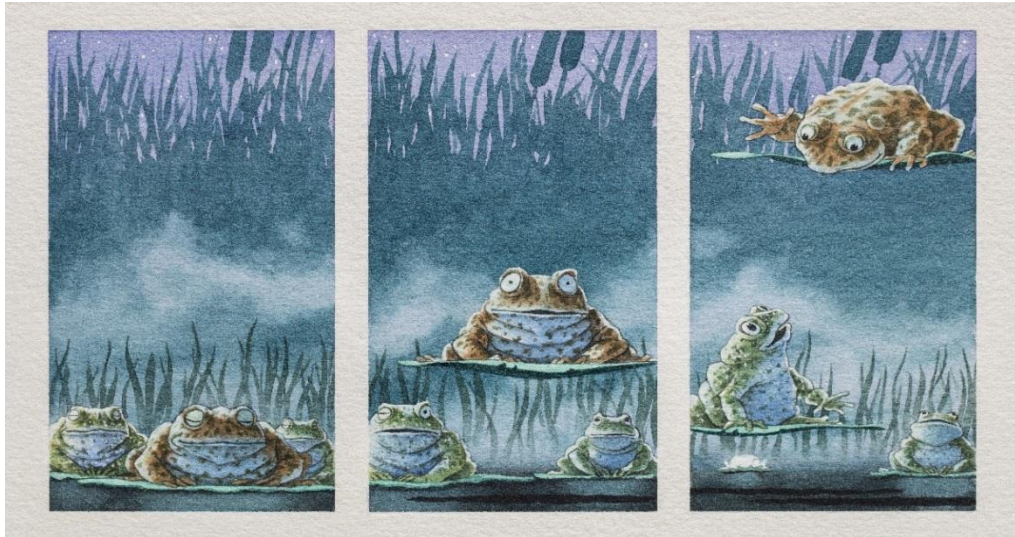




Contact: Katrina Carl
Public Relations Manager
805.884.6430
kcarl@sbma.net

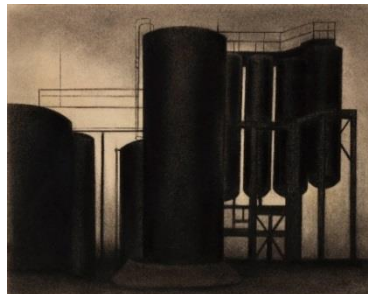


David Wiesner, *Tuesday*, pg. 1, 1991. Watercolor on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

David Wiesner & The Art of Wordless Storytelling

On view January 29 – May 14, 2017

October 26, 2016—Organized by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA), [*David Wiesner & The Art of Wordless Storytelling*](#) is the first comprehensive retrospective devoted to this internationally recognized master of the picture book. The exhibition includes nearly 80 original watercolors handmade by David Wiesner (b. 1956) for 10 of his most famous books, including three for which he won the prestigious Caldecott Medal: *Tuesday* (1992), *The Three Pigs* (2002), and *Flotsam* (2007). Wiesner is one of the most highly acclaimed picture book artists in the world and is only the second person in the history of the award to have received it three times. The show and accompanying exhibition catalogue also argue for the recognition of Wiesner's art as the inspired product of disparate sources, including earlier masters of the graphic medium, both European and American, and in more popular arenas, such as cartoons, graphic novels, comic books, and movies.



This is the first exhibition that seeks to contextualize the work of a noted, so-called "children's book illustrator" in the greater art-historical context of not just the contemporary visual culture of comic books and major motion pictures, but also the more somber realm of social critique, practiced so effectively in the

Left: Salvador Dalí, *Honey is Sweeter than Blood*, 1941. Oil on canvas. SBMA, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Warren Tremaine. **Right:** Joseph Stella, *The By-Product Storage Tanks*, n.d. (ca. 1918 - 1920). Charcoal on paper. SBMA, Gift of Wright S. Ludington.

19th century by the likes of Honoré Daumier and continued with gusto by his avant-garde followers between the World Wars. In the case of David Wiesner, many strands of influence are apparent in his now revered approach to wordless storytelling. As explored in the accompanying catalogue, one easily detects the artist's early attraction to surrealist masters of the 20th century (Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, and René Magritte), combined with an abiding fascination with the story-telling techniques of such American pioneers of the illustrated picture book as Lynd Ward (1905–1985), and the indelible impressions made by Ward's earlier European counterparts, Otto Nückel (1888–1955) or Franz Masereel (1889–1972).



Left: David Wiesner, *Flotsam*, pg. 19, 2006. Watercolor on paper. Courtesy of the artist. **Right:** David Wiesner, *Mr. Wuffles!*, pg. 8, 2013. Watercolor and india ink on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

The exhibition and catalogue provide an overview of the career of the Caldecott Award–winning artist, so that visitors both familiar and unfamiliar with Wiesner's achievements can appreciate these hand-wrought works of art that are the basis of his bestselling picture books. The charm of these wordless narratives is apparent; but the actual process by which Wiesner achieves this seemingly effortless effect of visual wit is not often fully apprehended, especially if limited to the reproductions of the illustrated books. Viewing the original works reveals the multiple layers of watercolor that he uses to create the opaque, exquisitely nuanced hues that bring each piece to life. The disparity between the slowness of the images' creation and the seeming instantaneity of the digitally produced reproductions that pop from the corresponding pages of Wiesner's picture books presents a somewhat paradoxical effect. It is, perhaps, not unmeaningful that a like disparity has often been pointed out in the work of Magritte, Dalí, and Giorgio de Chirico, whose oneiric images are far from spontaneous apparitions, but rather heavily calculated, technical works of labor.



The exhibition also includes collateral material by some of the artists that Wiesner has cited as important influences to connect the dots between areas of visual culture that are typically treated discretely. For instance, the kinship between Wiesner's relative self-effacement through the watercolor technique harkens to a muffling of technique in the tangibly intangible dream imagery of Salvador Dalí. Wiesner's exacting technique also resonates very clearly with the precisionist tradition of such American greats as Charles Sheeler or Joseph Stella, whose masterful works on paper have been drawn from SBMA's permanent collection to make this point. For Wiesner, there are also the more modern influences of film, including such classics as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* or a particular vignette from Looney Tunes, and comic books that every child of the 1960s and '70s probably recalls (at least, those who shared the attraction to the wildly impossible scenarios in static panes, pushed to their narrative potential by such masters as Jack Kirby [1917–1994] or Jim Steranko [b. 1938]). Certainly, Wiesner's latest creation and his first graphic novel, entitled *Fish Girl*, is indebted to their example. A coming of age tale that the artist produced in collaboration with author Donna Jo Napoli, *Fish Girl* is not a picture book, but 200 pages of images punctuated with text boxes and sound effects to tell the story of mermaid who longs to escape from the seaside attraction in which she was born and raised to discover the outside world. The book will be released by Clarion Books/Houghton-Mifflin in March 2017.

Image above: Nick Fury, *Agent of SHIELD* (June 1968) "Who is Scorpio", Jim Steranko, Michigan State University.



David Wiesner & The Art of Wordless Storytelling attempts to contribute to the growing art-historical literature that has now begun to probe the overlapping planes of interest between this imagistic terrain that is typically labeled visual culture, usually with the intent of disrespecting any former distinction between purportedly high and low forms of art. Katherine Roeder, art historian and specialist in this burgeoning area of inquiry, attempts to situate Wiesner's work in these various traditions. As she rightly argues, most of Wiesner's oeuvre hardly qualifies as illustration at all,

since the stories told emerge directly from the artist's creative process and not in the aftermath of a prior text, leaving ample room in their invitation to the viewer for his or her participation.

Image above: David Wiesner, *Fish Girl*, pg. 168-169, 2016. Watercolor and ink line on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Educational Interactives

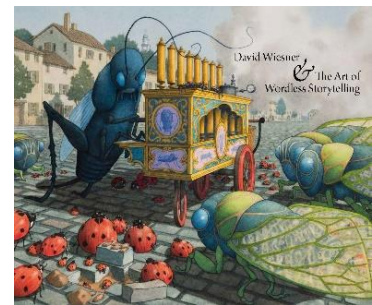


The Education Gallery includes David Wiesner's application *Spot* made available on iPads, and a reading area for all of Wiesner's books made available in several languages. Didactic labels are offered in multiple languages, including Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, German, and French. A downloadable app is available that includes recordings of the artist commenting on his creative process, technique, and overall approach. Excerpts from motion pictures, cartoons, and other source material of significance to the artist are also on view on a flat screen monitor.

David Wiesner, *Spot*, 2015. Watercolor and ink line on paper, Courtesy of the artist.

Catalogue

This exhibition is accompanied by an exquisitely designed, scholarly catalogue, distributed by [Yale University Press](http://www.yaleupress.edu) and authored by Katherine Roeder, Adjunct Faculty, George Mason University and the University of Maryland, University College, with a Q&A with the artist, David Wiesner, by SBMA Assistant Director and Chief Curator, Eik Kahng, and Chief Curator at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, Ellen Keiter. The catalogue will be available for purchase in the Museum Store.



Related Programs

Artist David Wiesner will give a public lecture on Sunday, January 29, 2017, and a second lecture and book signing for *Fish Girl* on a date in March TBD.

Credits

David Wiesner & The Art of Wordless Storytelling is organized by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, curated by Eik Kahng, SBMA Assistant Director and Chief Curator. The exhibition travels to The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art where it will be on view from June 18 – November 5, 2017.

The exhibition catalogue was generously underwritten by Zora and Les Charles. The exhibition was made possible through the generous support of the curatorial support groups The Dead Artists Society/D.A.S. ii and SBMA Women's Board.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is one of the finest museums on the West coast and is celebrated for the superb quality of its permanent collection. Its mission is to integrate art into the lives of people through internationally recognized exhibitions and special programs, as well as the thoughtful presentation of its permanent collection.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA. Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm, Free Thursday Evenings 5 – 8 pm 805.963.4364 www.sbma.net