

ART

AROUND THE
GALLERIESA heady
view of
offbeat
world

BY DAVID PAGEL



JEFF McLANE L.A. LOUVER

HEAD-SPINNING scale shifts are a mark of Matt Wedel's brightly colored pieces in "Sheep's Head."

To step into "Sheep's Head," Matt Wedel's magnificent exhibition at L.A. Louver, is to feel as if you have fallen, like Alice, through the looking glass.

Just inside the entrance stands a 10-foot-tall lamb with a human head that's too big for its body. Made of gorgeously glazed ceramic, the massive icon stares off in three-quarter profile, dwarfing visitors while reminding us what life looked like when we were 3 feet tall: bigger and better than it does now, our experiences of its highs and lows filled with more innocent intensity than we can remember, much less recapture.

Not far away on the floor rests the smallest piece: a 9-inch-tall bouquet of flowers. Their spiky petals, sprouting from a brick-solid crystal, recall artichokes or pinecones or Dr. Seuss flora. Goopy rivers of glaze, some as fluffy as meringue and others as translucent as syrup, spill plentifully from the 3-D still life.

To fully enjoy "Flower tree," you must get down on the floor and look closely, like a kid. Doing so feels odd. Not because it's embarrassing, but because your body is simply too big – out of scale and out of synch with the resplendent universe Wedel has fashioned from a dumb lump of clay. With matter-of-fact aplomb, he makes you feel like the human-lamb hybrid standing just over your shoulder.

That sense of disappearance into your surroundings and standing apart from them plays out powerfully among the 19 brightly colored pieces in the main gallery and four pieces in separate spaces. Head-spinning scale shifts are Wedel's bread and butter, zooming you in for close-ups and drawing you back to see the big picture.

The breadth of vision that unfolds is impressive. Cookie jars come to mind, as do centerpieces for fancy dinners, elaborate candle holders, ships' figureheads and decorative figurines. So do works by Picasso, Botero and Baselitz, as well as ancient Greek, Roman and Etruscan statuary, Cycladic sculpture, Olmec totems and carved saints from medieval churches.

Not a single reference is made explicit or nailed down clearly and definitively by Wedel's familiar yet elusive sculptures. In the phantasmagorical reality his wonderfully lumpy objects embody the power of suggestion trumps everything.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., (310) 822-4955, through May 18. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.lalouer.com