

ART AND CAKE

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Matt Wedel at LA Louver

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Matt Wedel, Figure with Head, LA Louver; Image courtesy of the gallery

Matt Wedel

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LA Louver, Venice

By Eve Wood

Matt Wedel's sculptures are visually stunning, but there is more to them than simple beauty. They are witty, enigmatic and above all, gorgeously crafted objects that are at once postmodern and classical, elegant and awkward, fragile and visually powerful. Referencing Classical Greek and Hellenistic sculpture, Wedel's small portraits, made from terracotta and stoneware, exist more as personality studies than literal likenesses of specific individuals.

The faces that appear in this lineup all possess a child-like wonderment, a nascent quality as though each was forged in the imagination of someone who still believes in dragons and the purest innocence of human consciousness. Their expressions betray a longing for something beyond their reach, their eyes fixed forward, frozen in space and time. There is also a sense of androgyny about these figures, each face appearing strangely ageless, the physical features miniaturized, so that the expansiveness of the face becomes the central focus.



The central sculpture, aptly titled *Figure with Head* (2013), is both whimsical and oddly disquieting as the figure appears to balance her body against a severed head, tucked nonchalantly against her left thigh. Her expression is serene, and she appears to be reaching her left arm out in an exaggerated gestural flourish reminiscent of Mannerist sculpture of the Late Renaissance. Like those artists including Giambologna and Cellini, Wedel implicates content through gesture, wherein the outstretched arm of his central figure becomes an oddly dislocated moment of severed connection much like the severed head beside her. It's as though she were presenting a great gift to an invisible friend.

The smaller heads punctuate the surrounding space in the gallery, and deepen the narrative Wedel only hints at with the main figure at the center of the room. The space these figures occupy is as much a part of understanding the content as the works themselves. The Sky Room is the perfect environment for these works, which are alternately light and heavy, serene yet strangely unsettling. The accent wall, painted a deep, sonorous blue, also provides another dimension to the sculpture. These could be the faces nymphs and goddesses long since gone under the waves, or perhaps they represent something more sinister as the central figure indicates. Why is that severed head tucked under her arm, and where is the rest of the body? These are not questions that require answers. On the contrary. Answers would be far too specific. The strength of Wedel's vision lies in the fact that more questions can be posed than concrete answers given. As with all great art, the supposition exists that the extraordinary is possible – that we can see it all around us, and even if it is at times disquieting, it sustains us.

