



ARON WIESENFELD

# A Waking Dream



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A sense of the forlorn runs through much of Aron Wiesenfeld's work. His solitary protagonists brace themselves against the elements, stand poised before the swallowing void of a tunnel, curl themselves inside an oversized tire or threaten to dissolve into their misty surroundings. The setting is often just as moody—a dim, liminal, untamed place marred by the looming presence of civilization. And yet, an ethereal, quiet beauty prevails.

"I think a lot of those moods and emotions go back to early childhood," says Wiesenfeld. "It's hard to put my finger on, but I'd describe the mood as a feeling of both freedom and loneliness, which are two sides of the same coin. I think the paintings are like dream imagery in the sense that they are symbols that pop up from that 'interior landscape.' Painting is a way of almost dreaming while awake. Your conscious mind is occupied with the technical aspects of it, and in the background the image arises on its own."

Wiesenfeld's passion for art was ignited by the comic books of his youth. He would obsessively draw Conan the Barbarian and Wolverine in the margins of all of his papers throughout middle and high school, after which he enrolled in New York's Cooper Union School of Art. Disenchanted by the program's focus on conceptual art rather than making it, he left, eventually finding a better fit at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California.

Wiesenfeld first made a name for himself as a comic book artist creating illustrations for the likes of Marvel Comics and many others. While it was an incredible experience working in an industry so close to his heart, by 24, Wiesenfeld made the transition to pursue painting. His fine art retains traces of his background as an illustrator, especially his not-quite-human waiflike figures, but less so as his paintings grow in their richness, saturation and narrative complexity.

Wiesenfeld typically cast youths as his

central characters because their relatively unformed identities lend themselves to crossroad moments and compelling narratives that pose more questions than deliver answers. "There are so many things to try and ways to be," he says of the teenage years. "It is overwhelming, and could be paralyzing because the choices you make are so important."

In his upcoming show at Arcadia Contemporary, Wiesenfeld will reveal a stunning new body of work that illustrates just how far his work has evolved over time—emerging into a fullness that surpasses what has come before.

His visually gratifying piece *Spring* is an utmost expression of this—and a tantalizing taste of what might be to come.

"With *Spring* I wanted to do a big maximalist painting that had a lot of shapes and colors that would draw the eye all over the canvas," says Wiesenfeld. "The greenhouse in it is based on a real place, but I kept adding and adding things to it. I found

it really challenging to make a composition that had many points of focus while trying to maintain some sense visual cohesion at the same time." For Wiesenberg, the painting is very "North Carolina," where he and his family moved to from California two years ago. "I've found a lot of inspiration there," he says. "Actually I feel like we moved into one of my paintings!"

The piece depicts a young girl looking out from the entrance of a greenhouse, almost consumed by the bounty of blooms and buckets and an artist's palette of color. While most of his other pieces are more sparse and subdued, *The Gardener* is an apt name for his show. "Just as a gardener can't make a plant, an artist can't make a painting out of nothing," he says. "My role is to be able to identify the right seeds and water them. I'm there to nurture them every day and give them what they need. The early stages of a painting is like an idea underground and unformed, and at some point, hopefully, the painting 'flowers', and all that work will come to fruition."

*Fall*, depicting an other-worldly girl brought down to earth by a single untied shoelace, with a sleeping child (her brother?), looking out from her perch in a tree, arose from Wiesenberg's time in San Diego. "We lived in a nondescript suburban neighborhood and there was a big open field nearby," he says. "The painting is about the emotion I felt on those days, in that place, which was the kind of sadness that emptiness brings, but emptiness also brings a feeling of potential."

Very often the result is not what Wiesenberg expected but that's one of his favorite aspects of creating. "To be surprised by your own work is an absolute delight," he says. "It's kind of like being a gambling addict. You try things and nothing works, like putting coins in slot machines. And finally, boom! Something happens—an unexpected payoff. Those are the moments you live for." ●

### Arcadia Contemporary

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**1**  
*Spring*, oil on canvas,  
 40 x 85"

**2**  
*Fall*, oil on canvas,  
 44 x 80"

**3**  
*Fragments*, oil on canvas,  
 31 x 40"

**4**  
 Wiesenfeld in his studio  
 with a work in progress.

