



William Wegman

b. 1943 American

William Wegman and Flo, 2015.

by Kathy Matthes



Blonde on Browne, 1991

“My Weimaraners are perfect fashion models. Their elegant, slinky forms are covered in gray --and gray, everyone knows, goes with anything”

(as cited in Foxley, 2019, p. 1).



William Wegman, February 2006

“The thing that’s unique about [polaroid]—before digital—is that it’s instant, meaning in a little over a minute you’d have the exposure It became something that broke through my rules, because suddenly I was delivered something that I liked but didn’t feel completely responsible for” (as cited in Foxley, 2019, p. 1).

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William Wegman arranges clothing that will be worn by his dogs, Flo and Topper, with the help of a long-time assistant inside his New York City studio. Photo By Michael D. Regan/NewsHour Weekend

Portrait of William Wegman with dogs Flo and Topper in his New York studio by Daniel Dorsa for Artsy.



“The setup is involved—which Wegman likens to a movie set with its generator, lighting equipment, drying racks—and the pictures’ vertical nature demanded that he get more creative with positioning and photographing the pets: ‘You don’t carry a camera of this size around and point it at the ground; you have to bring things up to it.’ So he began placing the dogs on pedestals to make them appear taller, which led to dressing them up in human clothing and props” (Foxley, 2019, p. 1).



PBS NewsHour, Oct 21, 2017, YouTube video

“Most of Wegman’s photos were captured on a 20-by-24-inch Polaroid camera, which he said is the size of a ‘big refrigerator’ kept inside a wood base that’s ‘quite beautiful actually but very rickety and fragile.’ When working outside, Wegman would haul it around in a truck.

Wegman has taken about 15,000 photos with that Polaroid” (Regan, 2017, p.1).

B I O

- “William Wegman was born in 1943 in Holyoke, Massachusetts.
- He received a B.F.A. in painting from the Massachusetts College of Art, Boston in 1965 and an M.F.A. in painting from the University of Illinois, Champagne-Urbana in 1967.
- From 1968 to 1970 he taught at the University of Wisconsin.
- By the early 70s, Wegman's work was being displayed in museums and galleries internationally.
- In the fall of 1970, he moved to Southern California where he taught for one year at California State College, Long Beach.” (Wegman, 2019, p. 1)



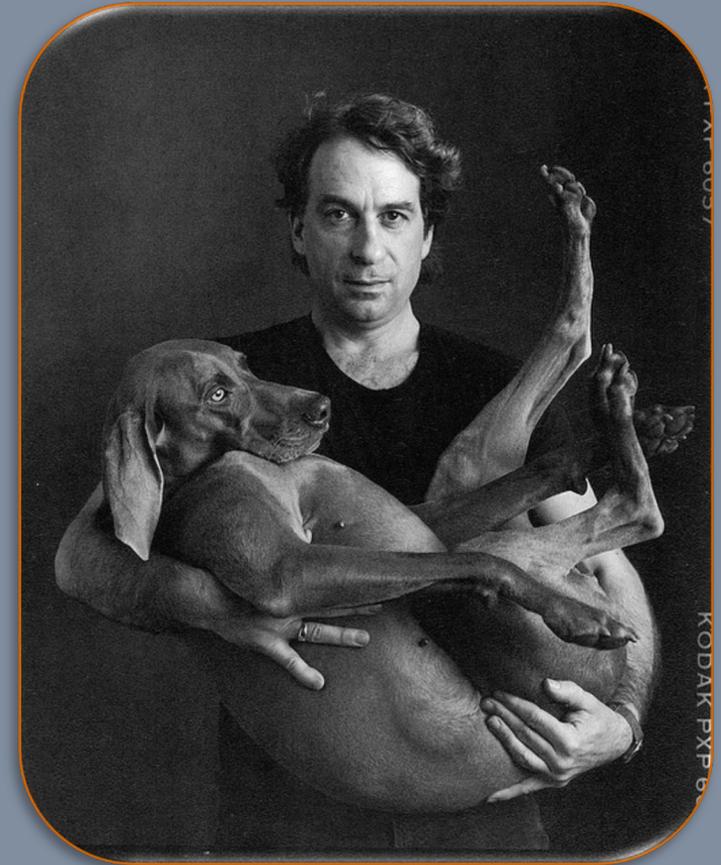
William Wegman with Man Ray.
Photographer: Annie Leibovitz

- “During that time, Wegman adopted Man Ray, a Weimaraner - whom became a central figure in Wegman's photographs and recordings. Wegman continued to work with his dogs, all Weimaraners.
- This resulted in published books, film/video work for *Saturday Night Live*, *Nickelodeon*, *Sesame Street*, photographs for *The New Yorker* and *Wallpaper*, as well as collaborative campaigns for Acne fashion brand, the Metropolitan Opera, Max Mara, and others.
- Wegman's work has been exhibited internationally, including at The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Artipelag, Stockholm, Sweden; and many others. Wegman's touring retrospectives have appeared in America, Japan, Korea, Spain, Los Angeles, Houston, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, and Europe.” (MASSART, n.d., p. 1)



Wegman stores hundreds of prints inside his home and studio, some shown here. Michael D. Regan/NewsHour Weekend

- “It was while he was in Long Beach that Wegman got his dog, a Weimaraner who he named Man Ray, and began a long and fruitful collaboration” (Wegman, 2019, p. 1).
- ‘Wegman said he’s worked with 14 Weimaraners in total Yet, he didn’t initially plan on taking artistic portraits of them” (Regan, 2017, p.1).
- “I took his picture, which you would do with your newborn, or whatever It was kind of magical how he became. He was kind of transformed by the act of photographing him” (as cited in Regan, 2017, p.1).



Willilam Wegman with Fay Ray
by Annie Libowitz 1988

- “His best work juggles the many balls of Post-Minimalism -- process, language, performance -- with an amateurish finesse that few of his contemporaries match.
- He may also be the last artist to hitch a ride on the Pop Art train as it pulled out of the station.
- Drawing on an even broader, more pedestrian range of Americana than the Pop artists did, Mr. Wegman refused to absorb these elements into high art, or even meet them on their own terms. Instead, he refashioned them into substandard versions -- crude, lame and infinitely touching -- that lay bare their hucksterism and their sincerity.
- He has not only embraced Americana, but he has also become part of it, and lived to tell the tale” (Smith, 2006, p. 1).



Photo by Mark Mann

- “He was inspired by the Surrealists, as the name of his most famous dog suggests, but also by the radio comedians Bob and Ray” (Smith, 2006, p. 1).
- “Knowing that his dog was aging and ailing, the artist set about making portraits of him in various guises and poses; the critic Sanford Schwartz compared the series to Robert Frank's classic book of photographs, *The Americans*, in its emotional fullness and range” (Smith, 2006, p. 1).
- “A pioneer video artist, conceptualist, photographer, painter and writer, William Wegman moves fluidly among various media: from conceptual works to commissioned magazine shots; videos shown in museums to television segments made for Sesame Street and Saturday Night Live; artists' books to children's books and from photographic collaborations with his Weimaraner muses to his most recent cycle of paintings combining found postcards with drawing, collage and painting” (20x200, 2019, p. 1)



William Wegman '65, BFA, Painting
MASSART, no date

- “In 1978, William Wegman was invited to The Polaroid Corporation’s headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts to work with their newly developed 20×24 inch Polaroid camera, made to promote its new *Polcolour II* film. The camera weighed an enormous 107kg, and contained within it a roll of modern instant film that produced richly coloured, large-format photographs.
- Although the new format was a radical departure from previous work, which had been resolutely black and white, and printed no larger than 11×14 inches, Wegman was instantly drawn to the device.
- As he has since stated, with a Polaroid image there can be ‘no revision, no cropping.’ The camera’s simplicity, as well as its immediacy, appealed to the artist’s conceptual and counter-culture inclinations. The resulting series of images, made over the course of 28 years, are in turn outrageously funny, ironic or surreal, but also often full of poetry and poignancy.” (Huxley-Parlour, 2019, p. 1)



Contemplating the bust of Man Ray, 1978.
Gelatin silver print.

- “In 1979, Polaroid organized an exhibition of 20 x 24 works featuring 18 artists, including Andy Warhol and Chuck Close. Photographer and critic Gary Metz contributed an essay to the catalog, in which he heralded the 20 x 24 as ‘a sort of reinvention of photography,’ offering artists the same thrill, and sense of discovery, that their predecessors had felt with the first daguerreotypes.
- “In the rhetoric of their tremendous size, their iridescent color, their formidable optics, their promiscuous topographic completeness—in short, their utter physicality—the 20 x 24 pictures recover and extend the first moments of photography’s public history.” (Nguyen, 2017, p. 1)
- “Typically, a day’s work at the 20 x 24 studio would result in 30-50 prints, of which on average 2 or 3 might I thought were noteworthy and worth showing. I am surprised at how much of it I have overlooked, as well as how dreadful some of it was.” (Wegman, n.d., p. 1)



William Wegman, *Rolleramer*, 1987,
Polaroid 20x24 Polacolor film.

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Blue Tie
2007
pigment print

W
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R
K
S



Walker Evans
2017
pigment print

W
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R
K
S



Standing by
2017
pigment print



Pawns
2015
pigment print

W
O
R
K
S



Psycho
1996
iris print



Surveyor
1996
Altered gelatin silver print

W
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R
K
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Wired
2005
color polaroid

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