



Matt Wedel: Potted Plant, 2020. gouache on paper, 44 1/2 x 32 in (Courtesy of LA Louver)

MATT WEDEL'S BOTANICAL POTS AND PAINTINGS AT LA LOUVER



SHANA NYS DAMBROT × NOVEMBER 16, 2023

Fans of sculptor Matt Wedel's eccentric ceramics—and especially his hearty, eccentric, mottled, expressively colorful take on succulents and botanicals—might be surprised when visiting his current exhibition at LA Louver, to encounter an exhibition of paintings instead. But what his work in two dimensions releases in hefty object presence, jaunty-edged planarity, and irresistible tactility, it reclaims with a super-charged palette, optical lushness, and a sinuous, cheeky life force. What both of Wedel's approaches to the evocative potential of exotic flora have in common, is that despite their nearly extraterrestrial strangeness, it's all palpably based on the inherent flourishes and fancies of nature itself. If the spiked leaves of bulbous succulents reference jaunty cactuses in the desert, Wedel's recent gouaches are redolent instead of the fecund verdance and blossom-rich landscape of Hawaii.



Matt Wedel: Flower Tree (Hawaii), 2023, gouache and pen on paper, 14 x 11 in (Courtesy of LA Louver)

Wedel's work has always been informed equally by art historical citations, material experimentation, and personal narratives from his family's generational presence in the pottery world to his formative travels through Europe's Renaissance art collections. In this case, the new painting series *Potted Plant* 2017-21 and *Flower Tree (Hawaii)* 2023, were each made around inflection points in his life—the latter during an exotic (for a son of the Midwest) extended residency in Hawaii. With the embrace of the symbolism embedded in Dutch still-life storytelling, the vessels depicted reference his father's pottery practice, their contents speak to his mother's avid gardening; and the choices of blossom, berry, leaf, stem, stalk, and curving blade evoke the body with humor and infuse the botanicals of his adventures with the emotional body language of a human figure.



Matt Wedel: Potted Plant, 2017, gouache on paper, 30 x 22 in (Courtesy of LA Louver)

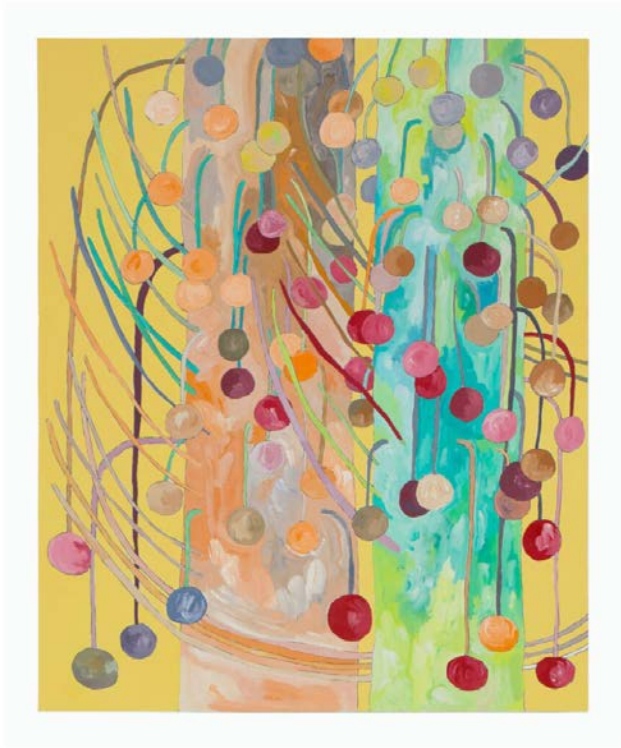
His activated palette is itself a nod to the retinal engorgement prompted by the island's surreal beauty. But it is also very much the result of his long-standing interest in color theory, optical effect, and teasing movement out of flickering spectral tensions. In that way the work appears anything but naturalistic, and is instead engaged with the efforts of painters in both abstract and figurative idioms that have been most interested in the shenanigans they could instigate in the eye of the beholder.



*Matt Wedel: Potted Plant, 2021, gouache on paper, 17 x 14 in
(Courtesy of LA Louver)*

But even before his Hawaiian sojourn, Wedel had practiced working on paper to cultivate a refreshed way to observe the world and its questions of surface, color, and meaning. There's a different quality of attention to working in paper versus clay, a factor of speed and scale and flat composition rather than dimensional engineering, and a quality of immediacy to the results. However there is also a lightness, a vulnerability to paper versus heavy clay, an ephemerality in the materials that speaks to the delicacy and peril of the natural world, as we celebrate its charm and splendor while we teeter on the brink of its destruction. As much as this work has to do with memory and the artist's personal philosophies, it also belongs to the collective realm of beauty and care—not quite a plea, but certainly a prompt, to remember what we love.

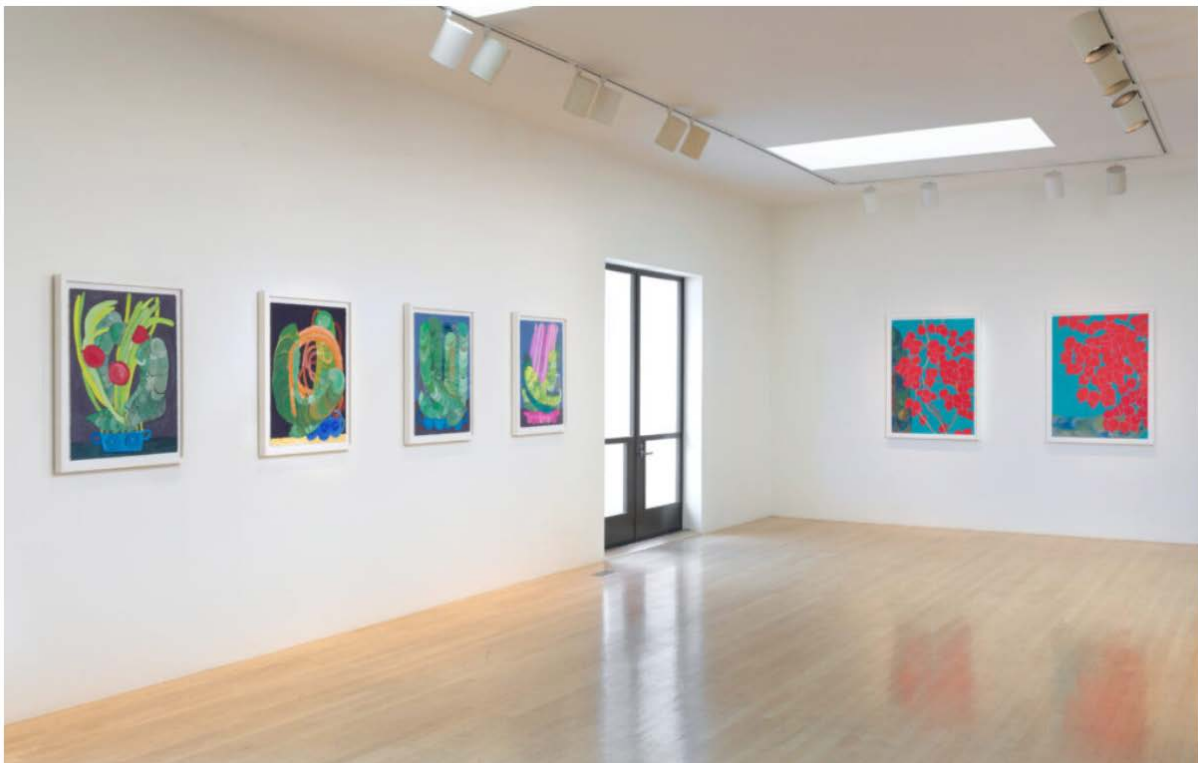
Pictures in the Garden is on view at 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice; On view through January 6; free; lalouver.com.



Matt Wedel: Flower Tree (Hawaii), 2023, gouache and pen on paper, 14 x 11 in (Courtesy of LA Louver)



Matt Wedel: Potted Plant, 2020, gouache on paper, 44 1/2 x 32 in (Courtesy of LA Louver)



Matt Wedel: Pictures in the Garden, installation view at LA Louver (Photo: Robert Wedemeyer)

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