

**DAVID B SMITH**  
GALLERY

Jason Thielke

*Zero-zero*

April 15 – May 14, 2011

David B. Smith Gallery

1543 A Wazee Street

Denver, CO 80202

303.893.4234

[davidbsmithgallery.com](http://davidbsmithgallery.com)

Exhibition Essay by Leanne Haase Goebel

Jason Thielke's figurative drawings explore the constellation of human experience. Yet this exhibition marks a departure for the artist, away from technical perfection. Previous works involved laser etching and many hours digitally recreating his original, hand-drawn sketches. For *Zero-zero*, the artist is hand-drawing directly on wooden panel.

"My favorite tool is colored pencil and graphite. It's all fun, but that's what really pulls it together for me, the areas that are coming into focus, that's what's doing it. It's a tool that is translating and allowing the continuation of my style," Thielke said. He prefers Prismacolor and Staedtler graphite.

Another shift is that instead of creating abstraction from fine detail, the artist is starting from abstraction, and the work gets tighter as he proceeds. It's coming into focus instead of blurring out of focus.

"A lot of my work is sort of obsessed with negative space, trying to come up with the perfect composition, and I tried to let go of that a little bit this time around," Thielke said. "I guess it's a constant struggle, being a loose artist and planning things out. The women figures, the newer ones, like *Survivor*, I think she's emotionally messy, and that comes across with the way that I'm drawing now."

The work is still made up of lines and planes, of architectural elements, but the lines are now diverse in their weight and thickness — not all are heavy and black, some are thin and fine, others fat and velvety. And while Thielke's previous work explored the combination of swirling curvilinear lines versus harsh, straight edges, here the effect is more like patterns that whisper Gustav Klimt, minus the eroticism, gold leaf, and Freudian psychoanalysis. Lines that are less sterile and more infused with an admiration and respect for the strong, powerful female form.

A viewer will not often see the male form in Thielke's drawings, but the masculine elements of power, aggression, and force are evident in the animals that appear: bighorn sheep, zebra, antelope. There is a steadfastness to these figures that belies the masculine. "There is sort of this feeling that as a man, you're supposed to know exactly what you want," Thielke said. "But these animals buck that idea, they struggle, appear trapped."

In *Comatose*, a female figure is blurred by the merging of a deer into her form. The doe is a representation of the fragile figure — nude, but not objectified; relaxed and comfortable, one hand gently resting atop the other, wrists crossed, a hint of warm pink tones washing over the canvas.

"I'm thinking about the messiness of life and how we are trying to figure things out," Thielke said. Perhaps it's maturity, a level of understanding that comes with being in his mid-thirties, a growing into the full complexities of understanding that life is inherently messy, that is pushing this growth.

Thielke grew up in Tempe, Arizona, taking summer art classes with adults at Arizona State University. He graduated from Northern Illinois University with a B.F.A. in 2000, then worked for several years as a graphic designer, relocating with his wife to Denver

“because we didn’t like the Chicago area and wanted to live somewhere between Arizona and Illinois.” They like to snowboard, so Denver was a natural choice. He’s been with the David B. Smith Gallery since 2008.

Whatever the motivation, the subtle shift is powerful. Thielke’s work continues to stand out among contemporary figurative artists as original. What is coming into focus for the artist is the importance of human touch to art-making. His works echo a bit the drawings of George Condo, particularly the *Constructed Female Portrait*, recently displayed at the Denver Art Museum in *Face to Face*. The architectural elements used to construct a drawing or a figure in Thielke’s hand seem less dark, less angry, less cartoon-like than Condo’s Pollock-esque faces. The contrast of loose wash and tight lines, angles, shapes, and forms that make up his compositions allow the mystery and the power of the figure to stand on its own. The artist professes that his work is about “being in awe of what we take for granted in life.” This is evident in the complex forms and shapes that make up a shadow on a knee, while the curve of a back is hinted at by the loose stroke of a brush. Nothing in a Thielke work can be taken for granted.