

HEROIC



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"Suspended"
Aron Wiesenfeld
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the
art of
Aron
Wiesenfeld
by Annie Owens

There's always so much weather out there isn't there? First it's sunny, then it's cold, then sunny again, then out of nowhere nature goes all sideways and some poor soul is caught outside in a torrent of hail and rain without a coat or umbrella, miles away from any refuge. The tide is high and suddenly all navigable choices to reach a final destination narrow to just one perilous path.

This very well could describe the scene in Aron Wiesenfeld's "The Lesson"—a massive charcoal drawing shown as part of his solo exhibit in New York's Arcadia Fine Arts gallery which opened on November 19, 2009. Aron's first solo show since 2007 will include five drawings and 11 paintings many of which are up to five feet high.

Given the atmospheric nippiness characteristic of his work, I was slightly surprised to learn that Wiesenfeld makes his home in sunny San Diego. He began his art career in comics, also surprising given the highbrow appeal of his work, (that is admittedly nerdish of me) drawing and inking for Continuity Comics then later moving to Marvel doing pencils on two of the *X-men* stories and covers for such titles as *Vertigo*, *Team 7* and *Fables*. Since Aron made his move to fine art (much to the befuddlement of his peers) he has enjoyed a career showing in a number of blue chip galleries nationwide. Aron's basic goals are to "feel inspired and to share that feeling with others." Today there is barely a trace of the hyper-real anatomy seen in the work of his comic roots, although his work is still very much focused on people as iconic forms occupying the picture plane. Forms "sculpted" in varying tones of grey—never extremes of dark and light—possess such depth and dimension, they are likely to take a breath right in front of you.

As I'm drawn into the depths of another piece, "The Gathering" it is, despite my best efforts, difficult to avoid stringing together my own narrative. Aron was

graciously tolerant of my musings and in fact, got right in there with me.

"The Gathering." This is another large and finely detailed drawing of a vast mountainous landscape. The young woman who dominates the picture wears an expression akin to that of a lioness who might have just scored a kill. This, combined with the raw solitude of the environment, is incongruous to her attire—the innocent basket, the civilized hairclip and her undeniable air of sophistication. What's portrayed is a woman of monumental stature rather than a simple provincial girl who, it turns out, is more Hunter than Gatherer, throwing a keen twist into the title.

One of the first impressions I got from the figures in Aron's work was one of empathy—then admiration. Keeping in mind that the personal meaning or implication of a piece of work an artist creates can change and shift without reason—even for its creator, I asked Aron what might have provoked this painting and what it brings up for him.

Aron Wiesenfeld (AW): Thank you for sharing that initial interpretation with me. I think you are right; she needs the solitude of the mountains in order to express what she feels, and even to be capable of feeling it. Maybe I'm projecting too, but I think solitude is often a necessary condition for freedom. One needs to be away from the distraction and the psychological clutter of our usual lives to know one's true self.

Annie O (AO): A similar duality exists in "The Delegate's Daughter." Away from





probing eyes, the clenched fist and bare feet contrast sharply with the prim sophistication of her pink dress and sweater and gives way to something fierce and commanding.

AW: As you point out, she is having this bare footed, primal experience in nature yet wearing clothing that identifies her as culturally privileged... her situation is analogous to the heroes in the myths of history. It always starts with the renunciation by the individual of his or her worldly life and embarking on a quest, leading from the artifice of the human-made world to the more universal world of nature and magic, to find... I don't know what exactly; something more true or real, or just to go into the unknown and see what's there. I think that's what a quest is, it's about making a break from the known. The act of searching is more important than the goal.

[The] correlation between "The Delegates Daughter" and "The Gathering" is a self-motivated intention. Each has made a conscious decision to strike out on her own into the unknown. I think it's the willingness to face the unknown that makes both women "heroic," and maybe why the woman in "The Gathering" strikes you more as a hunter than a gatherer... both have a stance and a physical presence that, as you said, commands the picture.

(left) "The Delegate's Daughter"
(top) "The Lesson"

They both face the unknown boldly, without fear. Those are some of the things I was thinking about when making those pieces, but looking at them now I realize that my motivation was to give a symbolic form to my own aspirations, and my own "questing" that I do in the form of art making.

AO: The choices you make in rendering light impart an overcast, chilly feel to each situation.

AW: I know what you mean, and I think the lighting and isolation of the figures gives that sense. I often use the overcast-day lighting so that the major shapes in the composition are the figures, not the shapes of light and shadow that you see in a sunny-day kind of light. This gives central importance to the forms themselves, and I find it makes them feel

"I think solitude is often a necessary condition for freedom. One needs to be away from the distraction and the psychological clutter of our usual lives to know one's true self."

more sculptural and touchable. Things just seem to be more "themselves" on overcast days, without the distraction of direct sunlight.

AO: Your figures have changed a lot over the years. They are much less literally rendered, less realistic—more abstracted.

AW: It's true, my work has changed in the last several years. I used to use models and photographs for the paintings, but I realized that all of that realistic detail was distracting me from what I wanted to express. I also realized that I didn't want to compete with photographic art; especially now that many photographic artists are using Photoshop, painting cannot compete in that realm, and it reduces painting to a form of documenting.

I think the power of painting has always come from its subjectivity: it is a direct expression of the artist's intention that develops organically from scratch. So for that reason I started making up the figures, and I was much happier with the results. The side effect is the stylization... people often say that my figures are elongated, but I don't mean to paint them that way, it's just the way they come out. I still use photo reference to add some authentic details, but it's at the end of the process, not the beginning. I would like to try

to reintroduce models into it... I'm just not sure how that will work yet.

AO: Do you miss working in the comics industry?

AW: Yes, sometimes. It was more like a "real" job—it had a structure that is missing in what I do now, in which I feel I am sort of making things up as I go



along. Comics have an audience that is very responsive to what the creators do, and I sometimes miss getting that feedback. The people in that audience for the most part don't seem to be very empathetic with what I'm doing now. A common response is "why are you doing that? You could be drawing Batman?" Comics are a wonderful medium. I will probably return to it in some form. Although I don't feel like the work I'm doing now is entirely different from what I did in comics, for example the theme of heroism is still very important to me.

AO: Outside of art, what are you interested in? And what is your favorite compliment, comment or critique you've received?

AW: I have a one-track mind when it comes to my work, so other interests always seem to relate back to it. I love to read novels, and that is often a source

of images for paintings. I think if I hadn't become an artist I would have tried to be a musician; I love to write songs and play guitar, but I can't sing, so music is just a hobby. I'm very interested in anthropology, I like to imagine the circumstances of ancient people and I would like to study the subject more.

AO: While my partner and I discussed your work, he commented that "the people in the pictures appear to be caught out in weather they are unprepared and inappropriately dressed for." I really liked that observation because it alludes to their vulnerability or the capability for overcoming perilous circumstances, especially in the drawing "The Lesson."

AW: I like [this] description too. It really gets right to the point. That should have been the title of the show! And your word—vulnerability... I think that is at

the heart of it. The girls in these pieces are at odds with their surroundings, and definitely unprepared... struggling. And the tragedy is that they exist only in single images, so there will never be any resolution, except maybe in the viewer's mind.

This leads me back to your question about the best compliments I've ever received: I think the best have been when someone sees something of themselves by way of interpreting one of my paintings. It makes me think the image went beyond my own little world, and maybe I channeled something deeper, not that I can take credit for "creating" anything, but I guess I can feel good about recognizing that something was significant, at least in an intuitive way.✦

(Clockwise)
"The Gathering," Leigh, "The Oath Breakers"