



Matt Wedel, Flower Tree (MW15-68), 2015
ceramic, 43 1.2 x 47 x 44 in. (110.5 x 119.4 x 111.8 cm)



Matt Wedel, Banana Tree 2015
ceramic, 72 x 79 x 59 in. (182.9 x 200.7 x 147.3 cm)



Matt Wedel, Flower tree (MW15-54), 2015
porcelain, 9 x 14 1_2 x 12 1_2 in. (22.9 x 36.8 x 31.8 cm)

Exhibition | Matt Wedel: “Peaceable Fruit” at L.A. Louver is Major Achievement

Matt Wedel’s exhibition, *Peaceable Fruit*, at L.A. Louver (Los Angeles, November 18 – December 30, 2015) is one of this year’s most important exhibitions. It succeeds in elevating the artist’s stature as a sculptor and advances ceramics as a contemporary art medium. One may wonder why I making such a fuss. If you look back at earlier shows they share similar themes and strengths. Why is this show so much more exciting? It’s all in nuance and details. There is a move forward in Wedel’s assurance with form, surface and subject that raises his work from very good to great. At this point incremental shifts take on power and raise him to the top canon of emerging contemporary sculpture. And at a smidgen under six figures, his pricing seems extremely reasonable in today’s overheated and often overvalued marketplace.

Scale is key. So let us begin by giving a sense of the works physical presence. To get an idea of scale we include an image below to put his work in proportion to human scale, courtesy of Tanya Batura.

He approaches his medium head on; few do more with the medium’s characteristics. Some employ ceramics merely as a modeling medium and they could switch to another material with little loss of content. This is not true of Wedel. Between the fire and the clay no other substance could give us the sensual richness he draws out. The work is massively ambitious (despite the artist’s personal modesty) and the richness of glaze surfaces embedded in the writhing plasticity of the forms achieves real majesty.

CFile is covering the exhibition in two posts. This one looks at each sculpture in isolation and the second shows L.A. Louver’s impressive installation and the collective excitement his work can engender. Also, we have included a 2013 video of the artist speaking about the challenges of working large scale.

First, the title: the artist says that it “comes out of a larger interest in landscape within my work and is a kind of hopeful signifier and idealized blueprint in understanding the future of humanity.” The resulting sculpture is the plant’s takeover of the animal-focused exuberant representation of an idyllic, mythological and abundant landscape that embodies the exhibition title, a direct reference to the bucolic scenes in naturalist painter Edward Hick’s *The Peaceable Kingdom* (1833-34).

Human figures are also present but are often blind or have limited vision. The gold foiled *Figure with Child* is particularly strong, recalling an

Elie Nadelman figural group in its elegance and implicit humanity and a folkish bronze-glazed *Figures with Dog*.

While this is an idealistic agenda, Wedel does not rely on conceptual tools to do the job. He hits one in the gut, forcing an urgent, physical reaction to his art. You do not have to process his message intellectually (although you can), one simply has to feel. Not that the work gives one any option and it's not all that peaceable; there is something ominous about plants endowed with this kind of rampant fecundity made more intense by the huge scale. One begins to wonder if one could be part of their food chain.

The massive *Banana Tree*, 2015, as the gallery notes, welcomes the visitor to the exhibition. It measures 72 x 79 x 59 inches and features wildly interweaving cylindrical stems that yield bunches of stylized bananas. Wedel first imagined the form with two figures akin to Adam and Eve standing at its center. As Wedel grew the sculpture, the figures effectively became engulfed by the banana tree and then disappeared. The gallery also notes a gradual movement in Wedel's work:

Many works demonstrate Wedel's shift towards abstraction, particularly in the flower tree forms, a recurring motif for the artist. Flowers are depicted with irregular petals that bloom from the tops of tubular forms, or in dense low-lying arrangements; while a series of wall mounted works deconstruct the floral form into ribbon-like petals that wrap and twist onto themselves. Color is more loosely applied, and is less aligned with form compared to earlier sculptures. The layered application of color is especially notable in a series of free-standing heads, their vague facial attributes obscured by muddled coloration, with hints of eyes, noses and mouths etched directly into the glaze.

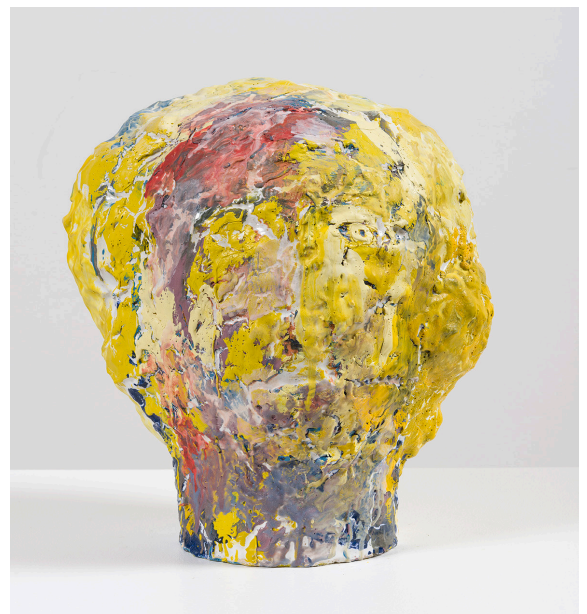
This not a show to miss. It is a game changer for the artist, and the growing role of ceramics in art.



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Matt Wedel, Flower tree (MW14-2), 2014
ceramic, 42 x 36 1/2 x 48 in. (106.7 x 92.7 x 121.9 cm)



Matt Wedel, Portrait (MW 15-74) 2015
stoneware, 16 x 12 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches, 40.6 x 31.8 x 29.8 cm