

CALENDAR

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AROUND THE GALLERIES

Spreading peace ... on the surface

Fiery apocalypse lurks deep in Matt Wedel's weighty (literally)

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ART CRITIC

Ceramics has an ancient history of fusing painted surfaces with sculptural forms. Perhaps that's one reason why the ceramic medium continues to be productively employed by so many artists today, when all things hybrid are highly valued and base materials are attractive the further they exist from the digital ether of daily life.



"FLOWER TREE" is part of Matt Wedel's "Peaceable Fruit" at L.A. Louver

At L.A. Louver, Matt Wedel's second solo show of nearly two dozen ceramics ranges from modest wall reliefs to elaborate and monumental sculptures, the smallest just 17 inches high and the largest reaching nearly 7 feet. Titled "Peaceable Fruit," it finds inspiration in Edward Hicks' famous early-19th century paintings of "the wolf dwelling with the lamb" in nature's pacific harmony, as biblical Isaiah 11:6-8 has it.

Some sculptures include human figures, usually ungainly and somehow forlorn, but the most sumptuous and extravagant works tend to feature plants. They evoke thickened, fleshy succulents, writhing and entangled like Medusa's twisting coif. Fat, tubular stems snake around one another and erupt into artichoke- or echeveria-like blossoms.

In one work, spectacular clusters of abstract bananas at the tips of hefty, curling stalks recall toy-like lions' tails.

Glazes are often brash and runny, chartreuse entwined with grape or puce with orange and off-white. Matte mixes with shiny, the play of light both absorbent and reflective to further visually animate the poured colors.

These giant floral clusters sometimes seem to swallow up fragments of human forms within them. They're like Capodimonte porcelains on steroids, topped with a dash of LSD.

They also weigh a ton. (This is the first time I've seen a gallery checklist note weight along with dimensions.) Of the earth as well as about it, the sculptures were each fired in a single piece in kilns large enough to accommodate their sometimes monumental size. The fruits might be peaceable, but an unavoidable hint of fiery apocalypse lurks within.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., (310) 822-4955, through Nov. 7. Closed Sundays and Mondays.
www.lalouver.com