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“Sterling Ruby: 2Traps” at Pace Wildenstein

By: Simmy Swinder



*Sterling Ruby, "2 Traps." Photo by G.R. Christmas. Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York.
Each sculpture measures approximately 10' x 9' x 40'*

Sterling Ruby is a contemporary artist with an impressive repertoire. In a New York Times article, critics Roberta Smith, Ken Johnson, and Karen Rosenberg described Ruby as “one of the most interesting artists to emerge in this century.” His current show at PaceWildenstein certainly supports this claim.

Walking into the gallery, I instantly noticed the smell emanating from the steel sculptures. “2Traps” consists of two monumental sculptures that look like freight containers titled Bus and Pig Pen. Bus is a vehicle turned ready-made sculpture while Pig Pen is composed of stacked cage-like cubbies, all but one sealed shut. Both sculptures are overbearing in their size, material, color, and yet invite one to enter.

Visitors can step inside Bus, sit at the very end where subwoofers and shiny chrome sound equipment are affixed in rows on either side. From this seat, you look down the long dismal, dark passage, to the front of the bus, where you can't see through the windshield; it's opaque and caged, just as all other window in the bus. You feel trapped, locked in, as if being inside the set of a horror movie. It makes you wonder, who was here? Who would be kept here? What happens to them? What happened to them? Pig Pen also begs these questions, but the title and manner in which cages are arranged makes it clear of the sculpture's pragmatic purpose. This vicarious understanding of Pig Pen was supplemented by Bus, which personalized and humanized the feeling of being confined in a cell, displaced, and subjected to torture.



Sterling Ruby, Bus, mixed media, 2009. © Sterling Ruby. Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York.

The exhibition of the two works is emotionally engaging and visually engrossing. Like being present within, and without, any architectural space, the visit captures all senses and is fully experiential. It draws one in, makes one feel and wonder, and see with more than just one's eyes. The juxtaposition of objects for human and animal entrapment, and forced transportation, left me questioning contemporary practices, in particular animal cruelty and human genocide. Sterling Ruby accomplished what every artist should strive for: to leave an inextricable impression on a public.

“Sterling Ruby: 2Traps” runs through March 20th
545 West 22nd Street
Take the C or E train to 23rd Street and/or the M23 bus to 11th Avenue
Gallery Hours: Tues-Sat, 10-6
Gallery website: www.pacewildenstein.com