

# SPRÜTH MAGERS BERLIN LONDON

## *Spectrum Ripper*

### **Sterling Ruby**

**Sprüth Magers London    october 09 - november 15 2008**

Monika Sprueth and Philomene Magers are delighted to announce Spectrum Ripper, the first UK solo exhibition of L.A.- based artist Sterling Ruby. Ruby speaks for a generation of artists who seek to re-inscribe the experience of physicality, sexuality and death into minimalist art. Spectrum Ripper is the last of a three-part Ripper trilogy, which began in September 2008 with Zen Ripper at Galleria Emi Fontana in Milan and Grid Ripper at GAMeC in Bergamo.

Based on US vernacular, the Ripper series is concerned with the deconstruction ('ripping') of Modernist tropes, such as 'the grid' as the ultimate harmonious geometry, 'Zen' as a religion-cum-interior design movement, and the colour spectrum as a trope for the metaphysical.

In the main gallery space Ruby has installed a pair of large paintings and two sculptures made from Formica and covered with industrial spray paint. The gritty urban aesthetic of these materials contrasts with the minimalist form of the works. The combination of contemporary street graffiti and modern sculpture allows Ruby to question the canonical position and alleged lack of subject matter of American minimalist art, as espoused by Donald Judd. Fascinated by prison architecture and banal urban design, such as the humble bus stop, Ruby argues that minimalism has in fact always been inherently political. It was in fact Ruby's move from Chicago to L.A. in 2003 that marked a shift in his practice: Ruby made the link between the demarcation of an art movement and the tags of L.A.'s street gangs. As a mode of territorialisation street graffiti became an important inspiration for Ruby.

In Spectrum Ripper Ruby seeks to undermine the dogma of 'pure' minimalism, but he also challenges the idea of the colour spectrum as a symbol of enlightenment or heightened state of consciousness. By infusing black into purity of the colour spectrum, Ruby contaminates the romantic notion of the spectrum as 'innate'. Pale yellow, turbid pink, and acid green become the means by which Ruby erodes the geometric rigidity of the sharp-edged sculptures. Ruby's work is a metaphor for the oppositional relationship between the 'conditioned' and the 'innate'. This exhibition is the result of the artist's struggle to negotiate between these two states of existence. Once described as treading a fine line between 'decoration and tragedy', Ruby's art explores death and our fear of it. Profoundly influenced by Ernest Becker's 1973 book *The Denial of Death* Ruby constantly seeks to break our allegedly natural desire for heroic beauty and its sculptural symbol, the monolith. In this respect, the two sculptures in the gallery can be interpreted as fallen symbols of male power. By bringing down the monolith, Ruby not only castrates the phallic meaning often associated with this form, but he also quotes Mark Rothko's Menil Chapel by turning the erect sculpture into a functional

device: the bench.

Installed two years before the publication of *The Denial of Death* Rothko's Chapel sought to enable a spiritual experience, which Becker considered to be at a crisis point at the time. While Ruby seeks to explore Rothko's legacy and the theoretical implications of Becker on modern society, his art is also full of mischief and *laissez-faire*, which makes it subtle and highly engaging.

Sterling Ruby was born in Bitburg, Germany in 1972. He finished his master's degree in 2005 at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, CA and received his bachelor's degree in 2001 from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. 2008 solo exhibitions include *Supermax 2008* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, *CHRON* at The Drawing Center, New York and *Kiln Works* at Metro Pictures in New York. Recent group exhibitions include: *Substraction* at Deitch Projects, New York (2008), *The Moscow Biennale for Contemporary Art* (2007); *The California Biennial* at the Orange County Museum of Art; and *Red Eye: LA Artists* in the Rubell Family Collection, Miami (2006). Ruby's ceramic works will be included in the upcoming exhibition *Dirt On Delight* at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, which will then travel to the Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis. A forthcoming monograph will be published by JRP Ringier at the beginning of 2009. Sterling Ruby lives and works in Los Angeles, California.