

EYVIND EARLE

Big Sur Poem, 1975
Oil on canvas, 28 x 22 in



COURTESY GALLERY 21

CHRISTINA WATERS

The Sorcerer's Apprentice

The Magic Eye
of Eyvind Earle

Throughout his long career, Eyvind Earle conjured worlds at once mysterious and perfect. The painter's vocabulary of enchantment could easily be called surrealist. But the term *magic realism* might come closer. In Earle's work, primal nature and unexpected fantasy conspire to create a tension between subject and visual style. For example, Earle's groves of trees are clearly collections of living tissue and botanical energy, yet are charged with fantastical perspectives, whispering of supernatural forces and impossible growth patterns. Floral vistas unfurl in uncanny colors, against skies of mauve and prairies of turquoise. Hypernatural color choices propel his subjects into a magic ecology far beyond the everyday world. And it is this "beyond," this landscape of dreams, that makes Earle's visions so indelible. Those same visions lend magic to his Disney animations and to his later vistas of the California coast. Earle's work soared beyond the conventional in almost every way, from forms pushed to dazzling impossibilities to colors that might only exist on distant stars. Ablaze with supersaturated color and lyrical form, Earle's twentieth-century artwork defies easy categorization.

The Castle

Once upon a time, when I was a little girl living in Germany, my family visited Neuschwanstein Castle, a froth of nineteenth-century architectural excess built by King Ludwig II of Bavaria (the patron of opera composer Richard Wagner) and set high above an alpine lake. With its spun-sugar turrets and towers, this fairy-tale castle loomed large in my girlhood imagination. Walt Disney animator Eyvind Earle must have had this opulent neo-rococo structure in mind when he began imagining an appropriate castle for the animated classic *Sleeping Beauty*. Perched at the very crest of a densely forested mountain, Neuschwanstein Castle offers an imposing spectacle of grand portals, crenellated towers, hundreds of Italianate baroque windows, and steeply pitched roofs crowned by pointed domes. The castle is approached by a steep and winding road, and once seen, is never forgotten. Certainly it was never forgotten by the twelve-year-old girl upon whom it made such an impression.