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By DAVID PAGEL
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Aaron Morse's solo debut delivers a lot and promises still more.

At Acme Gallery, the 30-year-old artist's acrylics on canvas, with a little oil paint and pencil thrown in, travel back to an era when entertainment was a big fat book filled with adventure stories and full-page illustrations of their dramatic high points.

Morse's fantasy of what that era's fantasy of the past was like is filtered through computer software. He begins with images lifted from long-forgotten historical epics. Before painting a picture, he subjects it to all sorts of distortion, sometimes enlarging, elongating and distending its redcoats, colonials, whalers, frontiersmen and Indians, or compressing, collaging and compacting them into dense clusters. The results can recall class photos or team portraits.

Sublime pine forests, awe-inspiring waterfalls and deep blue seas are the backdrops for Morse's strangely engaging pictures. So too are the panoramic scenes that catalog an area's flora and fauna in natural history textbooks, as well as diagrams and timelines from geological manuals.

Comedy and tragedy commingle. Morse paints with the light touch of a watercolorist and the quickness of someone in a rush to get the story out. His clever works bring a sense of urgency to the art of storytelling, without giving so much away that viewers are prevented from putting their own imaginations into action.

Acme Gallery, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., L.A.,
(323) 857-5942, through Nov. 8. Closed
Sundays and Mondays.