

Latest in Forever



Ellen Campbell

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Front Cover
Ellen Campbell
Big Yello
oil on canvas
2014
28" x 28"

ellencampbellstudio.com

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Works by Ellen Campbell

This work reflects a personal fascination with a central paradox of our contemporary condition. In our day-to-day experience, so many of the images we consciously and subliminally surround ourselves with are somehow derived from the natural world. However, as our pace of life quickens, and priorities pull our focus elsewhere, we become increasingly distant, detached, and often oblivious to the wild places and things we once valued so deeply.

I believe there is inspiration to be found in our collective response to this conundrum. Manufactured consumer products like paper towels, place mats, plastic bags – the detritus of our culture – commonly incorporate botanical decorative motifs, and are the main sources from which my imagery is drawn. One such example of these motifs is the flower shaped, non-slip mat found on bathtub and shower floors across the world.

In my paintings and drawings, found, generic (and often abstracted) motifs are organized into scenarios that create new visual and psychological relationships through placement and shifts in palette. The compositions themselves are inspired and triggered by the content and spatial configurations of the visual world around me. In my use of these elements and influences, the images are positioned within a fantastical state of nature, mirroring the tension between the human demands and transience of modern life and the endurance of the natural world.

– Ellen Campbell, 2017



Flora is the cast of characters in Ellen Campbell's paintings. Palette, mood and gesture vary from canvas to canvas. Unique titles put viewers on a path toward notably different, though inevitably enigmatic narratives. Campbell's anonymous flowers, with their symmetrical petals radiating from a round pistil, are the only constant. Flowers are easily employed as symbols, standing in for an endless variety of notions. In art history, flowers as subject matter appear in famous examples too numerous to count --Islamic motifs, Golden Age still lifes, in the oeuvres of Monet, O'Keeffe, Warhol. They can be and often are tropes: a structure upon which to exercise one's aesthetical intentions.

So, why would an artist still choose to make a painting of a flower, given the proliferous iterations so ingrained in our art schooled minds? How does one take such an exhausted piece of visual vocabulary and make it one's own? For Ellen Campbell, flowers are all of the historical and metaphorical associations, and more. They are a something to paint, they are something to paint about, and they mean something to be the thing that an artist paints. Flowers are her content, her trope and the link amongst her and the painters of art history.

In *Big Red T*, gleaming, fuchsia flowers top a viciously spiked stem, growing from a crimson, scorched landscape. In this violent environ, the darkened sky hangs low, and the sketchy, transparent remains of flower petals in the distance are fading into the fiery ground. Here, Campbell has rendered beauty transformed into something ferocious, as if this delicate piece of nature has just evolved, outfitted now with ugly lances with which it can defend itself, survive and dominate. In *Red Gray Flower*, this same bunch of vegetation is now an unnerving, surrealist scene, with leaves and buds rendered like amorphous organs. The subject of *Teal Velvet Sky* is pared down to a hazy, flattened abstraction of neutrals, the figure and ground merged into almost one in the same. Throughout her oeuvre, Campbell never simply depicts the flowers as they are; they're stressed, sharpened, anomalous and

obliterated, begging the question: do we take for granted that nature will always be beautiful? What does it take for us to truly take notice of a flower?

The artist's *Tubflower* series, too, challenges the viewer to reconsider the role that florals play in our daily lives; however here, Campbell does so not by showing us a hypothetical, but by re-representing that which is so constant in our visual vocabulary that it's practically invisible. Taking their titles from the non-slip stickers made for the bottom of the bathtub, the *Tubflower* paintings feature a stylized, six-petal form repeated, and layered upon itself. Like the patterns on paper towels, shampoo bottles, wallpaper and fabrics, the *Tubflowers* are no true depiction of nature. Motifs like these are far removed from their original sources, though surrounding ourselves with these formalized florals is evidence of our longing for a connection to the natural world, the further we divorce ourselves from the real thing.

– **Robin Dluzen**
Artist & Critic

Robin Dluzen is a Chicago-based artist and art critic whose artwork has been featured in venues around the country including Dorchester Art Project in Boston, MA; Indiana University Northwest in Gary, IN; Bert Green Fine Art in Chicago; Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago; and the Union League Club of Chicago. The former Editor-in-Chief of Chicago Art Magazine, Dluzen now writes regularly for Art Ltd Magazine and Visual Art Source. Dluzen received an MFA in Painting and Drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago



Cave Tub Flower, oil on canvas, 2012, 24" x 18"



Brown Blue, acrylic on canvas, 2014, 46" x 42"



Big Red, oil on canvas, 2014, 65" x 48"



Big Yello, oil on canvas, 2014, 60" x 48"



Jerome, acrylic on canvas, 2014, 42" x 42"



Red Tidybag, acrylic on canvas, 2014, 42" x 36"



Amberjack, oil on canvas, 2014, 26" x 22"



Teal Velvet Sky, oil on canvas, 2014, 24" x 18"



Open Square, oil on canvas, 2014, 28" x 28"



Red Grey Flower, oil on canvas, 2013, 24" x 20"



Sepia Stripe, watercolor on paper, 2014, 30" x 22"



Blue T, watercolor on paper, 2014, 30" x 22"

About Ellen

Ellen Campbell's paintings have been featured in solo and group exhibitions at galleries and cultural centers in Brooklyn, Minneapolis, Iowa and Chicago. Campbell is also the recipient of numerous awards and honors including Yaddo and Ucross Foundation artist residencies. In addition, her work is in many private and corporate collections. Ellen Campbell received her M.F.A. from the University of Chicago and her B.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design. She lives, works and teaches in Chicago.





