



Portraits Of LA's Female Artists Send A Powerful Message: 'You Are Here'

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Nineteen portraits from [Rebecca Campbell](#)'s ongoing series are on display at the L.A. Louver. She says she portrays female artists "who are serious, diligent, hard working and good at what they do."

Eric Minh Swenson/Rebecca Campbell

The question of who is represented and who is left out is rocking the country these days, from Hollywood to politics. And, in Venice, Calif., representation is at the heart 19 dramatic portraits, [now on display](#) at the L.A. Louver.



All of Campbell's portraits — including this one of L.A. artist [Lia Halloran](#), above — are done in black, white, grays and salmon pink. Campbell calls this her "vocabulary of marks and tones and textures."
Jeff McLane/LA Louver

The paintings are of talented female artists, all working right now in Los Angeles. Campbell felt women artists are over-looked, not getting shown in museums and galleries, becoming invisible.

"I thought, well, what I can do is I make pictures," Campbell explains. "I made it so that they didn't disappear, by making pictures of them."

There are 19 so far in this on-going project. The women are of different ages and races, but what ties them together is the fact that they all make art. Campbell isn't after precise representation in these portraits.

"You're trying to say something about this person, the personal history," she says. "But you're trying to do it with [a] vocabulary of marks and tones and textures ... in my language."

In bold, confident strokes with a brush or palette knife, in black, white and a salmon pink she mixes by hand, Campbell captures the essence of her subject.



Campbell "is creating an index that will serve as a record of this moment in time in Los Angeles art history," says artist [Alexandra Grant](#).

Jeff McLane/LA Louver

Alexandra Grant is one of the artists included in the series. In the painting, as in life, Grant has long hair, steady eyes and a slight smile.

"What Rebecca's doing in a very beautiful, subtle way is saying: Look, here's all these artists who are working *right now* in Los Angeles," says Grant. "Do you know them? They want to meet you. They want their work to be known in the public realm and considered on equal footing with male peers."

Campbell's women are painters, sculptors, photographers and dancers. Mpambo Wina trained and performed at the Dance Theatre of Harlem. She's small and elegant, with

vivid red lipstick and braided hair. She remembers when she sat for the photograph that Campbell would use to paint her portrait.

"You arrive at her studio and you sit," Wina says. "I started to pose ... and then she started talking to me and I dropped the armor."

The conversation swirled between them. "You talk about life or literature, architecture, traveling, and she's taking you in, bit by bit," Wina recalls.



Dancer Mpambo Wina says that when you sit for one of Campbell's portraits, she takes you in, bit by bit.
Jeff McLane/LA Louver

Campbell started clicking her camera while they talked. Suddenly she stopped and said: "I have it."

From that photo, Campbell created a painting that shows Wina in a white T-shirt, a bright cross on her necklace. Her face is open, thoughtful, engaged. She looks right at us — all the women in this series do.

"I think with each one of these portraits, that the gaze of someone looking back at you — confident, contemplative, and holding their space — that's a really important position for a woman artist to be in," Alexandra Grant says.

Wina says as a model, there was even more to it than that: "You feel seen," she says.

At the show's crowded opening reception, Grant felt community among the women on the walls and in the gallery, admiring Campbell's work.

"She is creating an index that will serve as a record of this moment in time in Los Angeles art history," Grant says. "And this is pretty funny — I had a number of people ask me: How do I get painted?"

The show — called "[You Are Here](#)" — is up at L.A. Louver Gallery in Venice until Feb. 13. Campbell writes this about what painting means to her: "It's about tracking ghosts," she says. "It's about selling diamonds to poets. It's about that slippery little idea of a connection that is deeper than butter and as long as water."