

ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART April 7- July 31, 2007

# William Wegman: *Funney/Strange*



William Wegman (American, b. 1943), *The Titled Chair*, 2003, oil and postcards on wooden panels, 96 x 192 x 2 in., Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, Museum Purchase, Derby Fund, 2003.012a, photography @ William Wegman

## CURRICULUM PACKET

Information, activities, and resources to help you prepare your classes for a visit to the exhibition and to encourage arts observation, exploration, discussion, and integration.

### Plan A Class Visit to the Addison

- Contact the education department as soon as possible to schedule the visit and discuss ideas for guided tours and related activities that are particularly suited to the interests of your group.
- Discuss the visit with your class and familiarize your students with William Wegman's work before visiting the museum by using the resources or activities in the Curriculum Packet or those you devise.
- At the museum, students will be asked to discuss, interact with, and raise questions about the artwork that they see. Teachers are strongly encouraged to engage in the discussion to strengthen the connection between classroom and museum learning.
- Mention that students will need to keep the following in mind: stay with the group, raise hands to ask or answer questions, no touching the artwork or the walls, no running, no food or gum.

### ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

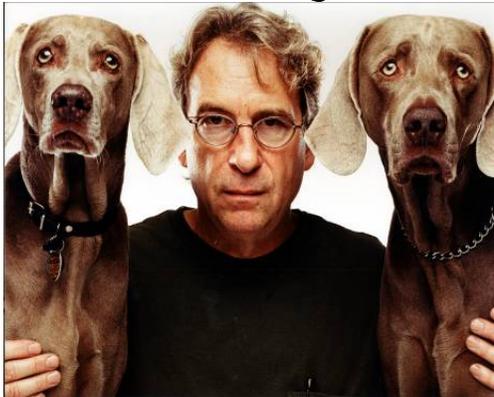
Phillips Academy, Route 28/Main Street, Andover, MA

Julie Bernson, Rebecca Spolarich, Regan Dody

Contact (978) 749-4037 or [rspolarich@andover.edu](mailto:rspolarich@andover.edu)

**FREE tours available on a first-come basis, Tuesdays-Fridays 8am-4pm; Group reservations are required**

# The Artist's Imagination



Portrait of William Wegman by Mark Mann

→ *What are the various ways and mediums through which William Wegman expresses his ideas?*

→ *How does Wegman use his imagination to turn his ideas into works of art?*

→ *What are some of William Wegman's inspirations?*

William Wegman was born in 1943 in Holyoke, Massachusetts, and graduated from Massachusetts College of Art in 1965. In this retrospective exhibition covering almost his entire forty-year career, Wegman's curiosity, humor, imagination, and ingenuity are demonstrated through a variety of mediums offering a comprehensive perspective that extends beyond his beloved dog photographs and into his groundbreaking videos, provocative image/text drawings, and fantastical paintings.

## Personal Expression

Throughout his career, William Wegman has experimented with many different mediums including photography, painting, painting with collage, drawing, video, altered photographs, handmade books, and text-based works. Wegman began to create photographs and text pieces after receiving his MFA in painting from the University of Illinois/Urbana-Champaign in 1967, and then was one of the first artists to begin experimenting with video in the early 1970s. While diverse, this exhibition of more than 200 works illustrates the experimental yet consistent eye and mind of Wegman over the course of his career. His play with everyday objects and activities combined with his wry sense of humor creates artworks that at once amuse us and make us look – and look again – to see something new in what we thought was most familiar.

## Wegman's Muses



William Wegman, *Dusted*, 1982, Polaroid, 24 in. x 20 in., Collection of Gifford Myers/OYO Studio, photography @ William Wegman

← *In what ways does Wegman portray his weimaraner dogs?*

*Why do you think Wegman photographed his dogs over and over again?* →

← *How do the dogs interact with the camera?*

*How do you think Wegman got his dogs to pose this way?* →



William Wegman, *Untitled 3*, 1998, Polaroid, 24 in. x 20 in., The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of William Wegman and Peter MacGill; restricted gifts of Robert Taub and the Photography Associates, 1998.218.1-7, photography @ William Wegman

While living in California in 1970, Wegman adopted his first weimaraner puppy which he named Man Ray. Prompted by the dog's curiosity and desire for attention, Wegman began to include him in his photographs and videos creating some of his most iconic imagery. Man Ray's reserved beauty and calm countenance were a perfect foil for Wegman's whimsy and wit. Invited to experiment with a new form of Polaroid technology in 1979, Wegman and Man Ray created a series of large-scale photographs involving increasingly elaborate disguises and costumes. After many years of successful collaboration, Man Ray passed away in 1982 and Wegman did not create art with dogs for another five years. His next weimaraner Fay Ray, who entered his life in 1985, became both his next muse and mother to a new generation of Wegman's canine collaborators.

## The Everyday and the Unexpected



William Wegman, *Shaking Hands*, 1972, Gelatin silver print, 10 ½ in. x 13 ¼ in., private collection, photography @ William Wegman

← At first glance what do you see happening in the photograph?

← What is similar about the appearance of the two figures? What is different?

← How does your understanding of the image change after looking at it more closely?

← How does Wegman create surprise in this image?

In the art of William Wegman, our everyday world is presented in a new light and our expectations are altered in surprising and often humorous ways. In Wegman's drawings, the manipulation of a few small lines can turn a ladder into a drinking straw, a dog into a whiskered cat, or a wave into a bird, transforming the familiar into the unexpected, the common into the hilarious. Seemingly straightforward situations become funny, strange, or silly due to the drawing of a few lines and the deceptively simple addition of a title or a phrase. Or, like the image above, photography is also be used to point out what we might otherwise overlook. Wegman's visual comparisons and puns leave us simultaneously scratching our heads, laughing out loud, and seeing the world in whole new way.

## Activities for in the Museum or Classroom

Students can be inspired to create their own imaginative works in the spirit of William Wegman through the following activities:

*What did Wegman use as the starting point for this picture? →*

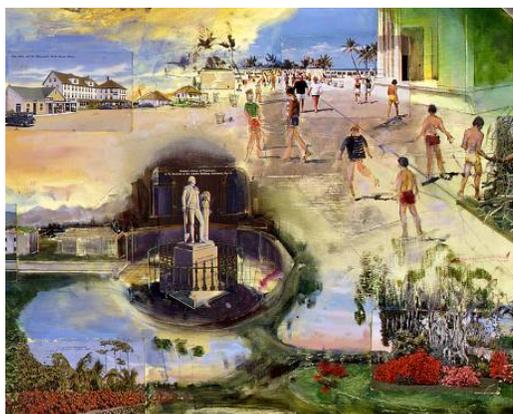
*How does he combine painting and photography here? →*

### Imagined Landscapes

Wegman uses found postcards and photographs as starting points for his paintings. In this painting, he begins with a family holiday card and then extends the composition to create a larger, imaginary scene. Students, too, can create a dynamic landscape that incorporates a found image into a larger imaginary world.



William Wegman, *Bob and Ray*, 1996, Gouache and greeting card on paper, 12 in. x 16 in., private collection, photography @ William Wegman

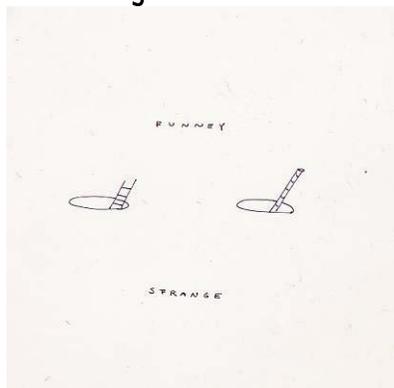


Detail from William Wegman, *Opposite Island*, 2003, oil and postcards on wood panel, 72 in. x 96 in., Beth Rudin DeWoody, photography @ William Wegman

- 1. Choose an image.** Each student should choose one image to work from – a postcard, family photograph, or picture from a newspaper or magazine. Option: If your students are also viewing the exhibition, *An Impressionist Legacy: Lawrence's White Fund Paintings* and focusing on local history, we encourage you to use postcards or photographs – old or new – of your town or city.
- 2. Expand and imagine.** After gluing their image to a large piece of paper, students expand the scene outwards using pencil, colored pencil, or paint. Refer to Wegman's collage paintings so that students can get some ideas about how he created scenes around his postcards and photographs. (See Resources for a good website.)

- Advanced exploration.** Students can use multiple found images to create a larger composition combining them all into one picture. Or, students can work together to create a collaborative composition connecting each of their images to another's in one coherent scene.

## Word Play



William Wegman, *Funney/Strange*, 1982, ink on paper, 10 3/4 in. x 9 in., private collection, photography © William Wegman

← *How do the text and images interact in this drawing?*

← *What is funny about this drawing? What is strange?*

← *How does the artist play with perception and scale?*

In his photographs and drawings, Wegman uses words and images to construct playful verbal and visual puns. The text can either provide the narration or the punch line for the image. In this activity, students can explore the relationship between image and text by creating works of their own.

- Examine and explore.** Looking at newspapers, advertisements, cartoons and graphic novels, discuss how images and texts interact. What is the different information each provides? How do they rely on each other? What happens when they stand alone?
- Mix and match.** Have students separate the words from various images by cutting them out with scissors or using white-out. Then have them pair text with different images and discuss the change in meaning of the text and image in these unintentional pairings. They can also write new text for the images or modify the original in order to create an opposite meaning. How easy is it to change the meaning and mood of an image by changing just a few words?
- Create your own.** Have each student create an image/text artwork. Start with a drawing or photograph, keeping the text separate from the picture. Once completed, students can exchange their images and write text for each other's pictures. Discuss how many different interpretations of the same image there can be.

## Further Exploration- William Wegman's Art Historical Connections

*How many art historical references can you find in this image? →*

*How does Wegman's knowledge and use of art history contribute to the meaning of his work? →*

Rooted in the conceptual art movement of the 1960's, Wegman's art responds to his fellow artists' work and the post-modern aesthetic. In addition to these connections, his work is filled with art historical references, including sixteenth-century Italian portraiture, nineteenth century photographers such as Carleton Watkins and Eadweard Muybridge, Pablo Picasso and cubism, the early twentieth-century artists Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp, and Susan Sontag's groundbreaking theories of photography. Throughout his work, Wegman mixes accessible imagery with sophisticated allusions.



William Wegman, *Man Ray Contemplating the Bust of Man Ray*, 1978, gelatin silver print, 14 in. x 11 in., private collection, photography © William Wegman

# Teacher Resources

## BOOKS

The artist has produced many children's books using dogs and people as his models such as *Chip Wants a Dog*, *Farm Days*, *Cinderella*, *Mother Goose*, and *Little Red Riding Hood*. These, as well as ABC and 123 books featuring the dogs, may be useful resources to examine both before and after a museum visit, particularly for younger students.

There are also many books on Wegman's work, including the comprehensive catalogue for this exhibition, *William Wegman: Funney/Strange*, published by the Addison Gallery and Yale University Press (2006). Some books are available at libraries and most are available for sale at the museum or online.

## WEB

Wegman's website <[www.wegmanworld.com](http://www.wegmanworld.com)> has some information and links to purchase books. The PBS website Art21 < <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/wegman/index.html> > offers a biography and links to images and essays about the artist. A great selection of postcard paintings is available at the Texas Gallery website at <<http://www.texgal.com/Wegman2005/index.htm>>.

## VIDEO

A comprehensive collection of Wegman videos is available on the DVD, *William Wegman Video Works 1970-1999*. Other videos such as *William Wegman's Alphabet Soup* are available for purchase online or are viewable on Youtube.com and on PBS' Sesame Street.