

Press Release

Sterling Ruby

Atropa

January 30–March 28, 2026

Public Reception: January 29, 6–8pm

Sprüth Magers, New York

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Sterling Ruby's multifaceted practice, spanning painting, sculpture, textile, ceramics and video, is defined by its sustained engagement with our chaotic present. For over two decades, his work has explored themes of violence, confinement and societal pressures through a consistent focus on material and artistic process. Sprüth Magers is pleased to present *Atropa*, a solo exhibition of all new works by Ruby at the New York gallery, running concurrently with Master Drawings New York. Named for the nightshade genus (commonly known as deadly nightshade) that references Atropos – the Greek Fate who cuts the thread of life to bring death – the exhibition engages with the paradox the plant embodies: lethally toxic yet medicinally valuable, a convergence of destruction and restoration. This duality permeates the focused presentation, which features graphite drawings, small-scale pen-and-ink studies, and expressive watercolor collages alongside bronze flowers. Capturing flora in various states of bloom and decay, these pieces evoke the vanitas painting tradition and its meditation on mortality and impermanence.

The graphite drawings (all 2025) represent the culmination of a series Ruby began thirty years ago, characterized by their palimpsestic quality. Executed with raw energy and painstaking labor, these works prioritize instinctive gesture and automatic drawing over conventional representation. Arising from dense layers of frenetic lines, erasing and smudging, rhythmic textures coalesce into botanical forms, offering fragile glimpses of nature within their turbulent surfaces. Building upon Ruby's obsessive mark-making, the pen-and-ink drawings (2024–25) deploy delicate, rapid lines that burst into dark, compulsive voids, from which petal and leaf shapes materialize. Rendered with relentless intensity, each motif collapses the boundary between what is seen and what is imagined – figuration emerging as a byproduct of the drawing process itself.

The watercolor collages extend the *DRFTRS* series (2013–present), in which fragmented photographic elements float through gestural painted landscapes. Here, blue washes establish atmospheric space against which a downed tree anchors the lower edge, demarcating a horizon line. This emphatic horizontality suggests stasis rather than the upward growth associated with vitality and life.

Two new *DRFTRS* subseries are included in the exhibition. In *SPLITTING (2025)*, distorted, monochromatic collaged images of nature reference a psychological defense mechanism where perception polarizes into binary categories – wholly good or bad, absent any nuance. Works such as *Hippy* and *Kissing Hippies* (both 2025) employ watercolor stains to conjure faces of embracing figures crowned with wreaths against neutral grounds, invoking counterculture iconography, particularly the flower as symbol, an element central to Ruby's broader visual vocabulary.

A new bronze series, *Bound Flower (2025)*, is the exhibition's sole sculptural component. Each unique work originates from a specimen cultivated in Ruby's studio garden – cut, dried and directly cast, the burnout process incinerates the flower, creating a bronze ghost of the original. Significantly, finished pieces retain the utilitarian infrastructure of their fabrication: gates and sprues through which molten metal flowed remain attached, functioning as constraints that bind the botanical form in a state of arrested time.

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Sterling Ruby (*1972, American/Dutch) lives and works in Los Angeles. Solo exhibitions include MAMO – Centre d'art de la Cité Radieuse, Marseille (2025), Sogetsu Foundation, Tokyo (2023), Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens (2021), Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2020), Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami (2019), Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2019), Museum of Art and Design, New York (2018), Des Moines Art Museum (2018), Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2017), Winterpalais, Belvedere Museum, Vienna (2016). Ruby's works are part of numerous museum collections, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, Centre Pompidou in Paris, Tate in London, Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Moderna Museet in Stockholm.

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