

Ruby Neri

Staircase

November 8 – December 14, 2024

Los Angeles

Press Release

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to announce *Staircase*, an exhibition of new bronze and ceramic sculptures and pastels on paper by Ruby Neri. The exhibition is on view in Los Angeles from November 8 through December 14. An opening reception will be held on Friday, November 8 from 6 to 8 PM.

Neri takes the full range of human interaction as her subject, producing works in which she depicts relationships as alternately mythological, mundane, ecstatic, inscrutable, hilarious, and tragic. The exhibition provides a window onto the expansive nature of her project, which includes many different kinds of making that overlap and inform one another. *Earthly Delights* (2024), a new large-scale bronze sculpture installed outdoors, provides a dramatic center of gravity, setting a tone of experimentation not only in terms of physical form and material, but also in terms of drawing and expressive gesture. These qualities are mirrored in the pastels and ceramics, in which tactility—and the tactility of color—are of primary concern.

Throughout the show, Neri stacks female figures on top of one another, creating two- and three-dimensional tableaux defined by wild-eyed sexual tension and playful struggles for power. In *Earthly Delights*—one of the most complex and intricate forms the artist has made to date—a central figure functions like a vertical landscape, dwarfing other figures and, as the title suggests, supporting fantastical flora with faces that further blur the line between figure and ground. The work also serves as a reminder that erotic connections between creatures are not limited to those between humans—or even between discrete beings—but are a connective force that keeps the entire world in a state of precarious unification. The visual vocabulary through which Neri expresses such energies is also a uniting force, one that brings together meditations on figuration, mass, and volume with the emotional resonances set off by the intense colors she has applied to its surfaces.

Neri makes room for the exploration of both narrative and formal conflict. In the pastels, for instance, foregrounds and backgrounds have been given equal weight, so that the scenes and environments in which her characters interact suffuse their bodies and give definition to their actions. *Caged* (2024) depicts a woman moving in the opposite direction of a wolf while the disembodied heads of other women float around her in the sky. Line and color co-exist much like these various beings seem to do, at times peaceably and at times competitively, carving each other into shapes that define the figures' bodies while simultaneously staking out abstract chunks of territory on the surface of the paper. Here, Neri transposes techniques and compositional ideas she has developed in her sculptural work into a two-dimensional syntax. Her images therefore have an accordingly architectonic sense of presence and monumentality, even as the speed of her line and the bold application of color channel the energy of her earliest work as a street artist in 1990s San Francisco.

Throughout *Staircase*, Neri achieves some of her most complex and richly metaphorical tableaux to date, with interactions between women, men, animals, and ghostly entities that are alternately dramatic, cinematic, and mythological. In addition to the many cultural reverberations the works generate—connections can quickly be

forged to any number of examples throughout the histories of art and literature—they continually focus attention on the ways in which she responds, moment by moment, to her own searching marks and visual and material interventions. The pastels and sculptures alike tell stories about people and relationships, but primary among these is the relationship between the artist and her gut reactions to the forms and images that emerge from her own hand.

This psychological dimension of Neri's project is notable for the depth at which it operates as well as the paradoxical lightness—of touch and of mood—that it can simultaneously hold. The ceramics have long been a forum in which such a wide range of feelings are given expression. Here, she has developed new ways of combining figures and vessel-like shapes that serve as reminders of clay's perennial associations with functionality. *Flying Away* (2024), a new vessel on view, is topped by the figure of a supine woman whose apparent sisters appear as inscribed decoration around its circumference, establishing a vertiginous, questioning system of apertures and blockades. Neri locates the heart of the matter both on the surface of her ceramic sculptures and within the voids of their hollow cores, tempting the eye with openings that communicate vulnerability even as they make room for the possibility of devouring ferocity.

As the title of the show indicates, in Neri's world it is neither the upper nor lower realms of experience that carry the day (and night), but the constantly trafficked stairway between them. Heaven and hell are only as powerful as the opposing landing on the other end of the moral spectrum, and people and spirits can fall or rise with equal facility and with equally growth-producing results. Indeed, the empowered feminist ethos of her work suggests that hierarchies of these kinds are already divisive and limiting, and that focusing on the lived, earthly experiences of individual people, starting with the passions of the artist herself, illuminates the surprising, unpredictable path to creative freedom.

Ruby Neri will be the subject of a solo exhibition at the Manetti Shrem Museum of Art in Davis, California from January 25 through May 5, 2025. Neri was also the subject of the 2018 two-person exhibition, *Alicia McCarthy and Ruby Neri / MATRIX 270*, at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) in California. Recent group shows include *Funk You Too!*, Museum of Arts and Design (2023), New York; *The Flames: The Age of Ceramics*, Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris (2021–2022); *New Time: Art and Feminisms in the 21st Century*, BAMPFA, California (2021); *The Domestic Plane: New Perspectives on Tabletop Art Objects, Objects Like Us*, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut (2018); *From Funk to Punk, Left Coast Ceramics*, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York (2017); *Fertile Ground: Art and Community in California*, Oakland Museum of California and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2014); *Energy That is All Around: Mission School*, Grey Art Gallery, New York University, New York (2014); *Busted*, High Line, New York (2013); and *Made in L.A. 2012*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2012). Her work is in the permanent collections of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Brooklyn Museum, New York; de Young museum, San Francisco; and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Neri lives and works in Los Angeles.