

# The New York Times

## Sterling Ruby and Lucio Fontana

*Andrea Rosen*  
*525 West 24th Street, Chelsea*  
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Pairing Sterling Ruby and Lucio Fontana is an inspired idea. Fontana (1899-1968) was the Italian avant-gardist known for cutting neat, graceful slices into his own monochrome paintings. He violated sheets of copper, too, leaving them bent, scratched and ragged along the edges of the incisions. Three examples from 1962 are included here. Less well known and compelling in a different way are his ceramics: pedestal-size, expressionist sculptures of vigorously worked and beautifully glazed clay. In two representations of the Crucifixion from the 1950s the literally torn and gouged clay and the figuratively

tortured flesh of Jesus become one.

Mr. Ruby, who was born in 1972 and lives in Los Angeles, toys freely with multiple styles. He has the attitude of a grunge rocker with a head full of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. A big, bracingly ugly bronze sculpture resembles part of a subterranean archaeological dig. Displayed on pedestals, flat-bottomed, crudely hand-molded clay basins contain broken pieces of other basins and pours of brightly colored glazes that resemble toxic chemicals and tarry sludge. Large, framed collages are mainly made from pieces of stained and splattered

cardboard that appear to have been used initially as studio floor covers.

Fontana and Mr. Ruby share a mission to uncover violent psychic depths that genteel idealism covers up. Yet in so doing, both exercise acute conceptual and aesthetic sophistication. (Mr. Ruby might be the love child of the artists and university professors Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley.) They are mandarins masquerading as barbarians in the wishful service of convulsive beauty.

*KEN JOHNSON*