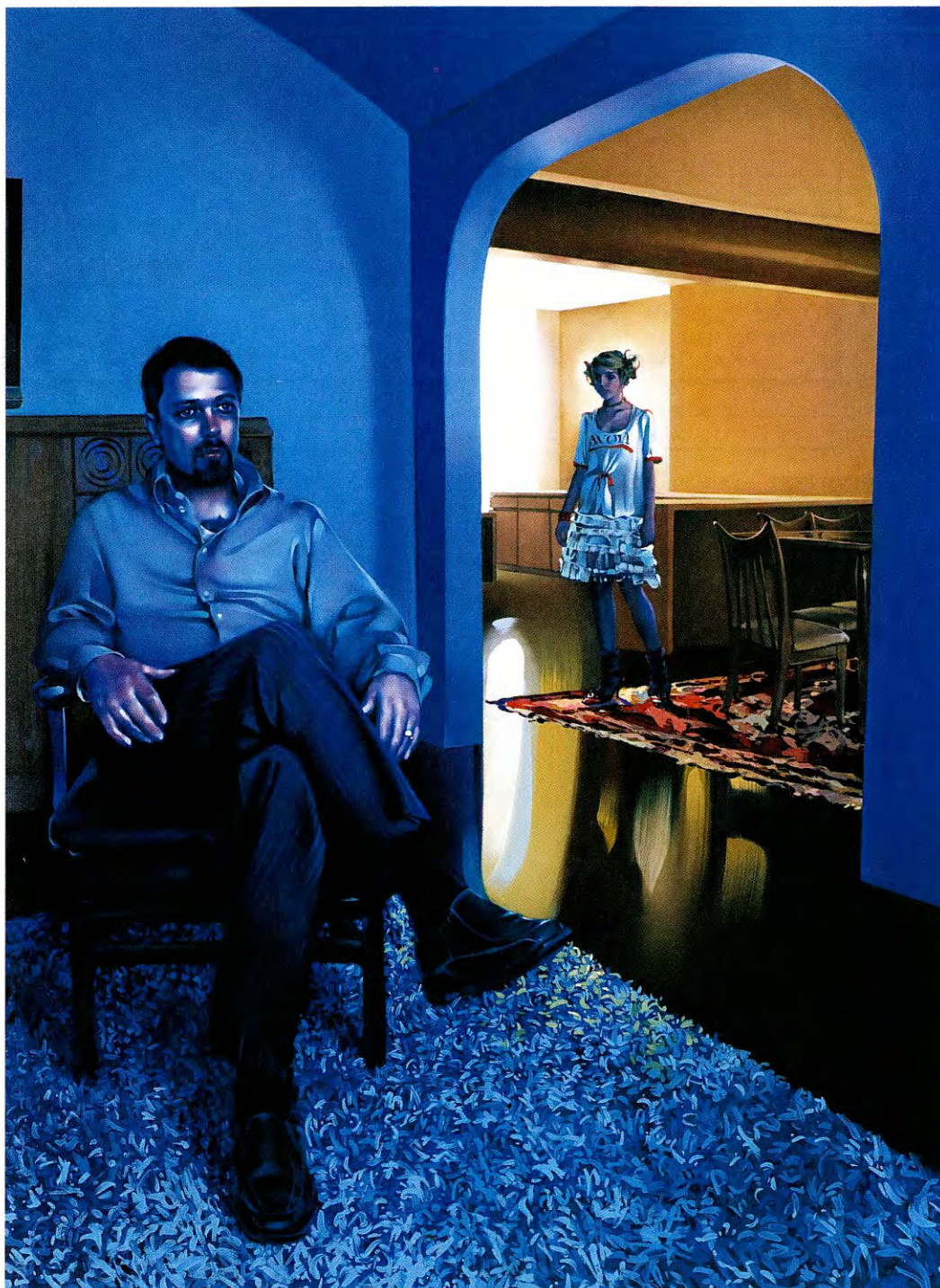


: artist profile **rebecca campbell**



Imagine walking into the living room from the '70s cult classic "Poltergeist" and, in the midst of all the flying furniture, videogenic hallucinations, depressed teenagers, shag carpet, and foreboding shadows, seeing Sargent's *Madame X*. The same tautly tailored sumptuous black evening dress, the same alabaster white offsetting the contours of limbs, and piled-up tresses. But it's not a woman, it's not even a painting: rather, it's a towering, leafless tree wrapped in tailored black velvet, rooted in a pool of salt crystals with the white glow of snow reflecting sunlight, with a coterie of hand-blown glass bluebirds perched among its branches. If perhaps unexpected for a painter, the work will be a centerpiece in Rebecca Campbell's new solo show—also entitled "Poltergeist"—at LA Louver Gallery, opening in February.

Originally from Salt Lake City, where her family home was at the foot of a mountain, Campbell left to study art in Vermont, then Portland, OR, before coming to LA, where she got her Masters from UCLA in 2001.



"DADDY DAUGHTER DATE"

2008

OIL ON CANVAS

90" X 67"

PHOTO: COURTESY LA LOUVER, VENICE, CA

But even after relocating, the long influence of life in proximity to nature's woodlands never left her, manifesting itself in her persistent lexicon of verdant locations with the full force of Grimm-meets-Rousseau symbols for all things wild, mysterious, and full of wonder. This is not to say she is a landscape painter—not by any stretch. Many of her portraits, interiors, still lifes, and urban views have nothing of nature in them. But the archetype of the woods as a stand-in for the psyche—and more importantly, the excuse for lavish detail, swirling forms, saturated palettes, and embrace of the exotic and beautiful which it affords—is typical of Campbell's overall approach.

In *Gretel* (2008), a small blonde girl crouches at the edge of a stream, either oblivious to or comfortable with the encroaching forest. With its dominant scale, its wall of lifelike impasto both evokes and, in its rich color and energetic use of form, nearly recreates, the look and feel of its protagonist's experience. As with all of Campbell's work (including the ambitious content of sculpture, video, installation, and assemblage in *Poltergeist*) there is both an unavoidable, plural narrative in this image, and plenty of room for the viewer to inject their own. Despite what she diplomatically describes as "encouragement" from many of her instructors and peers, Campbell stubbornly carries on painting pictures of people, places, and things, deliberating over the meaning of her work, unabashedly privileging both content and beauty in a stylistic season dominated by conceptualism and rabid anti-sentimentality.

With their eerie sense of space, and sensitivity to anatomy and gesture, her paintings remain the foundation of her omnivorous vision. Works like *Gretel* and the vertiginous masterpiece *Daddy Daughter Date* (2008) demonstrate her advanced technical skill in their deft rendering of spaces and perspectives that threaten dissolution even as they make a case for realism. Yet at the same time, they refuse to release their grip on content and meaning. "Poltergeist" means "kitchen ghost" and true to form, her sculptural recapitulations of domestic objects and settings transform the gallery into a kind of stage set for the painting/actors to strut across. Another remarkable sculpture, entitled *Satellite*, depicts a swarm of bees: made of walnut veneered plywood, nickel plated steel string and copper, it too testifies to Campbell's obsession with detail and narrative coherence. But the delight of her practice, once the surprise of her majestic craftsmanship wears off, is the realization that her deeper subject is the persistence of memory, the depths of human feeling unlocked by images and objects, the capriciousness of the subconscious, the perspective and compassion that comes with time's passage, and above all, how truly, deeply, madly beautiful is the world we inhabit.

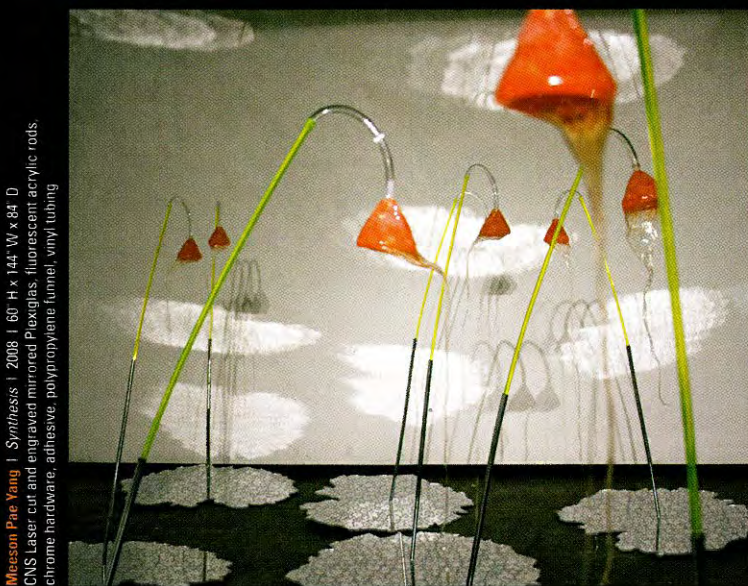
—SHANA NYS DAMBROT

Rebecca Campbell's solo show, entitled "Poltergeist," will be on view at LA Louver Gallery in Venice, CA, from February 26 - March 28, 2009.

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