

A GORGEOUS NEW JEFF WENZEL SOLO PAIRS PAINTINGS AND CERAMICS

By **Michael Paglia** *Thursday, Jun 12 2014*

Jeff Wenzel is one of Colorado's great abstract artists, with a solid body of work done over the past few decades. Though his roots are in ceramics — he was a protégé of Peter Voukos, whose abstract-expressionist approach to clay completely revolutionized that medium — Wenzel has only rarely exhibited his ceramics in Denver, and even more rarely has he exhibited them together with his much more familiar paintings. So the drop-dead-gorgeous solo, **Jeff Wenzel: Duende**, which just opened at Goodwin Fine Art, is a rare treat. And seeing the two types of work presented together kicks up the visual charge of the show, which has been perfectly installed by gallery director Tina Goodwin.

Whether with paint or clay, Wenzel's signature move is automatism, so he invariably employs abstract-expressionism as his taking-off point. But there's more to it than that, because the work unexpectedly combines the sense of freedom that characterizes automatism with its opposite motive, obsessiveness: Wenzel addresses the same areas over and over again until he gets precisely what he wants.

Oddly enough, despite the seemingly untamed creative frenzy that both the paintings and the ceramics — all of which were created in the past few months — reveal, Wenzel's instinct for a great composition and a killer surface comes through every time. Ceramics and paintings are made in thoroughly different ways, with the artist having much less control of the ceramic process because clay changes when it's fired. But both kinds of work in this show are thoroughly compatible and clearly from the same hand.

The paintings, however, are different from his earlier efforts in one key way. Whereas previously the surfaces were fractured, in this new body of work they are unified. As part of his process, Wenzel uses bits of paper and cardboard, some of which he pre-paints, and then lays them down on a board. In the earlier work, Wenzel allowed the collage elements to stand out, but here he has almost completely painted over them. A good example is "Tarantula" (pictured), a masterful juggling of reddish bars against a neutral field. The scale of it is wonderful too, with the piece being a big, fat, nearly square rectangle.

It's too bad that *Modern Masters*, just a few blocks away from Goodwin at the Denver Art Museum, had only a few days' crossover in its run with this show, since Wenzel is so clearly heir to some of the New York School greats that anchored that blockbuster.

<http://www.westword.com/2014-06-12/culture/jeff-wenzel-duende-goodwin-fine-art/>

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