

THE WINNERS! OUR SELF-PORTRAIT COVER CONTEST FINALISTS *page 62*

AMERICAN ARTIST

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CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE



Aron Wiesenfeld's figurative drawings and paintings are rich with meaning and wonderfully ambiguous, inviting viewers to create their own narratives and feel a sense of kinship with the artist's young protagonists.

BY NAOMI EKPERIGIN

W

hen Aron Wiesenfeld paraphrases a quote from David Bayles and Ted Orland's book *Art & Fear*, I can't say that I'm surprised. His drawings and paintings are fearless—the product of intensive training serving a vivid imagination. His figures are expressive yet also realistic. Working in both charcoal and oil, Wiesenfeld's straightforward execution belies a complexity and emotive power that one might not expect from such highly stylized figures. In short, the artist shows us that less really is more.

Wiesenfeld began his study of art with an introduction to comic books at the age of 10. "I wanted to draw like those artists, and I would copy them," he recalls. This wasn't an idle hobby, however. Before he took formal classes in

The Lesson
2007, charcoal, 35 x 50. All artwork this article private collection.



high school, Wiesenfeld worked diligently, teaching himself how to draw each body part from various angles. His skills earned him acceptance into New York City's Cooper Union, one of the country's top art schools. "Unfortunately, Cooper wasn't for me," the artist says. "They were doing a lot of conceptual art, and I wanted more traditional training. So I left Cooper and decided to pursue comics." Wiesenfeld worked in comics for about five years before "the childhood romance went away," as he puts it. There was a rigidity to the process that didn't satisfy his creative aspira-

Landfall
2009, charcoal
and sanguine,
50 x 38.

tions. "Creating art for comics leaves very little room for interpretation," the artist explains. "You work in pencil or pen-and-ink and only work on one aspect of the final picture. In my case, I was doing the drawing. Then I would hand it over to a colorist, who would do his or her part. But it wasn't a collaboration—we weren't advised or shown what the other person was doing. I could have an idea in my head and the end result would be very different."

Despite the brevity of his illustration career, Wiesenfeld displayed a skill and unique voice that earned him

a strong following. Nearly 10 years after he left the industry, he was still popular among enthusiasts. In 2009, one blogger wrote a lengthy post titled, "Where have you gone, Aron Wiesenfeld?" in which he outlines the artist's career. The blogger offers several examples of Wiesenfeld's work, and says that, by 1996, "I am not only buying anything he does but I am actively hunting down his comics. Very few people in mainstream comic books at this time are turning out work like that."

With such devoted fans (some from as far away as Australia), it's likely that Wiesenfeld could have easily

transitioned into animation, graphic design, or another field for which he was already well qualified. But instead he decided to go back to art school. "I wanted a more in-depth education in traditional drawing and painting," he explains of his decision to enroll in the Art Center College of Design, in Pasadena, California. "Although I had drawing chops from my previous work, I didn't have painting experience, and my color mixing and color theory were weak. I wasn't that far ahead of other students in some areas." Displaying the same dedication that he had when he was just 10 years old, Wiesenfeld threw himself into the rigorous

Leigh
2007, charcoal,
15½ x 23½.

four-year program. There, he discovered that he had an affinity for oil painting and charcoal, which are now his preferred media. "The charcoal drawings started out as preliminary sketches for oil paintings," the artist recalls, "but I ended up loving the medium so much that I took the drawings to the finished stage. There are times when I just know that there's no way I can improve on something by adding color."

When he finds himself inspired—by anything from a passage in a novel to a passerby—he begins drawing in his sketchbook and exploring his subject from multiple angles. "It's constant trial and

error," he says. "I can do upward of 50 sketches that don't turn into anything. And once I do find something I want to take further, I still find myself re-drawing on my paper." He maintains a studio in downtown San Diego, where he works at least 40 hours a week. Wiesenfeld takes an intuitive approach to his artmaking—which is where *Art & Fear* comes in. "Don't ask what you need from your drawing, ask what your drawing needs from you," he paraphrases. "It's a great guideline for creating art. I come into the studio each day with fresh eyes and see what my work needs. The drawing usually dictates where it needs to go next."





Although he has long left behind the world of muscled heroes and explosions, his current work utilizes many of the same skills. "When you read a comic, you have to connect the dots," Wiesenfeld explains. "I like that the reader has to get involved in the story." In his illustration work, he became known for wordless panels in which he conveyed complex narratives. Although the stylization has changed, the same complexity can be seen in such drawings as *Landfall* and *Rain*. Where the heroines are headed—or from where they are fleeing—is unclear. His renderings are highly expressive, the product of figure drawings done from imagination. "I painted from models at Art Center and continued right after I graduated," the artist says, "but I found that my paintings were looking like everyone else's. Painting from a model has already been perfected, especially in the 19th century. When I started working from my imagination my drawings and paintings began to feel more personal and truer to what I was after."

What Wiesenfeld wants is to make the viewer question—and be okay without a definite answer. His paintings are often ominous, placing a solitary young

adult against a harsh landscape. "I never set out to draw or paint young people, but I think that my figures come out that way because adolescence is a pivotal time in everyone's life," the artist explains. "For me, that was the first time I was standing in front of the unknown. I had to make decisions for myself, and those decisions actually mattered. I'm very fascinated by the lone hero, which is a trope of comics. The idea of one person against the world is always interesting." ❖

ABOVE
Postcards
2009, oil,
16 x 20.

RIGHT
Postcards
2009,
charcoal,
18 x 24.



WIESENFELD'S MATERIALS

DRAWING TOOLS

- Winsor & Newton vine charcoal in various degrees of hardness
- General's charcoal pencils
- General's compressed charcoal
- White Nupastel

SURFACES

- Conventry vellum rag paper
- Canson 20" x 25" drawing sheets

OTHER

- Krylon spray fixative
- Pink Pearl erasers

PANELS

Purchased from Utrecht, Artist & Craftsman Supply, or custom-made from Mission Blue Studio



Rain
2006,
charcoal,
50 x 38.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Aron Wiesenfeld's work has been featured in a number of group and solo exhibitions in New York and California. His drawings and paintings have appeared in publications around the world, including Spain's *Lamano* and *Doze* magazines; Australia's *Empty*; *American Art Collector*, *Juxtapoz*, and *Hi Fructose*. He is represented by Arcadia Fine Arts, in New York City, where he will present a solo exhibition of new work in November. For more information on the artist, visit www.aronwiesenfeld.com.