



by [Madeline Ehrlich](#) | August 3, 2017

# Aaron Zulpo

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## Painter of Narratives



Aaron Zulpo amongst paints in his Greenpoint studio. Photo: [Ian Hartsoe](#)

[Aaron Zulpo's](#) Greenpoint studio is a multitude of raw canvas hung on paint-stained walls. In the middle stands a table topped with piles of paint, smelling rich of linseed oil. His work looks immediately relatable, a style he later describes to me as "Cartoon Realism". The divisions of brightly colored vignettes create elaborate narratives, enticing the viewer to engage further.

***GP: When were you first exposed to art as a child? Are there visual influences from your childhood that currently influence your work?***

Aaron Zulpo: I grew up in the Midwest and wasn't exposed to a lot of art until high school. I was always a doodler, however, replicating imagery from comic books and a duplicated bronze Remington cowboy statue we had in the house. As far as visual references from my childhood go— action movies, bright colors, cowboys robbing a train—these are all things I liked as a child and I still like now. I took art classes in high school and really loved a specific sculpture class. After that I decided to apply to art school. This was the first time where all my classes related to one another. I could be in 2D Design in the morning, and learning about the same concepts and principles in afternoon art history. It was very exciting.



Aaron Zulpo, painting. Photo:[Ian Hartsoe](#)

***GP: What is the importance of storytelling in your art?***

AZ: I like to think of narration as a fundamental way for people to make connections, especially when it comes to art and the ability to understand it. By engineering an elaborate story with altered dimensions of space, visual problems arise for the viewer to solve. Storytelling also drives the compositions of my paintings. There is a specific theme throughout each piece, for example romance or unknown danger, and this is told through the division of space. Making the paintings beautiful and playful, while telling a complex narrative, is a challenge I like to create for myself.

*After graduating from Rhode Island School of Design in 2008, Zulpo landed in Greenpoint. He began painting building scenes, inspired by the closeness of living in New York. His new body of work, however, is of an entirely different landscape and era, depicting cacti, horses, mountains, and cowboys.*

***GP: Your newer work looks quite different compared to your building narrative scenes. How has the work shifted recently?***

AZ: I am always looking at art references. While I was making the window scene series, I came across a Frederic Remington book. Shortly after I visited a ranch in Western Montana and saw a private art collection of Western Art. Western art has a quality that is so intrinsically American. The desire to capture the same subject matter of Western America has stayed roughly the same for 180 years. I had never seen anything like it in New York, so I asked myself, “can I make Western Art?”. So here I am telling stories of the American Wild West.

***GP: Tell me a little more about the Western body of work itself.***

AZ: The new work consists of two different series. Rather than breaking the scenes into multiple vignettes, this body of work uses a single vantage point. The first series is inspired by Kit Carson who was a famous American scout and fur trapper. During Carson's life, he was fictionalized and imagined to be greater than life. These pieces take on a historical role to tell about a specific moment in time while playing along with the idea that Kit Carson was an ultimate outdoor adventurer. Examples include Kit Carson's camp at Mule Hill surrounded by Prickly Pears, and him seasick on an American sloop of war. The second body of work is all about Western iconic imagery. The idea is to make Western themed art in a way that is reminiscent of how the Old West is described in popular media- robberies, shootouts, and trains. These paintings use multiple panels to narrate the story as if you were watching single movie stills. The challenge is to continually find interesting scenes that can be told from a single vantage point and complete a cohesive story.



*"Kit Carson and Waanibe (Singing Grass)", 2017, 24 x 24 inches, oil on canvas, by Aaron Zulpo*

***GP: How would you compare your style to your peers?***

AZ: Right now, I see there is a strong figurative element in the New York art scene along with bright colors, alteration of the picture field, and stylized work that is a little cartoony. Sort of like a Cartoon Realism. The work is based on real life, but with

exaggerated emotion, vibrant colors, and simplification of figures based on personal stories of reality. I supposed I'd say we all have those shared interests.

***GP: What are your future projects?***

AZ: I'm a part of two group shows in Massachusetts in August and September. I'm also going to be showing some new window paintings at Affordable Art Fair in New York in September, and a solo exhibition of my Western series in Denver, Colorado in October.