

# The New York Times

## STERLING RUBY



Bread basket, 2007, Sterling Ruby

Sterling Ruby is one of the most interesting artists to emerge in this century. That's only eight years, of course, but the claim may stick. He makes obstreperous, richly glazed ceramic vessels that suggest charred remains; totemic sculptures webbed with mucousy, macramélike drips of resin; large, dark collages dotted with constellations of tiny images of artifacts; and drawings, photographs and short videos.

Mr. Ruby draws from ancient art, graffiti, sports, science fiction and the persistence of primitivism on all fronts. Minimalism and other forms of authority are frequent targets. Most important, he situates all this in a continuum of material, process, history and emotion.

Mr. Ruby, who lives in Los Angeles, stormed New York last spring with an inchoate two-gallery show at Metro Pictures and Foxy Production. "Superoverpass," a big white Formica arch à la Tony Smith — expertly finished but grimy and incised with graffiti — turned Foxy into an eerie mausoleum. Metro displayed the drawings, several increasingly phallic totems and a large ceramic mortar with pestles swimming in glaze. It all fulfilled the battle cry of his most widely quoted anti-poster: "Finish Architecture. Kill Minimalism. Long Live the Amorphous Law."

Now Mr. Ruby is back with a pair of slightly quieter, clarifying exhibitions. The Metro show is

### Chron

*The Drawing Center/ The Drawing Room*  
35 Wooster Street, SoHo  
Through Wednesday

### Kiln Works

*Metro Pictures*  
519 West 24th Street, Chelsea  
Through March 29

his first devoted entirely to ceramics, a medium he took up about 10 years ago, evolving an innovative, violent variation of "hand built" that suggests post-Schnabel Peter Voulkos. The 14 works straddle the line between decoration and tragedy. Some suggest votive objects adorned with misshapen amphora handles. Several contain small bowls, as if you were supposed to scoop up their bright, slurred glazes. "Bread Basket," splattered with shiny oranges, black and blues and a crusty white, resembles a child's car seat or a football helmet after some cataclysm.

At the Drawing Center Mr. Ruby has filled the small gallery with drawings, collages and photographs, as well as two enormous, Formica-covered, benchlike monoliths whose incisions include "cop" in enormous letters. Here glaze is replaced by red nail polish on paper, and the artist's vessels are primarily tattoo-covered bodies seen in photographs.

Especially revealing are two photographs of accidental ceramics. One shows a bowl-like ring of sandbags splashed with tar and filled with trash. Another shows a chewed-up square of plywood, splattered with bright colors and standing in a yard: it's a low-tech paintball barrier.

ROBERTA SMITH