEW YEARS NOW, AND I ENJOY IT QUITE A BIT. THERE HAS BEEN A LOT OF DEBATE OVER WHETHER THE SMALL HANGING PROTRUSION IN THE MIDDLE IS A NOSE OR A DICK. I WAS WONDERING IF, AS A PERSONAL FAVOR, YOU COULD SHED SOME LIGHT ON THIS...

I wasn't thinking of that particular protrusion as a nose or a dick. My intention is to make images as ambiguous as possible so that viewers can create their own story. But for your own peace of mind, the protrusion has nothing to do with a nose. I would think of it as some kind of growth coming off of a field. I think the main influences on this kind of image, which occurs occasionally, are warts, skin tabs or moles, but I never make things too specific.

SINCE WE'RE ON THE TOPIC OF TITLES, I KEEP THINKING THAT A LOT OF YOUR TITLING IS DIRECTED TOWARD NAMING OR GIVING A KIND OF SUBJECTIVITY TO YOUR OBJECTS.

You are correct in thinking that my titles are often an attempt to vaguely personify the inanimate. My assistants and I usually have an on-going list of titles. We then put these against a group of pieces until we find one that makes some sort of sense at a vague associative level. Wordplay, non sequiturs and free association of imagery all come into play in the titles, but don't actually affect what I make. I name my pieces like you would name your kids. I particularly love the way some words fit together phonically, which must come from my background as a songwriter. Without being too heavy-handed, most of my titles have an element of humor and, frequently, darkness. I will often hear a phrase that catches my attention and I'll write it down because it struck some humorous note for me. For example, there was a guy from the utility company who, after performing various services, asked me to fill out a form evaluating his performance. He instructed me to

"circle excellent." This cracked me up, and there will be a piece coming soon called "Circle Excellent."

YOUR SENSIBILITY FOR '50S POST-WAR AESTHETICS SEEMS MORE IN LINE WITH ARTISTS SUCH AS H.C. WESTERMANN OR BILLY AL BENGSTON AS OPPOSED TO PETER VOULKOS OR JOHN MASON. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS REGARDING THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM AND THINGS LIKE THE HOT ROD OR KUSTOM CULTURE MOVEMENTS DURING THE EARLY STAGES OF THE CALIFORNIA CLAY REVOLUTION?

Even though I am strongly associated with the California Clay Revolution, the majority of my influences come from sources other than ceramic artists. I first delved into the well-crafted object when making model airplanes as a kid. I saw these guys at the rec center making Japanese fighter planes out of orange crates, sanding the wood down to a fine finish, sealing off the surface, painting the planes with Testors Dope hobby paint, and then meticulously gluing the components together. That same mentality still exists in my work. When I was making model airplanes with my father, he would always tell me two things: "Sand with the grain" and "Never do a job half-assed." As much as I rebelled against the majority of his teachings and opinions, those two seemed to stick. After this, I was fully engaged in the hot rod culture in San Francisco and had a '48 Ford Coupe, which had forty coats of British racing green lacquer, sanded with fine sandpaper between each coat to create a richness and depth that couldn't be achieved without that kind of fanaticism and attention to detail. I still think that there are cars from the past, both custom and production, that are more interesting than most sculpture.

I came from San Francisco, but I couldn't relate to the Bay Area figurative school, so I made pilgrimages to L.A. to see shows at the Ferus Gallery as often as I could. There's an aesthetic, in scale and execution and surface, to which I could relate quite strongly. You mentioned Billy Al Bengston; I was unquestionably greatly influenced not only by his use of the airbrush to apply paint, but by the incredible sense of color in his paintings of the mid-'50s. Of all the California clay "revolutionaries," my main influence

#### HIGHLIGHTS: RON NAGLE

was Kenny Price, whose discipline, sense of craft, and integrity have been major influences on my work.

With a few exceptions, I have a great deal of disdain for the "ceramic world" and its preoccupation with material, process and trite humor. I am much more drawn to painting. In my younger days, I looked a lot at Tàpies, Morandi, Albers, de Kooning, Rothko and Twombly. I always felt the aesthetic aspirations of painters were on a much higher level than those of the ceramic crowd. That being said, I am crazy about almost all ceramics from the Momoyama period in Japan (in the late sixteenth century) and American 1940s restaurant-ware, because of its lack of pretense.

I'M NOT SURE IF YOU ARE TIRED OF TALKING ABOUT THIS, BUT I JUST FOUND OUT THAT YOU DID ALL OF THE SOUND EFFECTS FOR *THE EXORCIST* (1973). WHAT WERE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE SCENES AND YOUR TECHNIQUES FOR PRODUCING THE SOUND FOR THEM?

I'm never tired of talking about this because it's one of the best jobs I ever had. I was working with brilliant professionals in a rarified environment where I could do anything I wanted and get paid for it. The film's director, William Friedkin, wanted the sound to be "bigger than life" so that even the smallest details were magnified. I was given a portable tape recorder to record anything that popped into my head, which could potentially be used in the film. The sounds for the beginning of the movie were organic, such as the sound of a single bee in a jar tuned a hundred times to create a threatening din. That was combined with the sound of pigs being slaughtered along with some ambient machine noise that leaked into the recording. I had no idea what I was going to do with this combination of sounds once it was assembled on multi-track tape, but when it was played against the opening scenes, it seemed to work. The director flipped for it and I got the job.

One scene that stands out is when the priest goes through the window. The sound was created by smashing many, many window props and recording the smashing at various distances, as well as extending the tinkling and falling of the glass to just a little more than real time. That one window crash consisted of about forty one-inch pieces of tape spliced together to make one long crash. Later on, it occurred to me that much of the stacking or layering used in

the recording process is not that dissimilar to my approach for glazing sculpture: I fire my ceramics many times and use layer after layer of glaze, underglaze or china paint to create the color. At least that is what I did until very recently. I am now using auto paint that has been matted out to paint on bisque ware. This usually requires fewer layers for the same effect, and it is a much more direct way of working. It is very satisfying to see how certain color combinations come alive immediately, before my very eyes, without having to wait to open the kiln every morning. It is just more like painting, which is something I've been trying for all along. I am seriously considering making my next group of work out of hollow cast plastic, using clay only to create the first immediate image and taking a mold from that.

I AM ALWAYS AMAZED AT YOUR GENERATION'S CRAFTSMANSHIP SKILLS. DO YOU THINK THAT THIS COMES FROM A TIME WHEN EVERYONE LEARNED HOW TO FIX AND MAKE THINGS PROPERLY? YOU FIRST LEARNED CERAMICS FROM YOUR MOTHER, AND THEN MOVED INTO JEWELRY-MAKING. WHAT WERE THE GENDER ASSOCIATIONS AT THIS TIME FOR SOMEONE WORKING IN CERAMICS AND JEWELRY?

My father was a businessman by profession, but he could make or fix almost anything, so the idea of making objects was instilled in me early. My mother was also a very skilled seamstress. I am like many people of my generation, whose parents made or fixed stuff because they came out of the Depression.

Craftsmanship, for me, does not only represent slick or finished work. It is any technique that makes the finished piece believable. I started off as a jeweler because it was considered a very hip thing to do during the Beatnik period. During that time, the majority of contemporary jewelers were men, whereas ceramics was still thought of as something that little old ladies did. It wasn't until the studio pottery movement and then Voukos that ceramics took on a macho image. When I started using things like store-bought glazes, china paints and decals, and began slip casting, it ran contrary to this macho image. Let's not forget that it was Kenny Price who took these small cup and vessel forms and started bringing bright color and subtlety to contemporary ceramics.

## HIGHLIGHTS: RON NAGLE

CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT YOU MEAN WHEN YOU CALL YOURSELF A "WHITE DEVIL FORMALIST"? IS THIS THE SAME AS BEING A "PRECIOUS ASSHOLE"?

Being a "White Devil Formalist" and a "Precious Asshole" are two separate, but similarly glib, responses to classifying myself. "White Devil Formalist" is a sarcastic way of saying that I am a white male whose work doesn't necessarily have literal meaning. "Precious Asshole" means that I am drawn to small-scale intimate work by artists such as Morandi, Vermeer, Price, Cornell, Albers and Albert Ryder.

Having taught at the college level for fifty years, I've become very cynical and, in fact, resentful of political correctness, French theory and the what-does-it-mean crowd. By and large, I learned to detest academia and its left-brained approach to the arts. People forget that all of the aforementioned issues are matters of fashion and not necessarily the truth.

I come from a music background and I apply the same sensibility to both making and experiencing art. It all comes down to what it feels like, what it conjures, what associations a great piece of work can have on a vaguely, dare I say, magical level. I make no separation between high or low, pop music or oil-painted masterpieces. I would just as soon hear "River Deep, Mountain High" as look at Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*. They both do the same thing for me. I told my daughter to go to the Met and see the Turner show. She said, "Ike Turner?" ◇

### AUTHOR

STERLING RUBY (b. 1972) is an artist who lives and works in Los Angeles. He has received an MFA from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. His work has been featured in exhibitions at Sprüth Magers, Berlin; Xavier Huikens, Brussels; GAMeC, Bergamo; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

This page, from top:  
*Pegleg Bates*, 2011  
*Dr. Bob Cobbler*, 2008

Photos: Don Tuttle  
All images courtesy: the artist



« 21 Questions for Artist Sterling Ruby », [Artinfo.com](http://Artinfo.com), octobre 2011

## 21 Questions for Artist Sterling Ruby

Published: October 11, 2011

**Age:** 39

**Occupation:** Artist

**City/Neighborhood:** Los Angeles, CA

### What project are you working on now?

I am working on a soft-sculpture exhibition for the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, organized by Katya Garcia-Antón, which opens in February 2012. I'm also finishing a show titled EXHM / BC for the Frac Champagne-Ardenne, in Reims, in May 2012, working with Florence Derieux on this one.

### Your solo show, **VAMPIRE**, is currently the first exhibition by a Western artist at Pace Beijing, and one of the first selling shows by a Western artist in mainland China. What do you make of that distinction?

I'm not sure what this means, to tell you the truth.

### Why do you think they chose you?

I was very excited visiting Beijing for the first time in 2008 — there was an energy that the city had that the artists seemed to be feeding off of, it reminded me of the first time I experienced Los Angeles. I became fascinated by China's speed and scale. It seems somewhat cliché but there really is an excessiveness and power in Beijing. The invitation to exhibit came from Leng Lin, the Pace Beijing director. We have a good rapport, and I admire what he's done.

### You are known for jumping from one medium to another, which is a rare approach among Chinese contemporary artists, who tend to cultivate signature styles. How has your work been received by the Chinese audience?

So far the reception of the exhibition has been good. The idea of Chinese contemporary artists cultivating signature styles is misleading. I don't believe that Chinese artists are any more unidirectional than, say, American artists. That assumption might be based on the obsession with media, auction prices, and specific works. I have been to Beijing eight times over the past couple of years and realize now after getting to know many artists there and having done frequent studio visits that my perception prior to going was wrong. Someone like Zhang Xiaogang is primarily known for his paintings because of the auctions, but he has an incredibly diverse practice, which also includes sculpture, collage, and printmaking. This is something that I would not have known without visiting his studio and meeting him. I really like the work of Song Dong, whose 90's performative roots continues to inform his interdisciplinary practice. Even Li Songsong has made sculptures. The younger generation of Chinese artists is also working through this figurative/narrative (pre-Cultural Revolution) paradigm, which seems to be the West's narrow definition of Chinese contemporary art.

### You also have a show up currently at Andrea Rosen Gallery where your work is displayed alongside that of Lucio Fontana. Is there another historical artist with whom you would like to share a show?

I would love to curate a show around Jay DeFeo's "The Rose" and Bruce Conner's assemblage works like "The Bride."

### What's the last show that you saw?

Paul Schimmel's phenomenal "Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974-1981" at L.A. MOCA.

### What's the last show that surprised you? Why?

Tatsuo Miyajima's "Ashes To Ashes, Dust To Dust" show at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art. The LED counters, projections and sculpture were so crystal clear and hypnotic. I loved watching this optically trippy set of works and thinking about their Buddhist-Existentialist subject matter. I like the fact that as long as the equipment continues to run, the works perpetually have a life of their own. I forgot to ask the Ullens folks if they turn it off at night.

### Do you make a living off your art?

Yes.

### What's the most indispensable item in your studio?

The Hitachi CR18DL 18V 3.0Ah Lithium Ion Reciprocating Saw.

### Do you collect anything?

I collect art and pottery.

### What's the last artwork you purchased?

I recently acquired Taryn Simon's "Ski Dubai, The first indoor ski resort in the Middle East, Sheikh Zayed Road, Dubai" (2005) and Robert Mapplethorpe's portrait of the Baltimore writer "Cookie Mueller" (1978).

**What's the first artwork you ever sold?**

I sold my first sculpture in 1999-2000 while living in Chicago. I was paid \$500, which is what my rent was at the time. I spent \$700 to make the sculpture. I bought the sculpture back from the collector a few years ago. I'm glad to have it in my possession again despite having lost money both times.

**What's your art-world pet peeve?**

There are many, but I tend to keep them private now.

**Do you have a gallery/museum-going routine?**

Not really, I try to see what I can... I tend to see more shows when I travel.

**What's the last great book you read?**

I just finished "How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk" by Faber and Mazlish and Murakami's "A Wild Sheep Chase."

**What work of art do you wish you owned?**

I wish I owned Georg Baselitz's "The Big Night Down the Drain" (1962-1963).

**What would you do to get it?**

Almost anything, and I mean "anything".

**What international art destination do you most want to visit?**

Egypt — I want to see the pyramids.

**What under-appreciated artist, gallery, or work do you think people should know about?**

Three photographers: John Divola and friends Sarah Conaway and Melanie Schiff. I think Mara McCarthy's gallery, the Box, is exceptional.

**Who's your favorite living artist?**

I have always been a fan of Chris Burden, I've gotten to know him personally over the past few years and really admire his way of doing things. He's up there for me.

**What are your hobbies?**

I'm trying to get Young Buck out of his contract with 50 Cent so that he can finally have a real follow up to 2004's "Straight Outta Ca\$hville."

Ana Finel Honigman, « L is look and learn: Sterling Ruby », *i-D*, été 2011, p. 252-253

## L is look and learn: Sterling Ruby



"Freedom, to me, is always about being able to set up my own parameters and to have a private space in order to work through them." **STERLING RUBY**

**STERLING RUBY** is talking before the opening of his solo show *I AM NOT FREE BECAUSE I CAN BE EXPLODED ANYTIME*, and curated space Selections: Morris, Trockel, Holzer + Pink at Berlin's prestigious Sprüth Magers gallery. "Freedom, to me, is always about being able to set up my own parameters and to have a private space in order to work through them," the artist explains. Ruby's definition of freedom is monastic, independent and philosophical yet his art constitutes a public examination into the limitations on our freedoms imposed by governments and society. Ruby's work focuses on extreme cases where individuals' liberty is curbed or undercut for explicitly stated reasons. His subject matter includes marginalised subcultures, maximum security prison populations, modernist architecture, graffiti, warfare, and urban gangs. Yet, his work also evokes the insidious ways that true freedom is reduced in all our everyday lives. While his subject matter tests the perimeters of restraint and restrictions, Ruby's aesthetic is eclectic and free-spirited. He explores freedom's limitations in his apparently unconstrained paintings, collages, metal, bronze, ceramic, fiber, urethane and formica sculptures. Critic Steven Pulmood, in an article for Berlin's *032c*, appropriately describes Ruby as a "one-man Bauhaus." Ruby's skillful mix of medium and ideological interests substantiate this description. With his academic background in agriculture and experience working construction, Ruby is especially capable of producing physically imposing and articulate structures that stimulate viewers' unease through their off-put scale and physicality. Drips of neon paint and off-putting sharp points are signature elements of Ruby's art. His sculptures and canvases are huge. They are intentionally intimidating. Their purpose is to remind viewers of their own physical fragility and their ideological fallibility. The most advanced example of his work was Ruby's 2008 *SUPERMAX* exhibition at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. In this grand sculptural installation, Ruby evoked the feeling of being incarcerated through its overwhelming size and threatening structure. Pieces of *SUPERMAX* form the foundation for his exhibition at Sprüth Magers, which extrapolates on his view of America's attitude towards freedom. "America's obsession with terrorism (in general) is a scapegoat for its own self-importance," he says. "What I mean is that our paranoia regarding terrorism is

used to give primacy to the ideologies of America ahead of other countries. This kind of US righteousness holds countries of 'difference' into account for not being similar to us. We also have a real predisposition to equate fighting with freedom, which creates a situation where conflict and liberation go hand in hand with one another." Ruby takes a characteristically crisp approach to these concerns with his focus on RWB, the colors of the American flag. In his experience, RWB signify America's eagerness to fight for an abstract notion of freedom without questioning its integrity or application. He describes his relationship with RWB as, "an autobiographical take on being an American and associating that color combination with American power." Ruby was born in Bitburg, Germany, to a Dutch mother and an American father, and was raised in Baltimore, Maryland and near Shrewsbury, Pennsylvania. He explains, "For most of my youth I grew up in rural Pennsylvania and quite often I would see shirts, bumper stickers and posters that read 'THESE COLORS DON'T RUN'. This slogan perfectly illustrates the symbolic attachment of Americans to the colors of the flag, and again there is that implied readiness to fight... it has always stayed with me." The mentality that Ruby describes reduces freedom to dogma whereas genuine freedom involves constantly re-evaluating the definition of being free. Ruby's attitude towards government intervention in our daily lives is: "Stay out... stay out and let us crash if we need to... I suppose that's not a real answer... my ideal for the American government is for it to allocate more funding and tax revenue towards mental and physical health, change the drug laws, raise education levels, revise prison and correctional standards, and reverse its continued escalation of funding for the military industrial complex. But this is difficult, we are such a large and diverse country, and we have come to be seen as the peacekeeper for the world. Which is very schizophrenic... you know. It often seems impossible to make this kind of change in the trajectory that we have had for so many years... we're fucked." Ruby's art visually represents the responsibility of all free citizens to question their condition. Although his work is aesthetically intense and his imagery owes much to graffiti's cluttered, grimey and gripping appearance, Ruby is fascinated by minimalism and incorporates basic aspects of a minimalist aesthetic in his art. His colors are juicy. His materials are extreme. And his



concepts are complex. Yet, his process involves a fundamental distillation of ideas into straightforward and direct designs. The tensions between the maximalist and minimalist elements in his art are actually easily resolved when one considers his reference-points, inspirations and intellectual investment in recent art history. "My first real introduction to minimalism was in grad school at Art Center, primarily through Donald Judd's writing, which seemed hierarchical," Ruby explains before articulating his democratic, postmodern approach to breaking barriers between movements and methodologies. He says, "I started to think about simple minimalist forms in urban environments and how often I saw them demarcated, as a kind of existential 'tagging'... you know, citizens trying to gain footing and legacy by placing their name on something with object presence... within their own community. Of course in Los Angeles this was primarily a gang initiated activity, claiming that a certain territory belonged to you. For me it seemed to be similar to Judd's possessive strategy 30 years prior... it is all about territory." The direct inspiration for Ruby's recent Berlin exhibition comes from a surprising hybrid between minimalism and graffiti. The chaos of street art and clean expression came together in a 1983 painting which personally inspires Ruby's art viewing and art-making. Ruby first encountered the phrase "I AM NOT FREE BECAUSE I CAN BE EXPLODED AT ANY TIME", as the title of a painting by incongruous collaborators: Jenny Holzer and Lady Pink. Although Pink and Holzer are both feminist art icons, their work is aesthetically and contextually opposed. Holzer is consummate art world darling whose minimalist text installations are welcome on public spaces, despite their confrontational content. In contrast, Pink was a pioneer of New York's graffiti scene in the 1980s. Her hyper-colorful, electrifying street art was especially powerful because a heartbreakingly pretty, soft-spoken girl from Queens produced it. After appearing in the 1982 *Wild Styles* documentary, Pink became the heartthrob for a generation of bad-boys and a real role model for hardcore, creative, girls. However, Ruby's initial attraction to the project occurred outside of his interest in graffiti and street culture. "I first saw these works in Munich at Sprüth Magers," he recounts. "Philomene Magers introduced me to this collaboration between Holzer and Pink, and I immediately fell in love with the series. Holzer is one of my

all time favorites, but her works are so clinical and polished. The Lady Pink graffiti images accompanied by Holzer's stenciled texts seemed much dirtier, less finished, almost illicit." These contrasts are also evident in work by Robert Morris, Rosemarie Trockel, the other two artists who Ruby cites as major intellectual sources of inspiration by having included them in his curated section at Sprüth Magers's Project space. "It's difficult to sum up and even more difficult to give credit where credit is due," Ruby describes of the four's influence on him. "Morris defied Judd's minimalism by making it psychological, physical, theatrical and personal. Trockel's work has been very important to me, she seems like the logical figure to continue the Beuys trajectory of alchemy, political, formal and healing processes of actual art making. Holzer is militant, she is unforgiving in her subject matter and I admire that a lot. Lady Pink is the exception here, I was interested in her work because of her use of spray-paint and her themes of sexuality, which you don't see very often in graffiti." With his emotional response to work rooted in an academic art-school tradition, graffiti's pure kinetic pleasures seem like an odd match. But Ruby's interest in street art is deeply embedded in his biography. "I've been influenced by urban environments for a while," he recounts, "particularly since I moved to Los Angeles ten years ago, this is not street art in particular, but more street expression, what happens in the streets as survival adaptation." Paranoia about survival, progress and change fuels the conservative parts of America, far away from the streets of Los Angeles, which inspire Ruby's overall investigation in RWB. Ruby avoids embodying the didactic thinking that he abhors by consistently mixing references and stimulating surprising sensations in viewers. Ruby's art offers no easy solutions to his concerns yet it does provide a reminder of art's potential to inspire critical thinking. "I definitely don't see myself as an anarchist," he says, "but coming up against external limitations is where the definition of freedom becomes less abstract. Being able to work the way I do, as an artist, seems like freedom...for sure."

[spruethmagers.com](http://spruethmagers.com)

**TEXT ANA FINEL HONIGMAN**

**PORTRAIT HEDI SLIMANE, COURTESY OF ALMINE RECH  
GALLERY, PARIS**

Brienne Walsh, « The Survivalist: Q+A With Sterling Ruby », Art in America, mars 2011

# Art in America INTERNATIONAL • REVIEW

## ***The Survivalist: Q+A With Sterling Ruby***

by Brienne Walsh 03/18/11

Coming from an artist known for working in an excess of media on a monumental scale, Sterling Ruby's current solo exhibition, "Paintings," at Xavier Hufkens in Brussels, is surprisingly single-minded. The show features 11 large-scale, abstract works that read like color field paintings, created using spraypaint. Ruby first tags his compositions in bright colors, and then goes over them in black—as if to deface his own work, hinting at the spectral presence of images and objects unable to break through to the surface. Full of mourning and acute claustrophobia, these tags become trapped forever in the dense web of demarcated area that is inherent in the confined space of a flat canvas.

We caught up with Sterling Ruby to discuss how "Paintings," the first of his three solo shows to open this year, fits into the grander scope of his oeuvre.

**BRIENNE WALSH:** Is this exhibition the first straight painting show you have ever done?

**STERLING RUBY:** Yes... Despite enjoying the act of painting so much, I was reluctant to only show paintings in a gallery space. It's rare for me to focus on one medium but I felt it was time for them to stand on their own. They've turned rather formal, abstract and have a particularly dark palette, because they've been worked over so many times.



Installation view, 2011. Courtesy the Artist and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels. Photography ©Allard Bovenberg, Amsterdam; Installation view, 2011. Courtesy the Artist and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels. Photography ©Allard Bovenberg, Amsterdam

WALSH: Your work is often related to post-minimalism because of the way it folds references to graffiti sub-cultures into form. How does that manifest in your paintings?

RUBY: The paintings that I have been making over the last four years initially took their cues from my observations of tagging, vandalism and the power struggles associated with gang graffiti. Now, as with a lot of recent work, I have been thinking about them less conceptually.

WALSH: In an exhibition that focuses on one medium, the titles of each painting bear added weight. I wonder if you could explain how you named each work, and what each of these titles stand for, both in these and in past exhibitions?

RUBY: The titles vary widely: sometimes they reference code for a series in a specific material or color combination. For example, the titles in "Paintings" are just numerical: "SP147," "SP148," etc. But in past exhibitions, I've used government abbreviations to imply pathology or order. I've used drug terminology, street slang, song lyrics, psychoanalytic vocabulary, art historical terms and of course personal experiences and acquaintances, which I suppose are very autobiographical. *Mr. Reuptake*, a bronze sculpture I made in 2010, was someone I used to know who sold ecstasy, so it's a portrait. Sometimes the titles simply describe the piece in a matter of fact way, like *Bus* (2010) or *The Masturbators* (2009).

WALSH: You've been described by Joao Ribas in *Flash Art* as being part of a "post-humanistic" generation of artists. It's not a term with a definition, but I wonder how it strikes you?

RUBY: "Post-humanistic" is too vague an idea to be a generational "movement"—so far, anyway. That said, I do think artists my age are fighting the symptoms of excess. In a way, I think of the post-human as the end result of our being overwhelmed by our own history, theories, politics, etc. My work reflects the paranoia or schizophrenia of that contemporary conditioning, which makes what I do survivalist in nature. I am also thinking that this is why so much straight formalist work is being made by so many young artists. For me, I see it as a therapeutic or healing process, after being trained in so much institutional theory. I did an interview recently listing some of my pet "posts": post-anxiety, post-cynicism, post-transgression, post-depression, post-war, post-law, post-gender...

WALSH: Your painting in this exhibition, and your work in general, strikes me as articulating a post-apocalyptic character. They're proposed relics of a post-nuclear age. Would you say that your work laments the current state of affairs in culture?

RUBY: *Anti-Print 3* (2005) has an image of a ceramic kiln. I continually return to the image of the kiln as a visual marker, because I see it as a metaphor for the current lamentation of the loss of sincere gesture and expression. Perhaps I feel as though we can't get it back, so all of these things become monuments. The series of "SUPERMAX" works, which were large sculptural pieces that were exhibited in 2008 at MOCA in Los Angeles, and the "2TRAPS" exhibition [at the Pace Gallery] in New York last year, attempted the same. Those works channel an American prison system that has no correction, only detainment. It's a parallel world to the one we exist in now. The bus and the cage in the "2TRAPS" show were like time machines for me. The prison bus transcends time depending on if it is taking you in or out of this parallel institutional system. Those works simultaneously embodied a tarnished past, a stagnating present, and warnings for an apocalyptic future.

Linda Yablonsky, « Best in show/Sterling Ruby's Caged Heat », The New York Times Style Magazine, 11 février 2010



THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 11, 2010, 1:15 PM

## Best in Show | Sterling Ruby's Caged Heat

By [LINDA YABLONSKY](#)

G.R. Christmas/Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York “Pig Pen” and “Bus” by Sterling Ruby, on view at PaceWildenstein in Chelsea.

*Best in Show follows the peregrinations of critic and novelist Linda Yablonsky, author of [The Story of Junk](#), and a front-line chronicler of art-world events and exhibitions.*

Art is such a subjective pursuit that the next best thing to living with it may be having it to yourself in public. Sterling Ruby's “2 Traps,” two new monumental sculptures on view at [PaceWildenstein](#) in Chelsea, offer such solitary experience in spades. “Bus” looks at first like a cross between a heavy metal band's tour vehicle, a prison van outfitted for “Mad Max”-style siege and a nightclub from hell. Actually it is all three – and more. The bus once belonged to the Los Angeles Police Department, which used it to ferry inmates to and from California prisons. A rock band then acquired it and painted its fiery logos on the exterior. Before Ruby acquired it from the city's metro transportation system, the bus also did service as a mobile salesroom for stereo sound equipment. The L.A.-based Ruby, who is 38 and a subscriber to *Bus Conversion* magazine, made his bus a gothic icon. He put in black vinyl banquettes of the sort common to party limos, and enclosed them behind the kind of security gates used by California homeowners in bad neighborhoods. To complete its transformation as a metaphor for a dark night of the soul, he installed multiple subwoofers and shiny chrome globes, as if it were a traveling disco engulfed in an eerie silence. “Bus” functions as a metaphor for the suppression and release of personal demons that becomes even more pronounced with “Pig Pen,” the other monster piece in Ruby's show. Looking like a minimalist structure conceived by Sol LeWitt in a straitjacket, or a live chicken market absent its inhabitants, it is made of 68 locked steel cages that replicate solitary confinement cells in San Quentin. Though hardly a thing of beauty, the work is somehow as sexy as it is forbidding – and best experienced alone.

Followers of Ruby's work, which includes gloppy but fascinating ceramic vessels, enormously phallic polyurethane stalagmites, minimalist cubes "defaced" by graffiti and photographs painted with red nail polish, may be surprised by the claustrophobic extremes of the "traps." But Ruby, whom [the Times's Roberta Smith](#) has called "one of the most interesting artists to emerge in this century," is nothing if not unpredictable. After all, his last show in New York, "The Masturbators," was a video installation showing nine male porn stars doing what they do best — and mostly failing at the task. A similar sense of shame, rather than remorse, runs through both "Bus" and "Pig Pen." Ruby thinks of them as time machines — places that stop time the moment you enter and alter it when you come out. Such rearrangement of the senses is exactly what art delivers — like nothing else.

*"Sterling Ruby: 2 Traps" continues through March 20 at PaceWildenstein, 545 West 22nd Street.*

Catherine Taft, « Interview with Sterling Ruby », *The Journal*, 2008, p. 172-183

## **Sterling Ruby in Conversation with Catherine Taft**

**Interviews took place between spring of 2007 and fall of 2008**

### **Los Angeles, California**

**CT: I'd like to address a major aspect of your work that I find extremely relevant right now, in part because of George Bush's deplorable international relations, and that is the idea of *trauma*. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is an increasingly visible fallout of war here in America. Do you think this will lead to a new, marginalized generation marked by mental illness and disorder?**

**SR:** Trauma, okay... how about starting with the writers Robert J. Lifton and Dominick LaCapra; in the 1960's, Lifton, with Erik Erikson, formed the Wellfleet Psychohistory Group focusing primarily on the psychological incentives of war. He has since become, in my opinion, the foremost expert on cults and thought reform, and has identified recent generations as embodying an attitude of apocalyptic uncertainty. LaCapra, on the other hand, wrote two books--*History and Memory After Auschwitz* and *Writing History, Writing Trauma*--that examine how societal violations throughout history have launched a kind of aftermath in which individuals are confused about who they are or who they think they should be. Both of these authors have considered at length a kind of "trauma theory" by means of psycho-historical studies. They explain trauma through multi-generational viewpoints and expound on how history has essentially become a kind of baggage or burden. The baggage impedes a society and as the timeline of history gets bigger, so does each generation's burden. We feel ashamed of the atrocities committed in the past, but continue equal atrocities in the present and look to the future with extreme doubt- no correction, just continuum. The way I understand this is that we perceive ourselves universally as both victims and survivors and this view will get increasingly worse as time goes on.

I think that our generation, and those after, are going to have to redefine the term "outsider," not because it is mental, uneducated or outside of the system, but because we will start to lament what the term "inside" actually means. When history and conditioning disallow this generation to feel autonomous, then inevitably we will feel as though we have lost control over that autonomy. The idea that this generation's particular beliefs and actions are innate and unique to



its identity will inevitably become trumped by historical precedence, our baggage. The outcome of this is a deep, sad pit, but the aspect of surviving it is perhaps the “white light,” a new era.

Now onto America, which I love and I am a citizen of, despite being born in Germany and having a Dutch family; as an American, it is hard to see trauma without a certain kind of bias. I just got back from China and every morning, afternoon and night CCTV would air protests and riots from all over the world. It was so in your face and unedited as if intentionally shown to flood the viewer. Countries like China are way more open to showing actual traumatic situations whereas America seems to let its citizens believe in a remote state that just doesn't exist. Deep down, I know it is there, but instead, I get my fix of reality from 50 Cent and MSNBC's [t.v. show] “Lockup.” America revels in a kind of cultural slumming; we identify with bad behavior more than any other country and it is almost expected for an American to have the capacity to love trauma, as if it were a kind of longing.

**And your interest in and use of the Supermax penitentiary--a high-security prison system operating widely in the United States--drives home this complex, American ideology, correct?**

Yes. The idea of Supermax is completely allegorical to a present extreme within American culture. The Supermax penitentiary system is predominantly an American idea, which is a penal organization with no correction. The Supermax code is only concerned with detainment and I think for us to have gotten to a point where our hardest criminal cases are simply being detained as opposed to corrected is disheartening. Using this as an example or an allegory of contemporary society is like a beacon of the end. At the same time what happens in Supermax could also be looked at as an afterlife or sanction of extreme behavior. Perhaps you can only become Supermax from within Supermax. I look at Supermax as the closest thing I can imagine to hell.

**Some of these issues relate to the work of Mike Kelley, who often discusses his practice in terms of psychological trappings, like repressed memory syndrome, and its relation to the institution. *Day is Done* [2004-2005], for example, takes up the educational complex as a highly controlled system and attempts to recreate repressed memory from within that system. Not surprisingly, you studied with Mike at the “Educational Complex” of Art Center [College of Design in Pasadena, California]. In what ways does Mike's teaching enter into your practice?**

I feel now that Mike and I were pretty close, although most of the love came from other teachers like Richard Hawkins, Diana Thater, Patti Podesta, Dr. Laurence Rickels and Bruce Hainley. I was Mike's T.A. [teaching assistant] for two years and was very fortunate to have had his feedback during his last terms of teaching. There's something that I really love about Mike's desire to interpret the read of his work; I mean, he writes so often and he uses his writing to put forth a strict definition of what his work is about. We would talk about that a lot. It has worked for him and he is a pioneer of that kind of artist discourse. Art Center was focused on the over-arching canon of explaining one's work and, for me, it became evident that that wasn't what I wanted to do. I didn't want to explain myself all the time because the inception of my work is never necessarily predetermined and has habitually been about free-form psychology, both from personal as well as group-social platforms. I think that art shouldn't be proven; it's like poetry in a way. I find that, for me, it is more pleasing to have an idea that is malleable over time as opposed to defining what the work is in advance, making sure that everyone adheres to that specific explanation. Of course, much of this did come out of a very Mike Kelley scenario, which is to reject the institution where one studied.

The first and foremost rejection I had during school was focused on the Donald Judd writing, which seemed to be forced down my throat in an attempt to define minimalism. I got really bent out of shape about the holy-grail bullshit associated with such past movements, which is where my inscribed geometric work comes from. I don't like subscribing to a strict definition of an art movement. That just seems narrow and illustrative and it prevents the possibility of abstracting a pre-proposed movement. Yet, I think this is happening so often, particularly in graduate art programs that focus on theoretical writing as opposed to studio practice. It seems evident that a symptom of the contemporary art college is the illustration of written theory via visual art that in turn gets swallowed up by the recondites of the institution. This became extremely problematic for me. After I graduated, I became way less interested in proven or already indoctrinated ideas.

**Your rejection of Judd is clearly articulated in two recent bodies of work, *Superoverpass* [2007, Foxy Productions, New York]--a monolithic, Tony Smith-like form that occupied an entire gallery, floor to ceiling--and *Supermax* [2008, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles]. The latter was a rather oppressive installation of massive, pedestal-like sculptures, geometric constructions, abstract paintings, collages, drawings and fabric forms. These moves are further amplified and become most incisive in your current *Grid Ripper* installation [2008, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e**

**Contemporanea, Bergamo, Italy], which threatens to crowd the viewer out of the gallery architecture completely. In each of these series, your objects' surfaces are defaced with graffiti, dirtied by finger prints, and smeared with paint. Were these painterly yet debased marks conceived of as outright expressions against minimalism?**

The fact is that I am not anti-minimal, but rather I would prefer to alter my minimalism so that it does not adhere primarily to the ideas of "objecthood." I am rallying against the way minimalism was taught to my generation through Judd's writing, but I still find minimalism completely relevant. When I look at all of the geometric ideas associated with prison reform, for example, I tend to believe that personification in minimalism has a legitimate psychological value. I have also been enamored with Tony Smith's humanist geometry and Louis Kahn's universal values; I wound up implementing their viewpoints into my own minimalist developments.

This was also related to the way I was seeing gangs and their cryptic demarcations throughout Los Angeles. It was a connection of territorial foundation; Judd had defined what minimalism was and had become the spokesperson for the movement and so, in my mind, this and gang graffiti were quasi-merging. I was looking at the gang related activity of marking territories; gang members would inscribe Formica, aluminum and steel objects if to claim authorship/ownership over anything placed within their vicinity; gangs were even defacing things that looked like minimalist works, objects and public-monuments...like a thief. I've always wanted to do that to a Judd.

**This idea of claiming ownership over someone else's property plays out in a very different way in one of my favorite videos you produced at Art Center. It depicts you alone in the studio interacting with a sofa cushion that you found on the street; you rip into it as you coo like an infant; you put your body inside of the fabric and even press your tongue to the stuffing. At one point you become frenzied, flailing about as you repeat the phrase "stranger's cushions." It's very primal.**

This is a video called *Found Cushion Act* [2004] and it's edited into a series of episodic takes, like operatic staging. When I first moved to Los Angeles, I had no car and would walk or take the train everywhere I went, which ultimately put a narrow trajectory on where I could go. I saw a ton of bedding on the streets and after months of looking at these makeshift-sleeping quarters, I started to imagine an intimate connection to the person who had slept there. Not being able to touch the bedding was like this boundary that I

wanted to cross. That was the first piece I made with this idea in mind. I would always walk by these particular cushions and I never knew whose bedding it was. When it became evident that no one was sleeping there anymore, that the transient had become transient, I took the bedding and brought it into the studio. I staged this scenario of trying to get myself to touch it and I wound up licking it. In essence, becoming intimate with a stranger's discarded belongings and not knowing what the ramifications were was the crossover into an unknown intimacy. I think a lot of people thought that this was sort of exploitative, but I didn't mean it to be.

**Understanding the history of video art and how artists began using the medium in their studios, this doesn't seem exploitative at all. Your performance is in the spirit of Bruce Nauman's *Manipulating a Florescent Tube* [1969] or *Wall-Floor Positions* [1968]. It also reminds me of a little-known Paul McCarthy work, *The Couch* [1973], in which McCarthy kicks his way through a found couch in a sort of birthing sequence. Like these performative videos, your piece seems to embody anxieties about physical, social and psychological space.**

It really "was" like a Nauman. I wasn't exposed to a lot of video art until I started my employment as a secretary at the Video Data Bank [in Chicago]. Prior to Chicago, I studied at a four-year foundation program in Pennsylvania where I did figure and still life drawing for eight hours a day. Needless to say, there was no video art in the curriculum. After being promoted from the VDB front desk, I learned how to edit and wound up dubbing endurance based performance art for eight hours a day. I was holding the Acconci, Benglis and Nauman master tapes and it was a nice opportunity to learn the history of video art in parallel to watching the history of performance art. You see these types of physical repetitions that don't have anything to do with acting. I guess they do seminally, but in terms of a "production" it was so low key. I got obsessed with the stuff that Charles Atlas did with Merce Cunningham for similar reasons. I suppose that having the Portapak in your studio allows one to work through actions over and over again; it becomes a psychological sequence of repetition. So, *Found Cushion Act* started with that and led to my getting the guts to lay into this material with origins I knew nothing about.

**In more recent videos, you remove the figure and allow language to perform in place of the body. I'm thinking specifically of *Dihedral* [2006], which replaces the body with abstract imagery and a heavy, theoretical passage narrated in a distorted voice.**

That was the first time that I had re-written a text to fit my own agenda. I took the Roger Caillois text, *Mimicry and Legendary*

*Psychasthenia* [1935], which gives details on how certain insect species mimic their surroundings, yet if put into a space with any type of geometry--like an apartment or train station--their identification with such space becomes fucked up. Caillois focuses on the definition of a dihedral as a point in dark space that has the power to lead one into oblivion, or the way I read it, into schizophrenia. I re-wrote this to make the subject an individual who is uncomfortable with his “dihedral” or his male organ, one who can’t mimic the necessary behavior of having the organ. To be more direct, I wrote it about pre-operative and post-operative transgender surgery and the trials and tribulations associated with the decision to undergo surgery, as well as the after-shock of not having the organ any longer. There were also nail polish collages; each had one portrait of a pre-operative or post-operative transgender.

At the same time the idea of rewriting this text based on a dick-drive was a minimalist statement on gender, how masculine all of this had become. The “Interior Designer” show [2006, Marc Foxx, Los Angeles], which included this video, took monoliths--geometric erections, which stood for male-identified objects--and chopped them down. That show was all over the place, but the video embodied the intersection of all of the artworks as an episodic route to the surgery.

**These collages, part of your *Trans Compositional* series [2005], seem to push gender, and particularly femininity, to an aggressive and at times violent extreme. Another instance is in your photo collages, *PHYSICALISM THE RECOMBINE 1 - 6*, [2006], which center on the exaggerated, butch musculature of female body builders. Would you consider feminism another manifestation of trauma or even a victim/survivor power structure for both men and women?**

I don’t think that I have it completely figured out yet. Obviously, gender and feminism are big issues for me. Half of my education in Chicago was feminist theory. As I mentioned before, I was working at Video Data Bank, which was founded in the late sixties by two feminist- political activists who recognized that video, as an artistic medium didn’t have the same male-dominated history that painting or sculpture had. Many saw it as the most liberated medium that could be put into distribution and its reproducibility meant that artists could get it out there quickly as a message platform for their political and gender causes.

Feminism is very confusing and it was problematic for me to have major diversions over the split between what radical feminists and reformist feminists have written. [Luce] Irigaray seems to be the one who has been malleable, for me, on bridging such divides. There is a

huge separation within feminist theory on the topic of whether or not male-identification could be subject to a “correction”. As far as pushing gender, it feels as if there is simply no room for masculinity or male-identified work within most feminist attitudes and perhaps that is the way it should be. I don’t actually feel as though I have the right to use any of it as an excuse to make extreme work, yet I often think about it in terms of associating guilt with the work.

I suppose that I am often seen through my work’s subject matter as an aggressive person. Five years ago I had a child and began to, on the exterior, lead a very domestic life, where in the past I lived a visibly transient routine and often took pleasure in sexually transgressive behaviors. I try my hardest not to wear my heart on my sleeve, which is something that other male artists of my generation seem to exploit as public personification. But there’s been a big change between how I exist now and how I existed in the past and I think that brought on a lot of confusion or wanting to display confusion over male-identification.

**Let’s talk about your ceramic sculptures, which seem to be the most “analogue” or craft-driven works you produce. What led you to work with ceramics?**

I started doing ceramics a little over ten years ago in Chicago. I had a number of friends from the Art Institute of Chicago who were studying Art Education, which by and large resembled art therapy and we talked about these clay-kneading exercises that they would have to do. So I decided to take a public, “free-form” ceramics class as a way of debunking the idea that clay was the most approachable medium in which art therapy could occur. It was a weekend class made up of some grandmothers, this accountant guy, and a cluster of troubled teens. The first month of the class had no structure whatsoever and it was amazing. We were introduced to cone temperatures, glazes and different clay compounds, but had almost no instruction on how to build form. What happened in terms of a universal form blew my mind; everyone at that point made the same shape of work; it was completely hand wrought, anthropomorphic, hypersexual, brutal work; a lot of holes, a lot of extensions. Everyone used the same glazes and was over-glazing everything. When the kiln was opened after a firing, it was hard to identify whose work belonged to whom, but it was all super psychedelic and fucked up in terms of the aesthetics. As the class continued and more technical information was introduced, the work became more diverse and less interesting to me. To this day, I have kept pretty close to those original kinds of forms discovered during this class.

A number of conclusions came out of this experience. One was that clay was, in all actuality, a perfect medium for therapeutic experimentation. The clay's malleability was so fierce that people could adapt it to no end and it was a really easy medium to get other people to get into. Another conclusion was that once fired, this clay becomes a kind of monument to its prior malleability or expression. As soon as it hits the kiln it takes on the status of what once was, and it becomes a truncated or frozen gesture.

**And even a castrated gesture. But would you consider this “freezing” or “truncating” a kind of veneration of gesture instead? After all, the expression of gesture is becoming eternally held in form, like an honorific embalming brought about by a sort of ritual.**

The way I look at it, the process of truncation via the kiln, which produces the monumental object, is in connection with a violation or trauma; it halts the clay from ever being liberated again, and is without a doubt related to bereavement. Someone recently wrote a review of the *Supermax* show suggesting that I was capable of making work that contemplated cruelty in a positive way. I was really pleased that the critic understood that the sincerity I am trying to get at in my work comes from a contemporary sadness; that the suffering associated with this sort of current lamentation is real, that it arises from an insight knowing that we are conditioned subjects, not innate subjects. The ceramic sculptures are the most obvious example in that direction. **Are you familiar with the ceramics movement in Los Angeles in the late 1950s and 60s? Artists like Peter Voulkos, John Mason and Kenneth Price helped put ceramics on the critical radar as a bridge between craft and fine art. They defined a West Coast abstract expressionism through clay that was at odds with the New York School and completely unique to Southern California.**

Helene [Winer] made the comparison between my work and theirs two years ago and gave me a very old John Mason book. I am ashamed to say that this was the first time I had seen his work. To me, Voulkos and Price were perhaps more visible figures whom represented the Southern California craft-as-sculpture obsession. There is a good documentary by Chris Felver called “California Clay in the Rockies”, which focuses on a kind of idol love/worship towards Voulkos during the 1950's “West Coast clay revolution”. I had an interest in Otto and Gertrude Natzler prior to arriving in L.A. The Natzlers' were ceramicists who moved from Austria to Los Angeles in 1938. Otto became an instrumental figure in glaze experimentation during the mid century and Gertrude is considered one of the finest potters of all time.

By the fifth or sixth year of making ceramics I became familiar with the European “Fat Lava” movement. I recognized that the look of my ceramics were similar to this kind of mid-century dishware. My mother used to make these cups that were covered in massive amounts of running glazes, she wasn’t a potter at all, she would get these pre-made greenware cups, glaze them and have them fired at a store in Baltimore, Maryland. She was from the Netherlands and I now realize that she was probably nostalgic for the “Hot Lava” stuff that had been made in West Germany during the 60’s and 70’s. In a way I think that she made those because she was homesick; this would be around the late 70’s and we had just moved to the States from Germany. She continued to do this well into the 80’s after we moved to a farm in Pennsylvania. She eventually got a potters wheel and attempted to throw some things, although not much came out of it. Now that I am on the topic of nostalgia, I think that it plays the biggest role in why artists of my generation are turning to ceramics, but I also tend to believe that this is a pretense for something much deeper that every artist or critic our age is going through currently.

**Perhaps there is nostalgia to return to the utility of craft. Even Voulkos argued that his sculptures were essentially vessels--cups or pots--before they were fine art. Along these lines, would you consider your ceramic sculptures to be utilitarian?**

I recently decided that the motive for using images of knives and ceramic vessels in my collages--besides the sex references--were that these items had changed over time from utilitarian objects to collectable, aesthetic objects. I was acquiring catalogs and books that had knife and ceramic pottery collections that were being preserved by private collectors and museums. These collections had no “use” value anymore; they only had signs of once having a utilitarian worth and that that was part of their charm. It was as if these knives and vessels had been taken out of one functional world and placed into another world that worshipped primal attributes. Needless to say the attributes of a bygone era that we currently find so intriguing are also condemned as “irreverent.” This is again a kind of monumentalization, where the past gets lamented for its clear-cut simplicity. I feel as if this idea gets played out in all the different scenarios within my work. For example, the prison topics are completely associated to this; the biggest dilemma in prison reform is in trying to identify the “bad versus sick” subjects. It is always contingent upon a timeline system that recognizes past, present and future relations. This becomes a complication when certain inmates who are seen as irredeemable or sick cannot identify with time as correction... “LAUGH THEN, CRY NOW, DIE LATER.”