

Entertainment | Visual Arts

December gallery shows: retrospectives and an evolving artist's work

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 Dirk Staschke, "Beyond a Shadow" (2017), ceramic, wood and epoxy. (See caption for credit)
3 of 3

Dirk Staschke

Venerable tradition meets hallucinatory ceramics experiment in the work of Portland artist Dirk Staschke. The 11 works in his new show, "Perfection of Happenstance," offer variations on Dutch 17th-century vanitas paintings, which depicted everyday objects as symbols of the ephemeral and reminders of the vanity of all mortal human enterprises and pleasures. Ranging from flower bouquets to dinner-table offerings to boudoir items, Staschke's ceramic vanitas are all trompe l'oeil triumphs.

Staschke's work has changed in the last year or so, especially his floral bouquets which now melt and ooze downward in brownish trickles onto his ornate picture frames like something out of a Hammer horror film. The combination of chaos and control in the glaze-work is impressive.

Staschke plays with genre in another way in "Beyond a Shadow," in which his 3D vanitas — a pillow, a pearl necklace and two extinguished candles arrayed around a skull — is tilted on an angle, evoking a physical instability that matches the temporal instability of the piece's contents.

10 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays through Jan. 10. Winston Wächter Fine Art, 203 Dexter Ave. N., Seattle (206-652-2855 or www.winstonwachter.com).

Michael Upchurch: www.michaelupchurchauthor.com