

ICA/Boston and ICA Miami Co-Organize First Comprehensive Museum Survey of Sterling Ruby

***Sterling Ruby* Features Over Two Decades of Artist's Career through Painting, Collage, and Sculpture,
Highlights Iconic Series Alongside Unseen Early and Recent Works**

Expansive Exhibition Opens at ICA Miami this November, Opens at ICA/Boston in February 2020



Sterling Ruby, *ACTS/WS ROLLIN*, 2011. Clear urethane block, dye, wood, spray paint, and formica, 60 1/2 x 62 1/2 x 34 in. Collection of Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami. Gift of The Hinson Family, by exchange. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer. Courtesy Sterling Ruby Studio.

Boston, MA/Miami, FL – August 7, 2019 – Today, the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston (ICA/Boston) and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami (ICA Miami) announced the co-organization of *Sterling Ruby*, the first comprehensive museum survey of American/Dutch artist **Sterling Ruby** (b. 1972). Opening at ICA Miami on **November 7**, the survey features over 75 works that demonstrate the relationship between material transformation in Ruby's practice and the rapid evolution of contemporary culture, institutions, and labor. Spanning more than two decades of the artist's career, the exhibition features an array of works created in various mediums, from his renowned ceramics and paintings to lesser-known drawings and installations. The process of combining disparate elements is central to Ruby's material reclamations, which serve as a form of autobiographical and cultural archeology. Curated by **ICA Miami Artistic Director Alex Gartenfeld** and **ICA/Boston Barbara Lee Chief Curator Eva Respini**, *Sterling Ruby* is on view at ICA Miami through February 2 and on view at the ICA/Boston February 26 through May 26, 2020.

"Though Sterling Ruby is distinguished for his prolific and experimental studio practice, there are many pressing thematic elements of his work that have yet to be fully considered," said Alex Gartenfeld, ICA Miami's Artistic Director. "By tying together the evolution of Ruby's innovations in production and the development of his fascination with American culture, this show proposes new ways to consider Ruby's impact. Further, *Sterling Ruby* reflects ICA Miami's commitment to providing an institutional platform for the most significant voices in contemporary art."

“Ruby’s work embraces America’s icons, from the Stars and Stripes to American craft culture, even as it delves into the dark forces at play today. It addresses a wide range of issues—from the political underbelly of the landscape to material investigations of handmade traditions—and in the process, Ruby reexamines notions of beauty, value, and the history of sculpture itself. In our divisive era, Ruby’s uneasy combinations of materials, forms, and ideas offers the perfect analogy for our agitated times,” said Eva Respini, the ICA/Boston’s Barbara Lee Chief Curator.

Since his earliest works, Ruby has investigated the role of the artist as outsider. Critiquing the structures of modernism and traditional institutions, Ruby addresses the repressed underpinnings of U.S. culture and the coding of power and violence. Craft is central to his inquiry, as he explores traditions from Amish quilt-making to California’s radical ceramics tradition, shaped by his upbringing in Pennsylvania Dutch country. Organized by chronology and medium, *Sterling Ruby* considers the artist’s explorations of these themes across the many materials and forms he has utilized throughout his practice.

Sterling Ruby begins with the artist’s collages, drawings, and prints, which continuously explore the personal and cultural subconscious through a kind of “illicit merger.” Early in his career, Ruby often employed two-dimensional mediums to elaborate on recurrent subjects including the nation’s prison-industrial complex and maximum-security prisons. In a large series of works, among them *CDC at PDC Study* (2008), Ruby combines images of prisons and pastes them on top of orange paper, referencing the color of correctional facility uniforms. The exhibition also features two-dimensional works that demonstrate Ruby’s captivation with the American home, as seen in *Quilt/Body Snatchers* (2004), in which he overlays a still from the B horror film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978) on a Pennsylvania Dutch quilt.

The exhibition additionally considers the tension of expression and repression that defines our recent history, particularly through Ruby’s monumental urethane works, which he began making in response to the scale limitations of ceramics. For the artist, these sculptures serve to disrupt the minimalist structures of museums—another perceived product of institutionalization. The exhibition includes several works from Ruby’s *Monument Stalagmite* series, towering sculptures created by a time and labor-intensive process. This includes *Monument Stalagmite/The Shining* (2011), which features dripped red dye that takes on the appearance of blood and refers to an iconic scene in Stanley Kubrick’s film adaption of Stephen King’s novel *The Shining* (1980).

Further exemplifying the artist’s interest in craft, *Sterling Ruby* includes a selection of the ceramics for which he is widely known. Influenced by his mother’s collection of pottery and dishware, Ruby’s ceramics represent the artist’s probing of figurative forms, gesture and immediacy, and display hand-worked characteristics, but are not intended to serve functional purposes. *The Basin Theology* series, on view in this exhibition, contain key elements of previous destroyed ceramics that have broken in the kiln, an example of Ruby’s spirit of invention and reuse.

Another of Ruby’s signature materials, spray paint, is represented across several series and represents the artist’s blurring of high and low culture. Influenced by graffiti culture, works from the artist’s series of monumental spray-painted canvases, entitled *SP*, are reminiscent of landscapes—frequently evoking sceneries plagued by environmental destruction. While *SP131* (2010) implies the image of a vibrant sky tarnished with toxic pollution, *SP242* (2013) appears as a horizon enveloped with smoke, as seen in developed industrial landscapes or during devastating wildfires in California.

Ruby's soft sculptures—formed from various fabrics stuffed with fiberfill—occupy a complex place within the artist's practice, invoking craft and flag-making as well as horrific cartoons. As a result of growing up in a family of seamstresses and his exposure to quilting communities in rural Pennsylvania during his childhood, Ruby began reusing scraps of leftover textiles to create his *VORTEX*, *LEATHERETTE*, *QUILT* and *FLAG* series. The exhibition places these works in dialogue with other soft sculptures fashioned from American-flag patterned fabric, including *DOUBLE CANDLE (6992)* (2019) and *Double Vampire* (2013). A new work created from this fabric, entitled *FIGURES. PILE. (6991)* (2019), displays a pile of interwoven figures that appear as a monumental corpselike form.

The exhibition additionally features Ruby's metal works, including his *MS* series—architectural monuments invoking violence through their gun-like forms. Made from scrap sheet metal and reinforcement bars, these forms further demonstrate Ruby's ethos of material reuse. Also included are Ruby's *STOVES*, drawing inspiration from his childhood experience of tending his family's wood-burning stove in rural Pennsylvania, as well as from foundry workers' furnaces. The series is also an example of performative elements in Ruby's sculpture, as he embeds hand-crafted elements on each work through rough welds, patches of liquid bronze, and patina.

Concluding the exhibition are examples from Ruby's series, *ECLIPSE* and *SCALES*, which both reuse residual materials found throughout Ruby's studio. These series are examples of Ruby's interest in reviving modernist art visuals and infusing them with reused items. For instance, *SCALE (4586)* (2013) and *SCALE (5415) S.R. CLOR.* (2015) feature disposable items, such as cardboard boxes, plastic bottles, and paint-splattered jeans, installed as a mobile—a form associated with modern artist Alexander Calder. Taking up classic tropes of modernism throughout his work, Ruby aims to intervene in historical forms of image-making and manufacture in order to test their urgency today.

Sterling Ruby

ICA Miami

November 7, 2019 – February 2, 2020

2nd and 3rd Floors, Special Exhibitions Galleries

ICA/Boston

February 26, 2020 – May 26, 2020

Exhibition Support

Exhibitions at ICA Miami are generously supported by the Knight Contemporary Art Fund at The Miami Foundation. Major support at ICA Miami is provided by Xavier Hufkens, Inigo Philbrick, Andre Sakhai, and Carlo Bronzini Vender. Additional support at ICA Miami is provided by Michelle Simkins and Jason Rubell.

About *Sterling Ruby* Sponsors

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SPRÜTH MAGERS **GAGOSIAN** Xavier Hufkens

Additional support for the Boston presentation is generously provided by Stephanie Formica Connaughton and John Connaughton, Jean-François and Nathalie Ducrest, Bridgitt and Bruce Evans, James and Audrey Foster, Ted Pappendick and Erica Gervais Pappendick, David and Leslie Puth, and Charlotte and Herbert S. Wagner III.

Exhibition Catalogue

Sterling Ruby will be accompanied by a lushly illustrated scholarly catalogue edited by Alex Gartenfeld and Eva Respini, with an interview by Isabelle Graw. Published with DelMonico Prestel, the catalogue will feature essays that consider Ruby's work amidst the contemporary art production and visual culture of the last 30 years.

About Sterling Ruby

Sterling Ruby is a leading contemporary artist whose work has been presented in solo exhibitions at Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2008); Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergamo (2008 – 2009); Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome (2013); Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland (2014); and the Winter Palace at the Belvedere, Vienna (2016); among many others.

Ruby's work is featured in museum collections worldwide, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Canada; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and Tate Modern, London.

Ruby graduated in 1996 from the Pennsylvania School of Art and Design, Lancaster. Ruby received his B.F.A. in 2002 from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, and his M.F.A. in 2005 from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena. Born in 1972 on Bitburg Air Base in Bitburg, Germany, he currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

About the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston

Since its founding in 1936, the ICA has shared the pleasures of reflection, inspiration, imagination, and provocation that contemporary art offers with its audiences. A museum at the intersection of contemporary art and civic life, the ICA has advanced a bold vision for amplifying the artist's voice and augmenting art's role as educator, incubator, and convener for social engagement. Its innovative exhibitions, performances, and educational programs provide access to contemporary art, artists, and the creative process, inviting audiences of all ages and backgrounds to participate in the excitement of new art and ideas. Spanning two locations across Boston Harbor, the ICA offers year-round programming at its iconic building in Boston's Seaport and seasonal programming (May-September) at the Watershed in an East Boston shipyard.

The ICA is located at 25 Harbor Shore Drive, Boston, MA, 02210. The Watershed is located at 256 Marginal Street, East Boston, MA 02128. For more information, call 617-478-3100 or visit our website at icaboston.org. Follow the ICA at [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

About the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami

The Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami (ICA Miami) is dedicated to promoting continuous experimentation in contemporary art, advancing new scholarship, and fostering the exchange of art and ideas throughout the Miami region and internationally. Through an energetic calendar of exhibitions and programs, and its collection, the ICA Miami provides an important international platform for the work of local, emerging, and under-recognized artists, and advances the public appreciation and understanding of the most innovative art of our time.

Launched in 2014, ICA Miami opened its new permanent home in Miami's Design District on December 1, 2017. The museum's central location positions it as a cultural anchor within the community and enhances its role in developing cultural literacy throughout the Miami region. The museum offers free admission, providing audiences with open, public access to artistic excellence year-round. www.icamiami.org

The Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami is located at 61 NE 41st Street, Miami, Florida 33137.

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