

STUDY #8
MONUMENT STALAGMITE/ P.T.A.C.
STERLING RUBY

STUDY IS THE GENERIC NAME for a series of focused case-studies of works from the David Roberts Collection. It involves a single work, displayed in a gallery. The work is studied in depth, from its techniques, origin and history, to its position in the artist's practice and the contemporary debates. The study is made available, in a folder on the bench.

AN ARTWORK IS A SYSTEM that cannot be reduced only to an object or an index (certificate, instructions, etc.). It also includes the histories (material and conceptual), the trajectories (physical or virtual) and the narratives (past or to come) generated by the artwork: this is what this programme will research.

TO STUDY IS TO DEVOTE TIME and attention to a particular subject, to acquire knowledge. It can also refer to a piece of work done for practice or an experiment. It is in this sense that we would like to pursue – not the transmission of knowledge or the act of contemplation, but rather an invitation to act.

STUDY IS NOT AN ATTEMPT to capture or seize but a methodology of encounter and the insistence on the provisionality as both form and content within the process of research. It is an exercise to respond to the infinite demand of the work. Not to bring forth any historical truth but to enter into a dialogue with the work.

IN THIS SENSE THE STUDY IS NOT FINITE, but demands the reader to take up multiple positions and viewpoints. More than anything, it asks the viewer to engage with the artwork by, at least, spending some time with it.

INTRODUCTION

MONUMENT STALAGMITE/P.T.A.C. is a sculpture by **STERLING RUBY** from 2012. It is composed of urethane resin, poured over a structure of wood, PVC pipe and expanding foam. The work was produced in Los Angeles in 2012 and entered the David Roberts Collection in 2013. Similar spray paintings and works from the *Monument Stalagmite* series were exhibited at *EXHM*, a solo exhibition of the artist's work at Hauser and Wirth London in 2013.

THE FIRST WORKS in the *Monument Stalagmite* series were made in 2005 and exhibited at Ruby's MFA degree show at Art Center College of Design, Pasadena in 2005. All works produced after and including the third work in the series (*Monument Stalagmite/Pink*, 2005) incorporate a wooden armature. They are made in a process of pouring that takes over two months. The bulk of the material is monochromatic (an 'offwhite'), colour is added in the very last layer, using tinting dye added to crystal clear urethane resin, producing a 'still-wet' glossy surface. The sculptures vary in colour and height, the largest being over five and a half metres tall. *Monument Stalagmite/CDC SHIV*, 2010 stands at 5.6 m, as compared with *Monument Stalagmite/P.T.A.C.*'s 4.9 m. Works from the series are held in the following collections: Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Orange County Museum, Newport Beach, CA; MART of Trento and Rovereto, Italy; MOCA, Los Angeles, CA; MOCA Miami, Miami, FL.

ALSO ON DISPLAY FROM THE DAVID ROBERTS COLLECTION, *SPCE (4036)*, 2012 is a work made of collaged material, paint and urethane on cardboard measuring 304.8 x 203.2 cm. Ruby's cardboard collages came about as a way of repurposing material used to cover his studio floor during the production of urethane sculptures such as the *Monument Stalagmite* series. The work is layered with roughly-cut cardboard geometries, imagery of celestial bodies and sci-fi machinery, an aerial image of a California state prison, packaging fixed to the surface (a pregnancy test and the medication Proventil HFA, used to increase air flow to the lungs). Finally, spattered paint suggestive of stars is juxtaposed with the dusty imprints of shoes.

SP229, 2013, spray paint on canvas, measuring 243.8 x 213.4, is one of Ruby's spray painting series began in 2007 as a response to the artist's interest in Los Angeles graffiti, particularly gang tags. Using a limited range of colours, the work's abstract surface of diffuse marks and streaks caused as the spray can is exhausted is punctuated by hints of photographic representation, including blurring and vignette. In this way the works echo the relationship between stalagmite and etched armature in the *Monument Stalagmite* series, by which a formal system is projected onto the artist's wider urban environment.



Monument Stalagmite/P.T.A.C., 2012

PVC pipe, foam, urethane, wood, spray paint and formica

494.7 x 99.1 x 160 cm

Courtesy the artist and David Roberts Collection, London

MONUMENTAL SADNESS

SINCE HIS DEBUT ALMOST TEN YEARS AGO, the work of Sterling Ruby (b. 1972, American Air Force Base in Bittburg, Germany; lives and works in Los Angeles) has confronted the viewer through a large variety of media, from ceramics to collages, videos, spray paintings and sculptures in a wide array of materials. The artist's crosscutting approach to techniques, his almost overwhelming visual output, initially disoriented critics and the public, but then they rapidly became the place for thematic and conceptual coherence that is as deep as it is rigorous.

MONUMENT STALAGMITE/P.T.A.C (2012), in the David Roberts Collection, London, is part of a broader series of works – all titled *Monument Stalagmite* – made through a slow process of pouring liquid urethane over an armature of PVC and foam. The liquid urethane is poured over a structure hanging from the ceiling and subsequent layers are accumulated over a long period of time (nearly two months for each sculpture), evoking both processes of geological sedimentation and instantaneous formation. The ensuing form, which closely resembles a stalactite, is then removed from the ceiling to which it was anchored and is displayed upright on a pedestal, so that it visually evokes a stalagmite. Liquid urethane is a material that has been part of Ruby's artistic production from the very beginning: works made with it were already present in *Monument to Interiority*, the thesis exhibition the artist held in 2005 at the Art Centre College of Design in Pasadena. This complex installation of various materials also included another of the artist's iconic types of works: ceramics.

THERE IS A DIRECT RELATIONSHIP between the use of ceramic and that of urethane, a relationship worth exploring as it magnifies the subject of 'monumentality' that is central to understanding Ruby's work as a whole. In fact, the large sculptures in the *Monument Stalagmite* series can be viewed as an extension and consequence of the formal and conceptual preoccupations the artist began to explore during the years of his academic training, when he began to experiment with ceramics in amateur courses. While Ruby was initially attracted to the associations between the malleability of clay and its use in therapeutic settings, he later grasped the possibility of transforming the different phases of ceramic production into a figure of individual education and constraint. The expressive and spontaneous gesture that exists before irreversible formalisation is what piqued Ruby's interest in ceramics:

"Once fired, the clay becomes a kind of monument to its prior malleability or expression. As soon as it hits the kiln it takes on the status of what once was, and it becomes a truncated or frozen gesture."¹

ONCE FIRED, a material whose malleability managed to contain and express gesture and subjectivity becomes irremediably hard, fixed in its acquired features: a monument to that malleability, an

¹ Sterling Ruby in conversation with Catherine Taft, in *Sterling Ruby*, (ed. Alessandro Rabottini) catalogue of the exhibition *Sterling Ruby: GRID RIPPER*, curated by Alessandro Rabottini at GAMeC – Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo, Sept 30, 2008 – Feb. 8, 2009, p. 110.

exuberant monument to what has been lost. For Ruby, the freezing of a lost characteristic becomes the metaphor for an existential condition, of individual expressiveness captured in a condition of constraint. The artist expands on this concept:

“The process of truncation via the kiln, which produces the monumental object, is in connection with a violation or trauma; it halts the clay from ever being liberated again, and it is without doubt related to bereavement. . . [T]he sincerity I am trying to get at in my work comes from a contemporary sadness; that the suffering associated with this sort of current lamentation is real, that it arises from an insight knowing that we are conditioned subjects, not innate subjects. The ceramic sculptures are the most obvious example in that direction.”²

WHILST PERCEIVING THE ARTISTIC POTENTIAL INHERENT IN CERAMIC, Ruby began also to note its limitations in terms of scale and intimacy. It was this need to bring the subject of constraint to a further level, literally a “monumental” one, that inspired him to develop the *Monument Stalagmite* series. Here again we find a malleable material – liquid urethane in this case – that in its solidification becomes a figure of a process of freedom and transformation that quickly moves towards fixity and castration. The same dialectic – between movement and stagnation, between fluidity and ossification, between what is irreducible (to rules, to rationality and to institution) and what is made the object of correction – is a leitmotif the artist explores, from both a thematic and formal standpoint, in nearly all the series of works he has produced so far. In his works with minimalist forms (like *Absolute Contempt for Total Serenity / Single C.U.M.I.D* or *Inscribed Plinth / 1 P V 7*, both from 2007), for example, urethane is set into rigid transparent blocks, inside which coloured dye is captured in a state of total fixity, as if to emphasise – paradoxically – the geometric constraints of its own form. His famous *Spray Paintings*³ perform these dynamics almost subliminally, through the immediate solidification of an ethereal and elusive material. The issues of psychological and spatial limitation are more evident when we examine the choice of spray paint on a semantic level, in light of its urban use in graffiti tagging, in Ruby’s paintings the medium shifts from an individual or gang identity to a form of meditative abstraction.

THE INVERSION FROM STALACTITE (formed from the top down due to gravity) to stalagmite (which rises from the ground) gives *Monument Stalagmite* an immediate and inescapable phallic and assertive connotation. When he started developing this body of works, Ruby perceived these characteristics as problematic, since most of his works – despite its muscular appearance – address the deconstruction of machismo and its power both on a level of culture (and the perception of the American identity and politics around the world) and sexuality, understood as an area of continuous transformation and indeterminateness.⁴ The artist adds wooden crutches to the stalagmites, as if to suggest a state of reduction and congenital weakness, and it is on this prosthesis that he paints the

2 Ibid., p. 112.

3 The work *SP229*, 2013 is also on display.

4 A summary of this specific aspect, along with more general information on the *Monument Stalagmite* series, can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjNj5N2iF44>. The video was produced by MoCA – Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles for the solo exhibition *Supermax 2008*, curated by Philipp Kaiser.

title of the work (in this case “PTAC”). The device of incorporating the base into the sculpture runs through the history of contemporary art, from Constantin Brâncuși to Cy Twombly and Franz West. In some cases this form of integration was marked by the continuity of materials between the base and the sculpture, but in others marked explicit dissonance between the two identities. Ruby establishes a form of tension between the assertiveness of the stalagmite and a deconstructive and corrosive impulse towards its very monumentality.

THE TITLES OF MANY OF THE WORKS IN THIS SERIES have references – some more explicit than others – to the medical and pharmaceutical field (above all with regard to psychiatric treatment), drug dealing and consumption as codified in major urban areas through slang and government, military and penitentiary terminology. The letters “P.T.A.C” visible on the wooden structure that buttress this work are an acronym for “Party to a Crime”, a police expression for a person directly implicated in or associated with a crime through any form of intentional connivance, even before the crime was actually committed. The subjects of crime, detention and correction recur often in Ruby’s works, above all in reference to the penitentiary facility known as “Supermax” (short for “super-maximum security”), a special detention unit inside prisons used to house inmates considered a threat to national and international security. In this type of incarceration, the inmate is kept in solitary confinement for up to 23 hours a day for an unlimited period of time, drastically curtailing any contact with prison guards or other inmates.

THE CONCEPT OF “SUPERMAX” can be interpreted as a sort of metaphorical construction in which we can grasp the discordant forms and symbolic figures that populate Ruby’s work: an extreme architecture – one of utter solitude and constriction – that generates a desolate and irreducible monumentality. In his restless artistic output, Ruby scrutinises the concepts of individual freedom and constraint, resistance and abandonment, constant transformation and frustration, through figures of urban anguish and vandalism, induced and self-induced annihilation, transsexualism, mental alteration and physical transformation. In effect, what filters down through the visual ambition and visceral quality of Ruby’s work is an imagination that explores the mental and cultural recesses of our present.

Alessandro Rabottini

Translated from Italian by Catherine Bolton

ALESSANDRO RABOTTINI is a writer and curator based in London. As Curator at Large at the Madre Museum in Naples he curated solo exhibitions of Walid Raad / The Atlas Group, Ettore Spalletti and Pdraig Timoney. In 2008 Rabottini curated the first solo exhibition of Sterling Ruby in a European institution, the GAMEC in Bergamo and edited the most comprehensive catalogue of his work to date.

SELECTED IMAGES



Monument Stalagmite/P.T.A.C (detail), 2012

PVC pipe, foam, urethane, wood, spray paint and formica

494.7 x 99.1 x 160 cm

Courtesy the artist and David Roberts Collection, London



Monument Stalagmite/Black, 2005

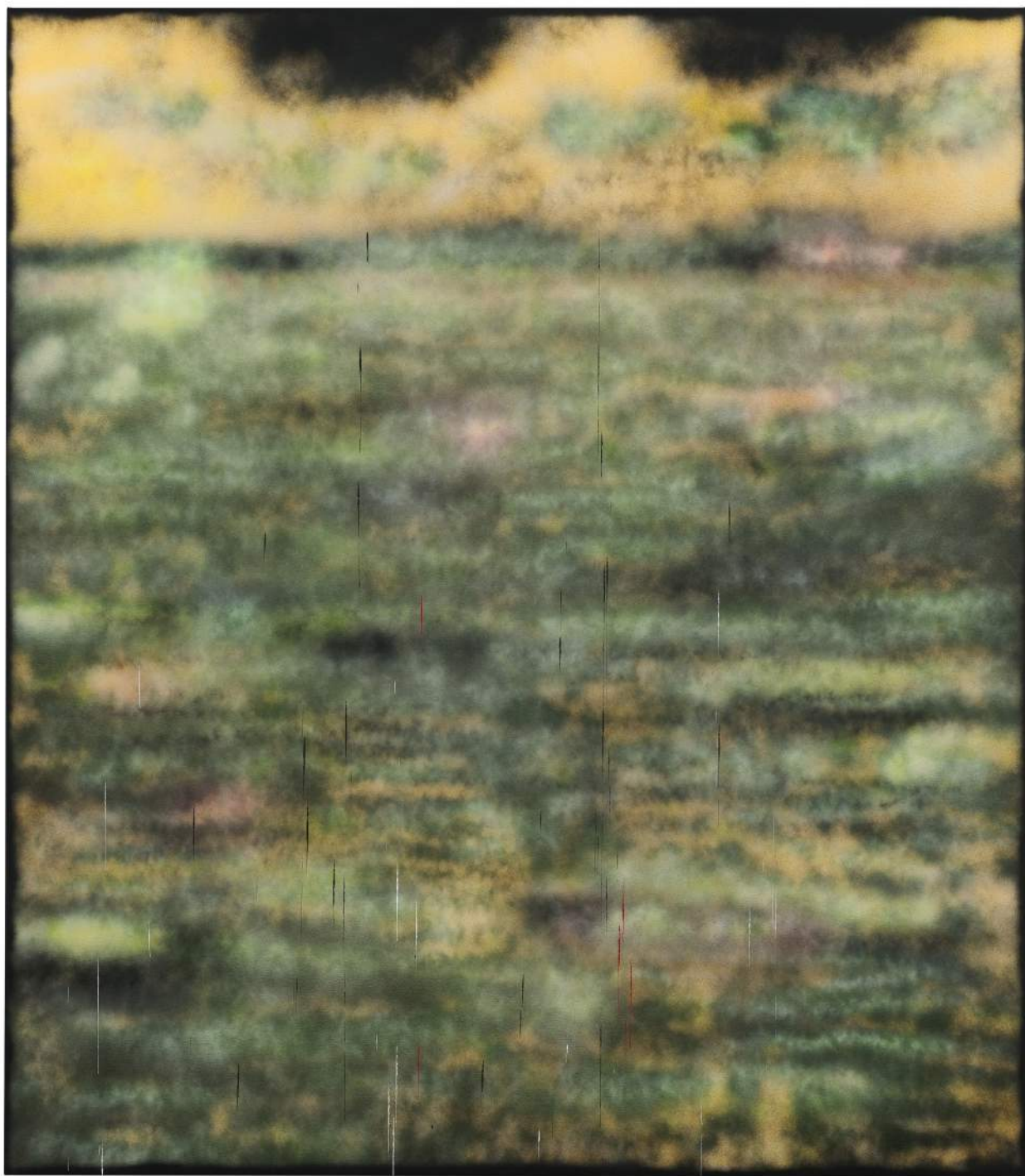
PVC pipe, foam urethane, wood and formica on base

248.92 x 52.07 x 38.1 cm

Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth, London. Photo: Farzad Owrang



Installation views of *Sterling Ruby & Robert Mapplethorpe*, 2009 at Xavier Hufkens, Brussels
Courtesy the artist and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels
Photo: Allard Bovenberg



SP229, 2013

Spray paint on canvas

243.8 x 213.4 cm

Courtesy the artist and David Roberts Collection, London



SPCE (4036), 2012

Collage, paint and urethane on cardboard

279.4 x 243.8 cm (Framed size: 294.6 x 260.4 cm)

Courtesy the artist and David Roberts Collection, London

	Cat. No.: <i>RVST-2013-02</i>
	Artist: <i>Sterling Ruby</i>
	Title of the work, year: <i>Monument Stalagmite/P.T.A.C. 2012</i>

PLEASE RETURN REPORT AT THE END OF THE EXHIBITION PERIOD

**Condition Report for
Loan/Transfer of Sculptures**

PLEASE COMPLETE THE RE-EXAMINATION SECTION (LAST PAGE) ON ARRIVAL AND BEFORE DEPARTURE.
ANY CHANGE OF CONDITION, DAMAGE OR DETERIORATION (WORK OR/AND FRAME) MUST BE REPORTED IMMEDIATELY TO THE LENDER.

PLEASE INCLUDE PICTURE OF THE WORK LOCATING ALL REMARKS, CHANGES IN CONDITION AND/OR DAMAGES

Number of documents/photographs enclosed :

SUPPORT : Material: *PVC pipe, foam, urethane, wood, spray paint and ferrisia*
Describe components (Please fill out and attached a separate sheet of page 2 for every individual component): *One piece*

Appearance : Good
Scratched Localised only
General brittle fracture network
Cracks
Discolouration
Old restorations

Notes: *Fracture on sculpture (both sides)
Slight bubbling of urethane at bottom of base*

General aspect :

Losses : None apparent None recent Yes :

Dirt : Heavy soiling
Visible
Minimal
None

Other damages : None apparent None recent Yes :

Packing requirements :

Travelframe Crated Bubble Wrap Polythene

Corner protection
Inside the crate is an independent structure which supports the work itself.
 Other:

Handling requirements :

Do NOT tape glass
 Do not remove from transit frame until immediately before hanging ✓
 Always set on foam blocks
 Use plastic gloves for carrying and hanging ✓
 Other: *Consent attached handling PDF provided by Houser & Wirth*

Display requirements :

Hanging fixtures : Yes Describe : No
 Plinth : Yes Describe : No
 Display Case Yes Describe : No

Other :

Barrier needed : Yes No
 Max light level : N/A Lux

Other environment condition:

Title of the Exhibition : *Study # 8 Monument Stagnite / P.T.A.C., Sterling Ruby*
 Exhibition's venue : *David Roberts Art Foundation (DRAF), London*
 Exhibition's dates : *5 June 2015 - 1 August 2015*

Examiner : *Nicoletta Lombartucci* Date : *29/05/2015*

RE-EXAMINATION :

DATE	VENUE	EXAMINER + STATUS	CHANGES IN CONDITION

Introduction

Guidelines for installation, care and maintenance are provided by Hauser & Wirth as a courtesy and are for reference only. Duty of care and common sense supersede any and all verbal or written instructions provided. These guidelines do not replace the advice of qualified professional staff. These guidelines may not be applicable depending on one or more factors including, but not limited to, site conditions, availability and skill of personnel, access to necessary equipment or supplies. Hauser & Wirth accepts absolutely no responsibility or liability for the quality of work, damage, errors, accidents, injuries, or the acts or omissions of any person not directly employed by Hauser & Wirth. This includes employees, agents, or representatives who assist with the handling, installation or care and maintenance of the work.

Inventory

The work is contained in a single crate.

Required tools and equipment for installation

Power drills for dismantling crate.
Materials lift or forklift.
Ethafoam pad (30 x 90 x 5 cm), wrapped in Tyvek sheeting.
4 x packing blankets
Cotton or Nitrile gloves for handling.

Required technicians

8 technicians are required to stand the work upright

Information on Materials

The work is constructed of Urethane resin, poured over a structure of wood, pvc pipe and expanding foam.
The Urethane resin is reasonably sturdy, however the thinner pieces are fragile and prone to cracking, so should not be handled.

Packing Instructions (PLEASE NOTE - some packing and installation images are of a different Monument Stalagmite)

The work is packed in a wooden crate.
Inside the crate is an independent structure which supports the work itself.
To unpack, remove the top and sides of the crate completely to access the support structure.

Installation instructions for *Monument Stalagmite/P.T.A.C.* from
Hauser & Wirth London



Before the structure is removed, the work should be placed so that its base is as close to its intended final location as possible.
Remove support structure, taking careful note of where the straps and battens are located.





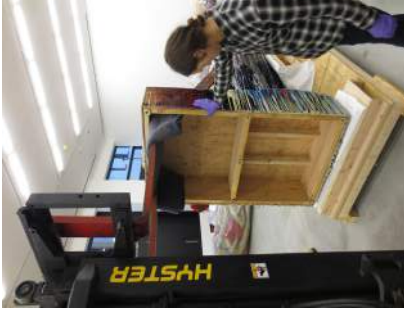
Image shows the work with support structure completely removed.

Finally, remove the screws that secure the padded support cradle to the crate base.

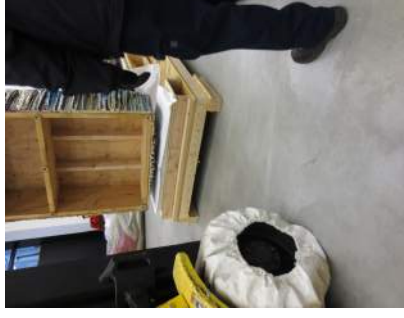


Installation Instructions

1. Position the forklift or materials lifter so that the forks are beneath the front edge of the plinth base, and pad the forks with blankets.



2. lift the sculpture slightly from the padded base of the crate



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3. Rotate the base of the crate, so that the floor area beneath the bottom of the sculpture is completely clear.



4. Carefully lower the sculpture to the floor, placing a blanket and Ethafoam pad between where they make contact. While doing this, ensure that no fragile parts of the sculpture are being put under pressure by the support cradle. If they are, try and introduce extra padding in the form of a blanket.



5. Withdraw the forklift.
6. You are now ready to upright the sculpture. Position 6 technicians around the thick, middle part of the sculpture - They will push the trunk of the sculpture upward. Position 2 technicians at the base side, behind the Ethafoam pad - they will prevent the sculpture from slipping out as it is raised.
7. Carefully push the sculpture upright. It can be handled from anywhere on the solid, dark middle area. It should not be handled by any of the thinner parts.
8. When the sculpture reaches it's tipping point, 4 of the technicians should remain supporting it and 2 should go to the other side to join the 2 already there. A blanket should be placed under the front edge, where the sculpture will come into contact with the floor. Then, the sculpture should be gently lowered until the plinth base sits squarely on the ground.

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9. Slide the sculpture into it's desired final position.
10. Tilt the sculpture back to remove the front blanket and then repeat for the rear.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The exhibition *Study #8 Monument Stalagmite/P.T.A.C., Sterling Ruby* is curated by Vincent Honoré (Director and Chief Curator) with Sandra Pusterhofer (Curator).

This leaflet was edited by Rachel Cass (Communications & Development Manager) and Dan Munn.

Thanks to Anna Peres (Assistant to Alessandro Rabottini)

Thanks to Hauser & Wirth, London.

ABOUT

DRAF (David Roberts Art Foundation) is an independent, non-profit space for contemporary art in London founded in 2007. It is directed and curated by Vincent Honoré. DRAF presents an international programme of exhibitions, commissions, live events, discussions and projects. DRAF is located at Symes Mews, 37 Camden High Street, Mornington Crescent, London NW1 7JE.

The David Roberts Art Foundation Limited is a registered charity in England and Wales (No.1119738). It is proudly supported by the Edinburgh House Estates group of companies.

For more information see www.davidrobertsartfoundation.com

ADDRESS

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The nearest tube stations are Mornington Crescent and Camden Town.

DRAF is a 15 minute walk from Kings Cross St. Pancras.

Buses: 24, 27, 29, 88, 134, 168, 214, 253

OPENING TIMES

Thu - Sat, 12 - 6 pm

Tue - Wed by appointment

FREE ADMISSION

DRAFT