

Art Gallery Shows to See in August

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This week in Newly Reviewed, Carolina Miranda covers three shows in Los Angeles: a group exhibit with Tom of Finland at the center, Betye Saar’s “wearable art” and Esther Pearl Watson’s spaceships.

DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

Esther Pearl Watson

Through Aug. 21. Vielmetter Los Angeles, 1700 South Santa Fe Avenue; 213-623-3280, vielmetter.com.



“Celestial Road Trip” by Esther Pearl Watson (2026) via Esther Pearl Watson and Vielmetter Los Angeles; Photo by Brica Wilcox

In Esther Pearl Watson's paintings, a flying saucer frequently hovers in the sky — over fields and freeways, above parked cars and strip malls.

The ships are symbolic of her late father, Gene Watson, an engineer who spent his life trying to build a functioning spaceship. His obsession led to a peripatetic childhood for the artist, since neither neighbors nor landlords took kindly to Gene turning their property into an intergalactic garage as parental duties were shunted and bills left unpaid.

In "Celestial Road Trip," the flying saucer motif reappears. Painted in a naïve style, these bright canvases function as a diary of sorts. In the past, Watson created scenes chronicling Southern California wildfires and the pandemic. The new work draws inspiration from her new home in Joshua Tree, where she moved last year.

The brilliant color palette and crude figures convey innocence, but Watson's work can be deeply mordant. One painting depicts a spaceship crushing an unwary onlooker, while another shows angels clutching Reese's candy as they encircle a pink U.F.O. — inspired by an episode in which Watson's father became so obsessed with his spaceship that his children took to subsisting on peanut butter cups.

But the paintings also reveal an artist enchanted by her new home. In "A Visit I Will Never Forget" (2026), a coyote trots through a blooming desert. And the show's title work, "Celestial Road Trip" (2026), shows a woman on horseback admiring a spaceship against a lustrous sky rendered in blue, pink and purple. It is hopeful, contemplative and beautifully bittersweet.