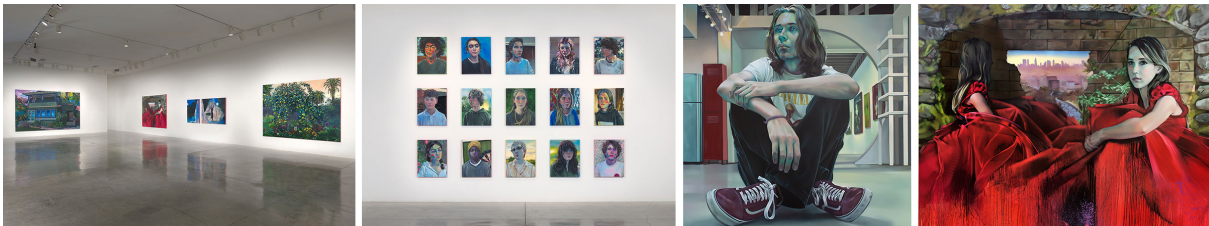


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Rebecca Campbell: 'Young Americans'
Dreams Come to Life
L.A. Louver
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by Jody Zellen



A grid of fifteen portraits of teenage boys and girls painted in a multitude of styles fills the far wall of the gallery. Are these the 'young americans' of the exhibits title? *Young Americans* was also the title of the 1975 album by the late David Bowie and was seen as his breakthrough in the United States: it also contained the hit song *Fame*. Thinking about Bowie and rock and roll and youth culture then—in comparison to now—it is possible to conclude that as different as things are in 2024, innocence is innocence, vulnerability is vulnerability, strength is strength and the young eventually grow old.

Two large paintings set the stage. *Greenhouse* and *California Love* (both 2023) are exteriors. In *California Love*, Campbell portrays a fruit tree surrounded by flowers. Behind a wooden fence are palm trees. In the foreground, colorful plants appear to dance in the magical light. This is the California dream. Although the painting is devoid of people, the human presence abounds—as gardener and appreciator of California's unique light. *Greenhouse* celebrates Campbell's excellence as a painter and as an observer of domestic life. Here she presents the family home—a green house with a balcony that is surrounded by plants and trees. A mix of styles inhabits the surface ranging from highly detailed renderings to blurred abstraction in addition to thick applications of paint. With Campbell, every stroke, gesture, area of color and expression is deliberate and purposeful. In *Greenhouse*, she allows three isolated figures—a painter on the balcony, a silhouette in an upper window and a shoeless youth seated on a wall at the edge of the homes back stairs to exist in their own worlds, connected and disconnected simultaneously.

This is evident in the eighty-inch square painting *In Utero* (2023) where a boy sits cross-legged on the floor. He has long hair and is wearing a t-shirt from "*In Utero*," the band Nirvana's 1993 album. He has dark red sneakers with white stripes and laces that formally relate to a red locker located behind him, as well as to the red edges of the paintings hanging on the wall in the room (that resembles Campbell's studio) behind him. His gaze is pensive, his face a melange of colored brush strokes with shadows and highlights that reinforce a dynamic, rather than static being.

Hollywood is a sign (2023) is a similarly evocative painting that features two young boys peacefully floating in a deep blue swimming pool. In the background is a reproduction of the iconic Hollywood sign set against distant hills. As the rectangular pool recedes, the incongruities of the scene and the location take shape. The boys are in a pool in the desert. Why is the Hollywood sign there too? The boy in the foreground rests his chin on the pool's deck, his head leaning on his shoulder, his face partially in shade. He seems complacent and relaxed. Behind him, magically floating or perhaps just sitting in the shallow end is another boy in a lotus pose. They seem connected, yet alone with their thoughts.

In the diptych *Wolf Moon* (2024), Campbell extrapolates. A youth wanders through a stream at night. A full moon behind him illuminates the transparent fabric that envelops him. Is he a dancer? A mysterious arm emerges from the drapery behind the main figure. Is it real? A dream? Spiritual? The beautifully painted image represents the freedom to express, to be whomever one wants to be dancing in the shimmering night.

In Between (2024) is a painting of two girls. One present and looking forward, one seen from behind and looking back at a distant city. Both are clad in ornate red dresses that dissolve into dripping paint toward the bottom edge of the canvas. They sit above a freeway in what appears to be a cave or a bunker with an uneven hole in the cinder-block wall behind them. There is an aura of sadness and longing, though their gazes never meet. The focus is the space between— a silent freeway and an urban silhouette.

In Campbell's work dreams come to life. There is loss and celebration, desire and hope. Many of these subjects are Campbell's own children and their friends, so she can be simultaneously objective and subjective in their depictions. She extrapolates from her own life to create paintings that communicate more universally about what it means to be young in an everchanging world.

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