

Los Angeles Times

Review: Bright, blazing bursts of color enliven Matt Wedel's sculptures at L.A. Louver

By DAVID PAGEL NOV 27, 2018 | 1:25 PM



Matt Wedel, "Flower tree," 2018, porcelain, 6-1/2 x 9-1/2 x 11 inches, (courtesy of the artist and L.A. Louver,

The first thing that hits you is color: bright, blazing bursts of it explode inside your eyeballs, every cell and nerve scrambling to take it all in.

The next thing you notice is motion. Before you even begin to experience the 35 works in Matt Wedel's exhibition as singular entities, you experience them *en masse*, as a multipart body whose organic components seem to be slithering, writhing and replicating, especially when seen out of the corner of your eye.

At L.A. Louver, every cubic foot of adjoining first-floor galleries (and a second-floor showroom) is abuzz with the kind of energy that makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. Your mind toggles between thoughts of massive crowds at sporting events — or political protests — and sci-fi movie aliens, whose diverse purposes all involve the extermination of the human race.

Only then do you have a chance to pay attention to the details of what Wedel has done with porcelain, paper and pastel. It's impressive. Often mind-blowing. But most important, it invites a type of soul searching rarely found in contemporary art or, for that matter, in everyday reality.

Titled "Everything is everything," the Ohio-based artist's exhibition is made up of three bodies of work. As with all things Wedel, they overlap. And leave room for outliers.

Sixteen "Flower trees" sit on variously sized pedestals. One hangs on the wall.

Each tabletop sculpture resembles the offspring of a gorgeous floral arrangement and a gigantic pine cone that has spontaneously combusted. The deep blue wall work has the presence of an accident waiting to happen, its cluster of mussel-shaped nubs evoking a handcrafted cluster bomb.

Nine porcelain "Portraits" line several shelves. Imagine a medieval battle helmet that extends from the top of the head to the base of the neck — and includes no openings to see, hear or breathe through. Or a domestically scaled lingam. Or a miniature traffic bollard.

In any case, Wedel has slathered his streamlined heads with gobs of meringue-style clay. Some swathes suggest faces. Others leave that to the imagination. All exude vitality. Despite their seeming ancientness.

Wedel's three pastel drawings, each at least 6 feet tall, paint a picture of portraiture that is nothing if not ambiguous — and at least as mysterious as any sitter. To see these works is to be transported through time, to an age when civilization and chaos were separated by a hair's breadth. And then

back to the present, where things aren't that different.

The six largest sculptures, all freestanding, anchor the exhibition. In each, scale shifts precipitously, sometimes turning a bookend into a barricade — and back again — and at other times transforming a park bench into a Pandora's box of associations: some playful, others unsavory, all intriguing.

The most colorful "Fruit Landscape" resembles a saguaro cactus transitioning into a giant squid, its prickly tentacles eliciting both unease and empathy. Its compatriot looks like a pile of discarded tire treads that have taken on a life of their own, like a phantasmagorical ball of snakes or Medusa on a bad hair day.

To meander through Wedel's sculptural cornucopia is to practically hear him pondering questions that come to mind in the studio but do not usually come up in public, such as: "Can a figure be a landscape?", "Can a portrait be anonymous?", "Can color be a sculptural substance?" and "Are the most effective gestures free of ego?"

In "Everything is everything," the answer is "Yes, yes, yes and yes." But to know that for sure, you have to see for yourself.

L.A. Louver gallery, 45 Venice Blvd., (310) 822-4955, through Jan. 5. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.lalouver.com



Matt Wedel, "Fruit Landscape," 2017, stoneware, 52 x 42 x 37 inches, (Courtesy of the artist and L.A. Louver, Venice)