

## ART TALK



### In the Art Ring: Newcomer Artist vs. Heavyweight Champion

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**Host:**

- [Edward Goldman](#)

Two new solo exhibitions that opened over the past week in **LA Louver** and **Blum & Poe** couldn't be more different. After all, sculptor Matt Wedel is a talented young newcomer bursting with ideas, while multimedia artist-celebrity Takashi Murakami is a sort of heavyweight champion of the art world.

But if you're curious and adventurous enough to see these exhibitions — one in Venice and the other in Culver City — you will probably agree with me that both artists deliver quite a punch. Not to each other but to us, viewers. To our sensibilities and to our eyes, and thankfully leaving no bruises but rather lasting pleasure.



*Sculptures by Matt Wedel, "Sheep's Head," LA Louver  
Image Edward Goldman, Courtesy Matt Wedel and LA Louver*

Thanks to his father, a professional ceramicist, Matt Wedel started to play with clay at the tender age of two. So in spite of his youth, he already has more than 20 years of experience with molding, firing and glazing clay. Looking at his sculptures — varying in size from small to gigantic, and exhibiting a wide range of color from subdued to exuberant — one wonders, is there any subject or style he would be afraid to tackle?



*Artist Matt Wedel in his studio  
Image Jeff McLane, courtesy LA Louver*

There's a variety of plant and flower-inspired sculptures where the artist acts "like an eccentric botanist...in a hot house." These floral sculptures are attractive and slightly unsettling, as if they had been dreamed up by the same mad scientist who created the Frankenstein monster. Then there are a number of smaller and larger-than-life figurative sculptures, primarily female forms, though some of them are rather ambiguous.



*(L-R) Matt Wedel, "Flower tree," 2013, ceramic; Matt Wedel, "Lady," 2013, ceramic  
Image Edward Goldman, courtesy Matt Wedel and LA Louver*

And when Matt Wedel wants to step away from representational art, he bravely and successfully engages with pure geometric forms. Looking at his monumental, monochromatic sculpture, *Rock*, I get the sense that he is paying tribute to the Cubism of Picasso and Braque.



*Artist Matt Wedel with "Rock," 2013, ceramic  
Image Edward Goldman, courtesy Matt Wedel and LA Louver*

Looking at the photo of the artist in his studio, one sees him alone, no assistants, but surrounded by a dense crowd of his own ceramic creatures. Though his work had already been seen in a number of group shows nationally and internationally, this exhibition at L.A. Louver is his first solo show in a major gallery. Matt Wedel is definitely the artist whose career is worth following.

Which brings us to one of the best-known and most commercially successful artists of our time: Takashi Murakami. At this point it's probably easier to name the few countries and few major museums where Murakami hasn't yet had a solo exhibition. Five years ago we enjoyed a **massive exhibition** of his paintings and sculptures here at MOCA — an exhibition that included a controversial Louis Vuitton gift shop stuffed with Murakami-designed merchandise. A couple years ago, his multicolored, over-the-top sculptures even **invaded the sacred precincts** of the Palace of Versailles. Looking at images of his works there, one wonders if our French friends were admiring his art or making fun of it.



*(foreground) Takashi Murakami, "Flame of Desire - Gold," 2013, gold leaf on fiberglass*

*(background) Takashi Murakami, "69 Arhats beneath the Bodhi Tree," 2013 acrylic, gold and platinum leaf on canvas mounted on board  
Image Edward Goldman, courtesy Takashi Murakami and Blum & Poe*

At the Blum & Poe exhibition of his new work, Takashi Murakami shows several impressive mural-sized paintings and one gigantic gilded sculpture, all of them undoubtedly executed with a multitude of his trusted studio assistants. Murakami is not the first successful artist whose practice relies on the help of a large skillful team. Rubens had one centuries ago, and Warhol's career would be unimaginable without his Factory.



(top) Takashi Murakami, "*Pom & Naked Me: On the Blue Mound of the Dead*,"  
2013

*acrylic on canvas mounted on board*

(bottom) Takashi Murakami, "*Naked Self Portrait with Pom*," 2013  
*platinum leaf on bronze*

*Images Edward Goldman, courtesy Takashi Murakami and Blum & Poe*

I was surprised to discover a few small-scale self-portraits by Murakami—one sculpture and a few paintings—where the artist demonstrates an unusual sense of intimacy and self-deprecating humor, rather than his trademark showbiz theatricality. I wouldn't be surprised if his slightly cartoonish self-portraits—depicting him vulnerable, nude and bespectacled—were in fact executed primarily by the artist himself rather than his assistants.

One of the looming dangers in the career of any extremely successful artist is to get stuck in the same *modus operandi* and to endlessly repeat yourself. I am delighted to report that this danger is not present in the exhibition of new works by Takashi Murakami.

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Banner image: Sculptures by Matt Wedel, *Sheep's Head*, LA Louver. Photo by Edward Goldman, courtesy Matt Wedel and LA Louver