

Sterling Ruby
SP Paintings
May 10 – June 10, 2013

For its inaugural exhibition, Nahmad Contemporary is pleased to present *Sterling Ruby: SP paintings*. The exhibition marks the first time Sterling Ruby's SP paintings ranging in production dates will be collectively displayed. This survey exhibition aims to feature paintings that illuminate the evolution of this outstanding body of work, as well as to reveal the scope of Ruby's exploration of the medium.

Ruby was first exposed to aerosol art at a young age, when he visited an exhibition on New York graffiti art in Rotterdam. This nascent exposure would not come to material fruition, until 2007 when Ruby first produced large-scale spray paint paintings. Their inception and initial execution was indebted to a fascination with gang tagging, and more particularly to acts of street expression and urban demarcation. Living in Los Angeles, Ruby was surrounded by civic structures whose surfaces were inscribed with a myriad of hegemonic and collective epithets.

Although the paintings were foregrounded by these preoccupations, over time they evolved to become less conceptually oriented and in turn far more self-aware. This can be seen in the formal developments of the canvases, as many works can be understood as drawing attention to the very act of painting itself. The diversity of linear orientations, the density of the layers of paint, the coalescence of hues, the viscous splatters and the worked sense of the canvases all emerge to underscore the economy of painting. The process of naming the works lends itself to this idea as well, as each title contains both the medium and a numeric code, thus the title is understood to be a thematic cue.

A central focus of Ruby's is the joining of opposing concepts and cultural phenomena – he refers to this practice as *illicit mergers*. The paintings strike a chord with the work of some Abstract Expressionists, and in particular Mark Rothko. This aesthetic allusion can be seen in the sheer size of the paintings, and their gestural and immersive qualities. When drawing Ruby's focus together with the paintings visual echoing of canonical movements, an illicit dichotomy of sacred and profane arises. Ruby is referencing the visual language of venerated artists, but is expressing himself through the medium of spray paint, which holds specific cultural connotations. To this end, Ruby is reappropriating pre-existing artistic practices, but giving them new form and meaning while maintaining his idiosyncratic practice.

The paintings have intensely mesmeric and atmospheric qualities, and due to their size and compositional features are monumentally dynamic. One feels as if

they are almost hypnotized, and being pulled into an expansive field of color, light, texture and shape. There is a sense of vitality to the paintings, by which extended viewing might bring about new discoveries, and metamorphosis.

Sterling Ruby was born in Bitberg, Germany in 1972 and lives and works in Los Angeles. He studied at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. Select solo exhibitions include: *Soft Work* [travelling exhibition] Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, France, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Genève, Switzerland (2012), *VAMPIRE* The Pace Gallery, Beijing, China (2011), *The Masturbators* Foxy Production, New York (2009), *SUPERMAX 2008* Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2008), *Chron* The Drawing Center, New York (2008), *Killing the Recondite* Metro Pictures, New York (2007).

A fully illustrated catalogue will be published for the exhibition.

For further information, please contact the gallery at info@nahmadcontemporary.com

NAHMAD CONTEMPORARY, 980 MADISON AVENUE, THIRD FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY10075