

: artist profile **ruby neri**



For Los Angeles-based artist Ruby Neri, transitioning between media comes naturally. "I really like the physicality of materials, I don't really divide the media into painting and sculpture... it's all part of the process," she comments. Growing up in Northern California, where she attended undergraduate art school at SFAI, she always fell, to a certain extent, under the large shadow cast by her father, the well-known Bay Area sculptor Manuel Neri. At the San Francisco Art Institute, preconceptions about the young artist constantly colored her experience. "All the teachers there were either students of my dad, or his contemporaries!" One professor, the late painter Irene Pijoan, "gave me the best advice—she told me I should leave," Neri recalls. "I thought I'd move back right after grad school, but I developed a strong community there as well," and the artist ended up staying in LA.

While doing her undergraduate work, Ruby Neri also got into the habit of going out with friends at night to do graffiti art, adopting the tag of "Reminisce" and spraying lively images of cantering horses on walls in San Francisco's Mission District. Among her fellow taggers were

Barry McGee, Margaret Kilgallen and Alicia McCarthy, and their graffiti art has become well-known as part of "The Mission School." Neri's involvement with the counter culture and lowbrow movements in the Bay Area has clearly stuck with her.

Once she began her graduate program at UCLA, Neri discovered that no one in Los Angeles was too concerned about the Bay Area, much less her own heritage. She found this gave her a newfound freedom to make sculpture, and she explored a variety of materials and techniques including plastics, mold making, and casting. Sculptor Charles Ray was "really pivotal to me in terms of sculpture," she recalls. "He made it really appealing."

As Neri established a reputation as a sculptor, she began working a lot in a hybrid fashion, creating figurative sculptures that were part clay and part plaster, with some areas glazed, and others crudely painted. These included functional ceramic elements, like vases, along with stick legs and arms, creating a disturbing, assemblage effect. She also began working with tableaux, in which she combines figurative and inanimate objects arranged on tables, their enigmatic compositions daring us to construct relationships and meaning.

For her latest show, "The Big Feel," at San Francisco's Gallery Paule Anglim, Ruby Neri presents a generous assortment of sculptural objects and paintings on canvas and paper, as well as a large tableau. *My Khaki* (2015) includes an introspective blonde woman, a picture frame, oversized rings and a sun disk. This piece feels as if the

subject is somehow in transition—with eyes shut, we are excluded from her inner world. The tableaux are, Neri says, "where I bring in a very formal aesthetic in terms of how objects create a dialogue among themselves."

Neri's paintings, all works in oil, are deeply rooted in both Bay Area figuration and German Expressionism. In *Figures with a Horse* (2015) a large vertically oriented canvas with thickly encrusted paint bears the image of a white horse seen in profile; its front legs are lemon yellow, green and red, outlined in viridian. A female figure has scrawls of hair, her arms draping over shoulders like a shawl. Small works in oil on paper speak to the world of the subconscious and surrealism, as in *Woman with Children* (2014), which fills a rectangular shape with boneless, wriggling limbs.

"LA is so opposite of the Bay Area," Neri states. "So I have two sides... LA feels much dreamier and more laid back." A bit of an unexpected statement, she clarifies: "LA has this sense of space... And I love that whole noir element. People go there to pursue dreams... of making it big, on the big screen. It's like a dark romance."

Recent LA shows have included a solo exhibition at David Kordansky in 2012, along with inclusion in the biennial survey "Made in LA 2012" at the Hammer Museum. "Energy That Is All Around: The Mission School" traveled from SFAI in San Francisco in 2013 to the Grey Art Gallery at NYU. This past fall and winter, her work was included in "Fertile Ground: Art and Community in California," at the Oakland Museum of California, which included discussion of the 1990s Mission scene. Neri's upcoming projects include breaking in a new, 20 cubic foot gas-fired kiln, "which will transform my life," and putting together a book about the 1990s work with Alicia McCarthy. "We'll do it ourselves," Neri says. Somehow, that comes as no surprise.

—BARBARA MORRIS

"Ruby Neri: *The Big Feel*," remains on view at Paule Anglim Gallery, in San Francisco, from March 25 – May 2, 2015. www.gallerypauleanglim.com

"Fertile Ground: Art and Community in California," could be seen at the Oakland Museum of California from September 20, 2014 – April 12, 2015. www.museumca.org

OPPOSITE LEFT TO RIGHT:
"MY KHAKI," 2015, Ruby Neri
CERAMIC, OIL PAINT, GLAZE, PLASTER AND WOOD
BASE 81" x 97" x 53½"
PHOTO: COURTESY GALLERY PAULE ANGLIM

"WOMAN WITH CHILDREN," 2014
Ruby Neri
OIL ON PAPER, 14" x 20"
PHOTO: COURTESY GALLERY PAULE ANGLIM

