

Works by 'interdisciplinary artist' on view at Kukje Gallery

Sterling Ruby creates recycling room of artworks based on used materials



Sterling Ruby poses for a photo at his solo exhibition at Kukje Gallery in Seoul on Thursday.

Ahn Hoon/The Korea Herald

By Lee Woo-young

Los Angeles-based artist Sterling Ruby is one of the hottest artists in the global art market today. His spray painting fetched between \$35,000 and \$45,000 in 2008 and tripled in price by 2011 to an estimated \$100,000 to \$150,000 in three years.

Kukje Gallery in Seoul has brought major works by the artist — selected as one of the “50 Next Most Collectible Artists” by the U.S. art magazine Art+Auction last year — in a solo exhibition in Seoul, following on the heels of another exhibition of works by American contemporary artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, which ended on March 31.

The artworks include sculptures, collages and spray paintings that show Ruby’s diverse use of materials.

“I am an interdisciplinary artist. I work with different materials,” said Ruby at the guided press tour at the gallery on Thursday.

“But you will understand that it’s kind of related in the context of sociological and historical meanings, and most importantly for me, it is a biographical subject,” he said.

The artist creates a “recycling room,” filled with artworks using materials he found in his studio or that were used in the making of artworks. The materials range from cardboard boxes and other materials from his studio to his clothes and ceramic shards blown up in the kiln.

Large basins filled with ceramic shards collected over the past 12 years are on display.

“Ceramics have always been a craft movement, but also art therapy in terms of psychology and pathology,” said Ruby.

The group of ceramic shards reminded him of archaeological sites or excavation sites, and gave him a sense of redemption in repositioning them into a new form.

Ruby also found archaeological form in the cardboard boxes used to protect the floor of his studio during the making of his large urethane sculptures.



“SP235,” 2013 by Sterling Ruby Courtesy of the artist and Kukje Gallery

By arranging the boxes as seen in Picasso’s works, he created a new collage series.

The artist, who was drawn to charms of Amish quilts when he was 8, presented another collage work that holds the elements of quilts.

“This is my version of quilts,” said Ruby, who used his clothes and his assistants’ clothes for the collage work.

The spray-painted works are associated with an endemic problem of the U.S. urban scene — gangs and the state’s struggle to disassemble them.

Inspired by symbols of gangs indicating their territory, Ruby creates an atmospheric layering of spray paints on canvas without using brushes.

The shades of different colors, which the artist said is inspired by Claude Monet’s paintings, became motifs of Christian Dior’s creative director Raf Simons in the makings of all-over print dresses for Dior’s fall 2012 couture show.

The Sterling Ruby exhibition continues through May 10 at Kukje Gallery in Jongno, Seoul.

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