



The first comprehensive retrospective devoted to David Wiesner (b. 1956), an internationally recognized master of the picture book, this exhibition includes nearly 80 original watercolors for ten of his most famous books, including three for which he won the prestigious Caldecott Medal: *Tuesday* (1992), *The Three Pigs* (2002), and *Flotsam* (2007).

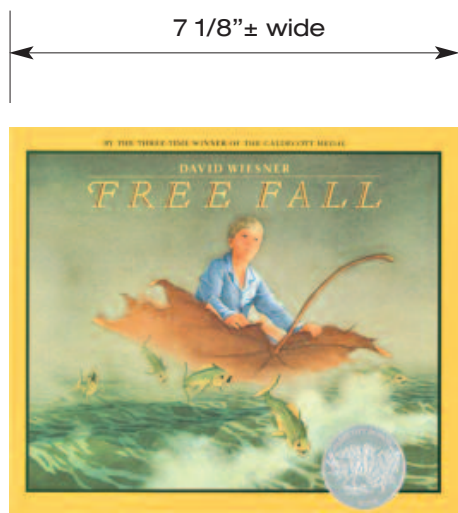
Wiesner is one of the world's most highly acclaimed picture book artists and only the second person in the award's history to have received it three times. The show reveals how his art has been informed by disparate sources: American Precisionists, such as Charles Sheeler and Joseph Stella; the master Surrealists Salvador Dalí and Max Ernst; early 20th-century graphic artists, both European (Franz Maseerel and Otto Nüchel) and American (Lynd Ward); two legends of the Marvel comic book realm, Jim Steranko and Jack Kirby; and, not least, the cinematic pioneer Stanley Kubrick.

The exhibition provides a rare opportunity for visitors to appreciate the hand-wrought works of art that are the basis of Wiesner's best-selling picture books. The charm of these wordless narratives is self-evident, but the process by which the artist 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 Wiesner uses to create the opaque, exquisitely nuanced hues that bring each piece to life. The meticulous care that he devotes to creating each image is in contrast to the seeming instantaneity of the reproductions that burst forth from the corresponding pages of Wiesner's picture books.

*All artwork in the exhibition unless otherwise indicated is by David Wiesner

36" wide

(Need portrait image file)



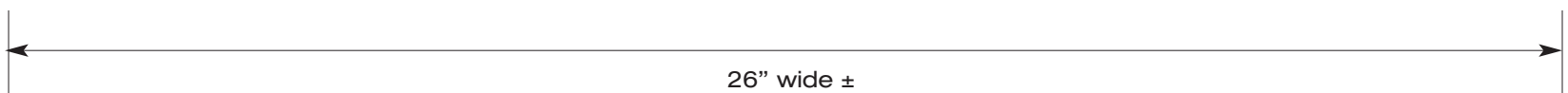
Free Fall

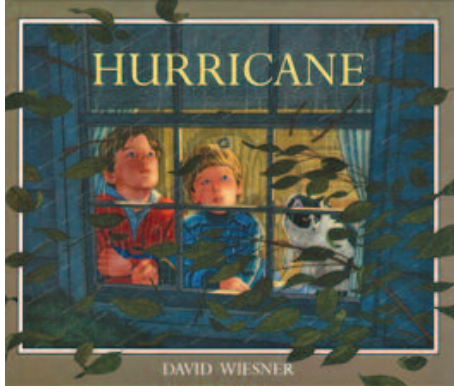
1988

ALL PAGES | Watercolor on paper

Wiesner was awarded his first Caldecot Honor Medal in 1988 for *Free Fall*. This is the first book for which the aspiring artist provided both the story and images, having earlier in his career more often illustrated others' book, album, or magazine covers. The imagery, presented in wide landscape format, is intended to be viewed by the reader in continuous spreads—Wiesner's preferred book format. The hallucinatory experience of the dream, populated with the ordinary paraphernalia of a little boy's familiar bedroom, provides the vehicle for a magical journey already inhabited by many of the artist's favorite creatures (dragons and pigs), with two dimensions frequently eliding into three.

As in the vast majority of Wiesner's books, the originals after which the books are made are watercolors. The artist carefully applies washes of color, one atop another, until he achieves the saturation and specificity of hue that he intends.





Hurricane

1990

ALL PAGES | Watercolor on paper

Related thematically to *Free Fall*, but intermixing both text and image, *Hurricane* revives Wiesner's childhood memory of a frightening night when the family cat had to be rescued from an impending storm; a fallen tree provides the stimulus for two brothers' flights of imagination. Hannibal, the black-and-white cat, is one of several furry felines that wander through the artist's watercolors in future projects. Wiesner masterfully captures the changing atmosphere, both indoors and out, of the hurricane and its aftermath. The images' deep familiarity to the child in each of us makes the sound of the raindrops pelting on the windowpanes audible. The child's ability to transform a felled tree into myriad environments—from jungle to ocean to outer space—is championed in these gently evocative renderings, again produced in watercolor to dazzling coloristic effect with carefully constructed sightlines, whether from a distant aerial view or as if sitting next to the boys on the couch.



Tuesday

1991

ALL PAGES | Watercolor on paper

Awarded the Caldecott Medal in 1991, *Tuesday* is one of Wiesner's best-known books. Largely wordless and structured around a particular Tuesday, the story visualizes the adventures of some fortunate frogs over the course of one magical evening. We are invited to share the frogs' delight as they glide through the neighborhood on their flying lily pads. Never have the facial features of a frog been captured in quite so many attitudes of wonder, giddiness, fear, and, finally, disappointment as they once again succumb to gravity. Like the comic book format from which Wiesner skillfully draws, the movement of time and space is implied through multiple panes, either repeated in bands or overlaid to capture details of the action close up as well as from afar. The gorgeous palette of greens and blues, localized through washes of watercolor, signals nuances of shifting light from dusk to dawn. The story ends with another moonlit sky, this time illuminating a bevy of levitating pigs, whose squeals of delight are charmingly communicated through wide eyes and open snouts.

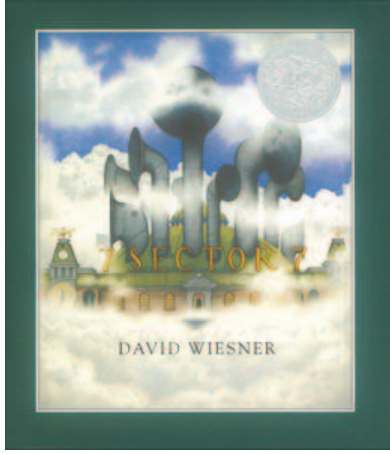


June 29, 1999

1992

ALL PAGES | Watercolor on paper

Once again, Wiesner invokes levitation as the vehicle for improbable flights of the imagination, this time for outsized vegetables that our protagonist, Holly Evans, believes (wrongly) to be the consequence of her science project gone awry. For the book, Wiesner provides humorous captions to punctuate the whimsical images of enormous vegetables in all different regions of the American landscape: from turnips in the Rockies to cabbages adrift in the big sky above an ordinary roadside diner. The plot twist, encountered in the final watercolors at the book's conclusion, reveals the actual cause behind this astonishing phenomenon: an extraterrestrial intervention by some aliens, who have accidentally jettisoned their technologically enhanced food supply. The meticulous description of Wiesner's watercolors is a trademark of his work. The fantastic scenarios so lovingly described immediately recall the work of the Belgian Surrealist René Magritte.

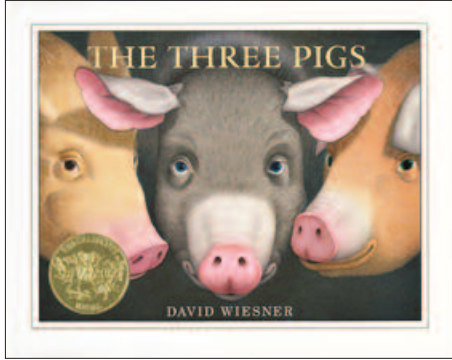


Sector 7

1999

ALL PAGES | Watercolor on paper

Published in 1999, *Sector 7* is essentially a parable for the importance of holding on to our childhood ability to pretend. A wordless narrative, the story revolves around a little boy on a class field trip to the Empire State Building who is befriended by a cloud and introduced to the real origin of such celestial formations: a steampunk factory high up in the sky. Whereas the human factory workers adhere to a strict menu of cloud types, the boy designs all sorts of fanciful forms for the clouds to adopt from an aquatic vocabulary recurrent in Wiesner's work, including exotic fish and octopuses. This unlawful creativity quickly leads to the boy's banishment from Sector 7, but his lasting impression on the imaginatively stifled clouds is obvious in the schools of fish-shaped clouds visible in the Manhattan skyline. The book received a Caldecott Honor Award.



The Three Pigs

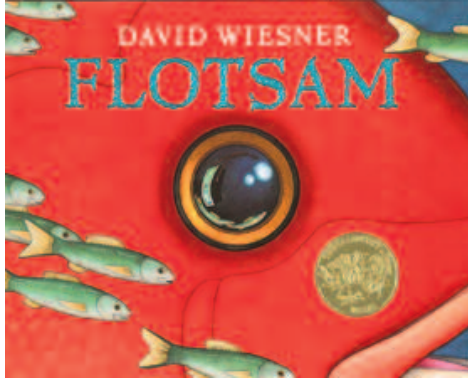
2001

JACKET | Watercolor, gouache, and colored pencil on paper

PAGE 1 | Watercolor, india ink, gouache, and colored pencil on paper

PAGES 7, 14–15, 29, 30–31, 34–35, AND 39 | Watercolor, india ink, gouache, and colored pencil on paper

Wiesner received his second Caldecott Medal for this extraordinary reimagining of the classic fairy tale of the three pigs. Stylistically, the book is a departure from the earlier watercolors in that the manner of drawing changes as our porcine protagonists pass from one story into the next. Inspired by the original Looney Tunes, in which characters break free from the cartoon into the white space of the imagination, these pigs wander in and out of other fairy tales, acquiring new friends along the way. They ultimately foil the hungry wolf, who threatens to blow down their houses in order to gobble them up, by a romp through the discrete pictorial universes of “Hey diddle diddle . . .,” and then “High on a hill there lived a great dragon.” Ultimately, the pigs’ new friends, including the impressive dragon from the hill, help them find permanent refuge from the wolf, and they all live happily ever after. Considerably more words are expended in this picture book through captions and dialogue balloons, but the clever use of white space also is just as evocative in this visual spoof on the interstitial areas between fictional worlds.

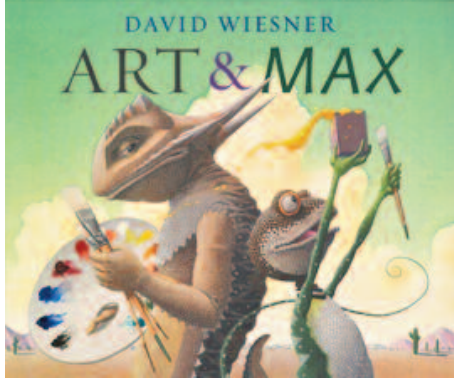


Flotsam

2006

ALL PAGES | Watercolor on paper

In 2006, Wiesner earned a third Caldecott Medal for this beautifully realized wordless story about a young boy's discovery of an old camera washed up on the beach. Saturated with his own boyhood memories of the Jersey shore that were then deepened through his children's, the story merges time and space through the device of images captured on film over decades, as each new child records his or her own immediate reality and then casts the old-fashioned camera back into the ocean to be found yet again. Wiesner's clever device of pictures within pictures in an infinite regression gives him ample opportunity to deploy his familiar range of aquatic subjects through reversals in scale and unexpected juxtapositions, devices commonly used by the Surrealists. The artist's mastery of the watercolor medium is unrivaled in these works of art, which abound with an astounding attention to minute details that invite the use of a magnifying glass.



Art & Max

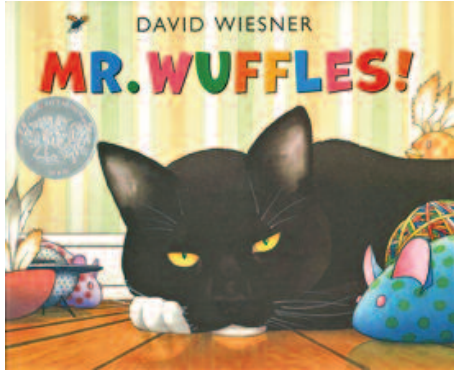
2010

JACKET, PAGES 1 AND 8 | Watercolor and acrylic on paper

PAGES 14–15 | Watercolor, acrylic, and pastel on paper

PAGE 25 | Watercolor, acrylic, and india ink on paper

Published in 2010, *Art & Max* uses sparing dialogue and an abundance of visual gags to recount the artistic adventure of two friends. Max's desire to mimic his friend by learning to paint leads to uproarious missteps, reminiscent in their zaniness of the antics found in classic Wile E. Coyote cartoons of the 1950s. (The desert's low horizon lines and Max's hair-brained schemes to restore his friend to his original appearance with an oscillating fan and a vacuum cleaner clearly branded with the Acme brand name makes this reference unmistakable.) The visual puns multiply, as Max further transforms his friend through Abstract Expressionist splatters and thousands of Pointillist dots of unblended primary colors.



Mr. Wuffles!

2013

ALL PAGES | Watercolor and india ink on paper

Wiesner's own cat Cricket served as the model for this curious feline and his discovery of a cat toy that turns out to be something entirely unexpected. Represented entirely from the perspective of the cat and the unsuspecting aliens whose space ship has become the object of Mr. Wuffles' undivided attention, the pictorial narrative flows in variously sized panes that read temporally from top to bottom and left to right as the aliens set out to find a means of repairing their battered-about space ship. Luckily, they are befriended by some ants and ladybugs and through pictures (again, images within images—a favorite ploy of the artist), the aliens are able to repair their ship's broken part and escape from the predatory Mr. Wuffles. The irresistible charm of this largely wordless tale lies in Wiesner's mastery of the feline movements, expressions, and attitudes that any cat owner will recognize.

Spot

2015

ALL PAGES | Watercolor and ink line on paper

In 2015, Wiesner released one of his most unusual and innovative publications: an app made specifically for the iPad. Called *Spot* and introduced visually by the spots on a ladybug, the app capitalizes on the zooming-in capability of the iPad to lead viewers through an interconnected series of fantastical universes. Reversals and inversions of scale once again draw the viewer from one realm to the next; each is populated with the now familiar creatures that are the staple of the artist's oeuvre. Quotations from the Surrealists abound, as do self-quotations, whether schools of fish, octopuses, cats, or insects. Wordlessness again invites viewers to invent and reinvent stories inspired by the highly detailed fictional worlds.

Fish Girl

2016

ALL PAGES | Watercolor and ink line on paper

Wiesner's most recent project is his first graphic novel, which tells the coming-of-age story of Mira, a lonely mermaid trapped in a brick building as a seaside attraction on the boardwalk. The artist worked with author Donna Jo Napoli to generate the text and dialogue to populate this extended 200-page book. The watercolors for each are once again handmade, involving hours of laboriously applied washes of color, while the initial drawing was done in pencil and then scanned to produce clean black lines. Wiesner's familiar sea creatures swim through the narrative, especially a loyal octopus, who is the mermaid's one true friend. Directed at young adults, the story is one of confinement, betrayal, self-discovery, friendship, and freedom. Wordlessness as the Fish Girl's initial state eventually gives way to language through the Fish Girl's encounter with her first human friend, a young girl named Livia. Christened Mira by her new friend, Fish Girl eventually loses her mermaid's tail, which is replaced by a pair of human legs. The ascendant final scenes, following a tropical storm that sweeps away Mira's watery prison to free her and all of her sea creature friends, is a triumph of visual storytelling. This is the first exhibition of several of the original watercolors crafted by Wiesner for *Fish Girl*, which will be published by Clarion Books/Houghton-Mifflin and available in stores on March 9, 2017.