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36

William Wegman

Portraiture

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By appointment

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Alain Bublex FR
Robert Cottingham US
John DeAndrea US
Massimo Furlan CH
Eulàlia Grau ES
Taro Izumi JP
Richard Jackson US
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Lucie Picandet FR
Emanuel Proweller FR
Duke Riley US
Lázaro Saavedra CU
Niki de Saint Phalle FR
Pierre Seinturier FR
Peter Stämpfli CH
Jean Tinguely CH
Keith Tyson GB
Tomi Ungerer FR
Jacques Villeglé FR
William Wegman US
Winshluss FR
Virginie Yassef FR

OPENING
Thursday 12 November 2026

13.11.26
-
19.12.26

PhotoSaintGermain

As part of Photo Saint-Germain, Galerie GP & N Vallois presents William Wegman's second solo exhibition. The artist brings together large-format prints devoted to portraiture, in which Flo, his famous dog, serves as both model and muse.



Miriam, 2026

Timothée Chaillou: A live model is docile up to a point. Is that moment of tipping over what usually produces your images?

William Wegman: Some of my favorite pictures were not my idea at all. I start out with a plan but rarely do I stick to it. The final picture is a collaboration. The less docile the model the better.

TC: Do you talk to your dogs the same way during a shooting session as you do outside one?

WW: I have had twelve dogs since 1970 and with each one I have had a special way of working together. With Man Ray, my first dog, I used my voice: "Do you want to go to the beach?" My second dog, Fay Ray, was keen on a tennis ball or any ball about that size which is why balls figure so prominently in photographs with Fay. Fay's number one son, Chundo, was always looking for me so if I wanted him to look evil, I would move far away and his squint would give him a menacing look. When I would get close to him he would look sweet and welcoming. Candy was a real challenge because she did not like the strobe lights but we figured out that she loved action shots so if a dog is jumping or flying through the air it is probably Candy. Now, with Flo who loves the studio situation,is not at all interested in the ball and is quite deaf, I use my hands to guide her.

TC: What is hardest to hold on these images — the garment, the head, or the gaze?

WW: The garment without question.

TC: The trench coat is cinched, the dress falls to the floor, the puffer is buttoned at the collar. Do you decide that the garment should hang right, or does gravity decide for you?

WW: Both.
The dog looks at the lens, or looks away.

TC: That difference decides the tone of each image. Is it the gaze, above all, that makes you pick one image out of a set of tries?

WW: I think so. With Flo especially. She has this great look, a bold, direct stare, and not at all cute.



Joan, 2026

TC: The tall black wig suggests an eighteenth-century hairstyle; the red one, fancy dress. Could you tell us about how you chose the specific props and outfits for this set?

WW: The image you are describing is from a fashion shoot for French Vogue. For this we were working with clothes straight from the runway and an array of accessories and wigs. An inspiring and entertaining shoot! The stylists said that Flo and her brother Topper were the best models they had ever worked with. Another image in this show is from a shoot for Max Mara which again involved beautiful clothes. But I also have a big collection of props and accessories acquired at flea markets and yard sales over the years and some of the images are made with these clothes which, although not the latest fashion, have their own special charm. I like the challenge of working with whatever props are at hand and coming up with something that I think is a good picture.

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33

camera *obscura*
camera *lucida*

Group show

13.11.26
-
19.12.26

TC: Can you talk about the pleasure of the beautiful image, in the noble sense of the word? Because it's almost a guilty pleasure in the field of criticism.

WW: For me, the excitement and part of the beauty, comes from seeing an image appear as if out of nowhere. When I first started to work with the 20x24 Polaroid I was surprised at how beautiful the Polaroid images were and a little afraid of this beauty. For some time I only allowed myself to take very dark pictures, Man Ray draped in black against black backgrounds. And then one day I painted Man Ray's nails with some red nail polish that happened to be at the Polaroid studio. That was the beginning of color for me and there is nothing more beautiful than Polaroid red.



Joyce, 2026

TC: What were your instructions to yourself, and your appetites, for this set?

WW: When The New York Times Magazine asked me to photograph Flo for an article on aging dogs I knew exactly what I wanted to do and that's pretty much exactly what happened. This is rare. Usually what ends up happening has little or nothing to do with my original ideas…

TC: What was on your list of things not to do in 1970, and which one did you break first?

WW: I wanted my work to be seen in print and not on a wall so I wanted to make photographs that were not bigger than a magazine page. The 20 x 24 inch Polaroid camera broke that rule. Next on my list of things not to do was to create anthropomorphic images with Man Ray. I successfully avoided this until towards the end of his life, again with the Polaroid 20 x 24 camera.

TC: Your images are full of references to art history. The Victorian tableau vivant rests on bodies that freeze on purpose, to imitate a painting. You kept the staging, the costume, the composition — but the body that poses doesn't know it's imitating. What sidesteps have you made with respect to the history of portraiture, and which ones gave you satisfaction?

WW: As an art student in school in Boston I spent a lot of time in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts colonial period rooms and at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. I thought a lot about the work in these collections, of Copley portraits in particular, when I started using the 20 x 24 Polaroid.

TC: Buffon makes the dog the moral animal par excellence, the only one (he says) who understands its name. Your dogs' names shape what people project onto them, and even more so the names of characters. Does the character come before the name?

WW: I liked what Vicki Hearne wrote in Adam's Task, that naming and interacting with a dog expands its intelligence exponentially. The more I asked of my dogs the smarter they became. And the happier.



Betty, 2026

TC: You named a dog after a Surrealist photographer.

WW: I named my dog after a famous photographer's name, not the photographer. In fact, I named him Man Ray well before I imagined I would be photographing him. When I got him home and set him down he sat in a ray of light and he looked like an old man. I had planned on naming him Bauhaus but nothing in him looked like Bauhaus. My next dog had to be named Fay Ray obviously.

TC: And what of Surrealism?

WW: When I first started making work it was in the context of Minimal Conceptualism. I was a part of the West Coast version of this movement - which in a way turned the East Coast version on its head - but the context was still Minimal Conceptualism. I of course knew about Surrealism but the work of the surrealists has not been a reference for me in my own work. Some of my pictures might have a surrealist appearance but this arises out of my own naturally perverse internal logic rather than any attempt at surrealist thinking.