



Wordless Delights

at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art

By **Kerry Methner** / VOICE

WITH NARRATIVE FLOW AND UNIQUE VISUAL INTEREST, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art hosted a pre-opening reception on January 27th for its most recent exhibition, *David Wiesner & The Art of Wordless Storytelling*. A roughly chronologically presented retrospective, with several inspiring highlights thrown in to illuminate those who influenced the artist, the exhibition holds up the work of David Wiesner, a three time Caldecott Medal winner known for wordless story books.

Starting with a few examples of his early illustrations and then commencing through ten of his books and book development materials, the exhibition invites the viewer to fill in the blanks. Wiesner explained, "The space between the pictures is where the reader fills in the story."

Even Wiesner's early work offers viewers a unique perspective. It's like being in the image and looking around, almost being embedded in it.

Perhaps this comes from his method.

"I often make models of things," he related. "The best way to paint is to observe." And for him that can mean making clay models of frogs... moving them around in space, and eventually drawing them. It is also perhaps why looking into his stories feels like peering into a dream.



David Wiesner, *Tuesday*, pg. 10-11, 1991. Watercolor on paper. Courtesy of the artist.



At the opening reception: Dr. **Alex** and **Lauren DePaoli** with **Les** and **Zora Charles** (who underwrote the exhibition catalogue), and **Christine** and **Robert Emmons**

Wiesner explained to a group walking the exhibition, that he divides his work in four phases. The first is a quick sketch of the entire book. It's an all on one page pencil thumbnail storyboard. The thumbnail for his book *Tuesday* is included in the exhibition, as well as examples of the next steps...a book dummy, then drawings on tracing paper... "I have to build the world of the book," he explained of this, the longest step.

Then come his watercolors. They consist of ten to 25 layers of paint each. "When I get to color, I let it happen," he revealed. It's rarely an immediate process, though the end product does not reveal the painstaking nature of the medium. "Sometimes I'm literally waiting for the paint to dry!" he laughed. Each book takes between just under a year to three and a half years for Wiesner to complete. This is, of course, after settling on a story idea.

On view through May 14th, the exhibition includes some multi-media, interactive aspects as well. Foremost, at the far end of the chronology, is one of Wiesner's most recent projects, an iPad app called "Spot." It is an exciting answer to the question, "What's next for storytelling?"

"We have to figure out how we are going to tell stories on these devices," he explained. Always intrigued by the world inside a world, inside a world, the artist's imagination unfurled as he responded to what's in everyone's hand today. "The tech is an answer...pinch and zoom..." And "Spot" was born.

For info and programing visit www.sbma.net



Artist **David Wiesner**, Assistant Director & Chief Curator **Eik Kahng**, Ph.D., and SBMA Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Director and CEO **Larry Feinberg**



SBMA Board Chair **John Bishop** and **Bob Williams** with SBMA Women's Board VP **Carolyn Williams** and President **Helene Segal**, and **George Konstantinow**. The Women's Board was a major sponsor of the exhibition.

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