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## This Boyle Heights Photographer Documents Her Community In Intimate Portraits

by [Julia Wick](#) in [Arts & Entertainment](#) on Jun 19, 2017 12:16 pm

FULLSCREEN



Sarah, 2016

"It was last summer, and it was really hot in Boyle Heights. Both physically and in the streets. Gentrification was happening and yet there were a lot of murders of local brown boys. We took her portrait, and it was very confrontational on both ends, which is weird, because we don't have a confrontational relationship. But then a week later, the cops murdered that fourteen-year-old boy, Jesse James Romero, for literally tagging on that wall behind Sarah." —Star Montana



Photographer Star Montana was born and raised in Boyle Heights, and the Eastside neighborhood serves as a backdrop for much of her work. Her startlingly intimate photos, which have been displayed at the Vincent Price Art Museum at East Los Angeles College and the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, highlight the personal while also addressing broader themes of class, social environment and identity. As Montana told Allison Agsten, Director of the Main Museum, in a conversation earlier this year, "Everything a photographer takes is actually a self-portrait."

After first studying photography at ELAC, Montana transferred to the School of Visual Arts in New York, where she ["longed for California sunshine and dreamed of the light and the people of Los Angeles."](#) It was on her periodic trips home that she took many of the photographs that are now on view at downtown's Beta Main, where Montana is currently completing a residency. The Beta Main, by the way, is [a testing space](#) for downtown's forthcoming, [L.A.-artist-centric Main Museum](#), which is slated to open in 2020. It's on 4th Street between Spring and Main, and we highly recommend a visit if you haven't been.



Star Montana (Photo courtesy of Beta Main)

"The moment I saw these portraits, I knew we had to show them and to support Star through our residency program so she could advance this body of work," Agsten told LAist. "It takes a very sensitive artist to tell so many stories in just one photo, to draw out subjects so naturally. That comes from Star's own unique combination of strength and openness. It's as if each portrait looks back, the subject radiating power and vulnerability, somehow telling the story of their lives."

Unlike her earlier work, which most often featured friends and family, many of the individuals pictured in Montana's *I Dream of Los Angeles* are strangers that she met via an open-call process or approached in South or East Los Angeles, according to the museum.

[Beta Main](#) is located at 114 W 4th Street in downtown Los Angeles. Admission is free and it is open Wednesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. (213) 986-8500. "I Dream of Los Angeles" by Star Montana will be on view through Sunday, July 23, 2017.

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