

Memories of a searching spirit

LEAH OLLMAN

The “Poltergeist” in **Rebecca Campbell’s** scattered, sometimes scintillating show of that title at L.A. Louver seems to be the artist herself, wandering restlessly through her own childhood memories, unsure whether to wreak havoc or pay homage and ultimately doing a little of both.

Such memories are inexhaustible, and so is Campbell’s drive to find forms that capture their potency and resonance. She continues to paint, with a facility that ranges from airless to breathless, and now she also sculpts, shoots video and incorporates different media into installations that mimic domestic settings.

An avocado wall-oven set against a painted wallpaper pattern and packed with old books (formative titles including “Nancy Drew” and “Madame Bovary”) makes a powerful time capsule, its clock forever spinning backward. “Gretel,” a large canvas of a blond-braided girl in lush, dappled woods, is a portrait of innocence, a scene of pure wonder before the encounter with that other oven. The painting hangs like a domestic altarpiece, a balustrade extending out from either side of its free-standing support wall and a multi-toned carpet on the floor below. The treatment feels heavy-handed.

Campbell’s show itself wanders restlessly from sculptural sketches — sprightly assemblages of piano keys — to evocative, monumental gestures, such as a full-size tree flocked in black velvet, its branches dotted with glass birds glowing Windex blue. Paintings of utility poles dilute the overall mood; others, such as “The Wizard,” whisk us right back into the heart of Campbell’s tough yet wistful sensibility.

In the stunning 7 1/2-foot-tall canvas “Daddy Daughter Date,” Daddy sits, soaking in the cool blue glow of an offstage TV screen, while teenage Daughter stands in the next room, haloed by golden possibility. She perches on the edge of what amounts to a flying carpet, a rug woven of sensuously frosted pigment that appears to hover over the more thinly painted glossy wood floor. The passage is transcendent, the moment both excruciating and beautiful — Campbell’s mnemonic reach and aesthetic grasp in perfect sync.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 822-4955, through March 28. Closed Sundays and Mondays.



“Do You Really Want to Hurt Me.” Courtesy L.A. Louver, Venice, CA