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A generous humility at work

It doesn't take long for the grandmotherly calm that wafts around Ruby Neri's roomful of figurative sculptures to settle over visitors to her exhibition at David Kordansky Gallery. The feeling is strange — oddly disarming and terrifically distinct from business as usual when it comes to contemporary art, which gets far more attention for being snide than for eliciting such human sympathies as affection, fondness and love.

Not one of Neri's 15 sculptures, nearly all of which are about 6 feet tall, is especially realistic. Made of fired clay and raw plaster, sometimes glazed and sometimes



David Kordansky Gallery

RUBY NERI'S sculptures extol a sense of peace.

painted, many of her approachable icons recall Brancusi by way of the 99-cent store, the casual elegance of his stacked sculptures given new life by the vase-like shapes and vessel-style forms that constitute the chests, necks and limbs of Neri's idiosyncratic figures.

Others have the relaxed postures and contented demeanors of people at peace with themselves. Think Giacometti's spindly figures at the beach, their existential

dread transformed into pleasant fulfillment.

Degas' little dancer also comes to mind, if she had grown up in a hippie household. Where Matisse extolled luxury, peace and pleasure, Neri steers clear of the first, its links to privilege at odds with her art's generous humility. Likewise, her endearing works take themselves less seriously than Picasso's ceramics, replacing the muscular thrust of his forms with sweetness.

In terms of art history,

that's the tip of the iceberg. Neri's sculptures share deep similarities with African masks, ancient Egyptian funerary sculpture, Etruscan totems and prehistoric talismans. Their salt-of-the-earth accessibility connects them to newspaper caricatures, handcrafted dolls and homemade scarecrows.

Titled "Sculpture," Neri's exhibition is a rich mix of recollections that is all the more powerful for not being pushy. An island of calm in a sea of turmoil, it merits many visits.

David Kordansky Gallery, 3143 S. La Cienega Blvd., (310) 558-3030, through Aug. 18. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.davidkordanskygallery.com