



Silver Eye Center for Photography
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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William Wegman's Large Scale Polaroid Photographs on View at Silver Eye Center for Photography

(Pittsburgh, PA) Silver Eye Center for Photography proudly presents ***It's a Dog's Life: Photographs by William Wegman from the Polaroid Collection*** on view **September 6 – November 4, 2006**. This exhibition features 28 photographs of William Wegman's celebrated Weimaraner dogs. Wegman's delightful, large-format color prints entertain audiences that range from Sesame Street to the Whitney Museum of American Art. Included are large images of the sleek Man Ray in roller skates (*Rolleramer, 1987*); a domestic scene of two Weimaraners in long dresses and aprons (*Serving Trout, 1991*); and a physically fit dog on his exercise bicycle (*Stud 2000*). Silver Eye Center for Photography is honored to present these Polaroid prints by internationally acclaimed artist, William Wegman, in Pittsburgh.

The Opening Reception will take place on Friday, September 15 at 6:00 p.m. at Silver Eye Center for Photography, 1015 East Carson Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15203. Members and students, free; Non-members, \$5.00. Refreshments will be served.

William Wegman shifts among three media: videotape, photography and drawing, each of which lends itself to his quick responses and humor. Wegman was trained as a painter, but began creating conceptual video art in 1970 and continued with this media through 1977. In 1979, Wegman was invited to Cambridge, Massachusetts— along with Chuck Close, Jim Dine, Lucas Samaras, Andy Warhol, and others-- to use the new Polaroid 20x24-inch camera. This very rare 5-foot camera weighs 235 pounds and produces large format "contact" prints renowned for their lush color and detail. Only six Polaroid 20x24-inch cameras exist, delivering large format photographs in just 70 seconds. Wegman brought his dog, Man Ray, with him to use this unusual camera for the first time and a remarkable collaboration was born. Since the early years of Polaroid film testing in the late 1940s, artists have been invited to experiment with Polaroid film materials, and selected work has been accessioned into the permanent archives of the Polaroid Collection. The 28 images from *It's a Dog's Life: Photographs by William Wegman from the Polaroid Collection* were created by one such giant size Polaroid instant camera.

Wegman's experience with video especially prepared him to work in the 20x24 Studio situation; that is, utilizing a crew and staging scenarios. For the next three years, until Man Ray's death in 1982, Wegman made many one-of-a-kind memorable images of his willing and hard working companion. Non-canine subjects were the focus of Wegman's artistic pursuits until the late 1980s when he again began to work with his Weimaraner, Fay Ray, eventually including her expanding family in his humorous and wry images.

In his book, *William Wegman Polaroids*, Wegman explains, "It became possible to stay with an idea and spin off into directions I never thought I would go. In working with the 20x24, images occasionally popped out of the camera belly that I had difficulty owning up to. Some have taken time for me to accept as mine, but the immediacy of the physical presence of the image has a way of exerting a powerful persuasiveness over my prejudices. Then again,

certain photographs seemed to be predestined. As if it was only a matter of time before I got around to creating them.”

Linda Benedict-Jones, Executive Director of Silver Eye describes the uniqueness of these images: “When most of us think of a photograph, we think of the possibility of having an infinite number of prints. What is so special about these 20x24 inch photographs by William Wegman is that there is only one print. When Polaroid calls them 'unique' prints, or 'one-of-a-kind' prints, they mean that they are good, but they also mean that there are no others! You see, there is no negative with a Polaroid 20x24 print, and so the positive, or the print is, by definition, the only image that exists. So if the public has seen Wegman prints before, chances are they have never seen these because these have never before come to Pittsburgh.”

It is rare for an artist to be known by broadly diverse audiences, yet William Wegman is admired by those who frequent art museums, by dog lovers, and by children worldwide who love his engaging storybooks. Wegman’s most recent exhibitions include traveling retrospectives in Japan, Scandinavia, France, and the United States. Since 1989, he has created films and video works for Sesame Street, Saturday Night Live, and Nickelodeon. In 1996, his film *The Hardly Boys in Hardly Gold* was screened at the Sundance Film Festival. Wegman’s publications include *Man’s Best Friend*, documenting his first collaboration with a canine model; *William Wegman: Painting, Drawings, Video*, the most complete collection of his work to date; and *William Wegman Polaroids*.

Linda Benedict-Jones, explains Wegman’s appeal: “William Wegman’s images are engaging because they make us react. If we’re dog lovers, we think about the funny things we do with our own pets. Then again, if we’re not especially connected to the world of domestic animals, we marvel at the way Wegman choreographs these four-legged friends of his. There is good reason why his work is so popular. Animals help us step outside of our own daily lives, and Wegman’s Weimaraners seem to do that for all ages.”

Many of the photographs on view at Silver Eye are amusing at first glance. Others are somber. Some prints demand a closer inspection in order to find hidden humorous touches. One such image features Wegman’s photo assistant Andrea Beeman, sitting with Fay Ray (*Fay and Andrea, 1987*). Both girl and dog look wide-eyed, innocent and beautiful but the mischievous catch is that Fay is wearing long fake eyelashes. Another example presents a massive stone fireplace in a hunting lodge (*Mantle, 1990*). It is easy to miss the two slumbering dogs perched on top of the mantle and above the roaring fire. They blend into the smooth textures of the stones. It is these discoveries that add another layer to Wegman’s work.

About William Wegman

William Wegman is an art photographer famous for his humorous compositions involving his Weimaraners in various costumes, poses and scenarios. Born in Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1943, Wegman started drawing at age 4 and knew ten years later that he wanted to be an artist. He received a BFA in painting at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston and his MFA at the University of Illinois Champagne-Urbana in 1967. His first use of video equipment was in 1969 through a teaching position at the

University of Wisconsin. A year later, he moved to Santa Monica, California, where his video work continued and where he purchased his now famous Weimaraner/actor/art-partner Man Ray. Wegman's celebrity dog is named in honor of the Surrealist artist Man Ray. From that point on, Man Ray would become a central figure in Wegman's photographs and videos. Man Ray became so popular that the Village Voice named the dog "Man of the Year" in 1982. Following the passing of Man Ray in 1982, a female Weimaraner, Fay Ray (a play on the name of the actress Fay Wray), would enter Wegman's life in 1986 and a series of new work would ensue with the use of the Polaroid 20x24 Camera. Wegman's cast has grown to include Fay-Ray's offspring: Battina, Crooky and Chundo. Four new dogs have joined the family; Battina's son Chip in 1995, Chip's son Bobbin in 1999, Candy in 2000 and Candy and Bobbin's daughter Penny in 2004. The work of William Wegman has received international attention, and his photographs, videos, paintings and drawings have been exhibited worldwide. William Wegman continues to create photographs, drawings, paintings and videos in New York and Maine.

About Polaroid

A capsule of history reveals that in 1944 the idea of an instant photograph was born. Scientist Edwin Land, the founder of Polaroid Corporation, and his young daughter were in New Mexico on vacation. Land photographed his daughter and she promptly asked him why she could not see the picture immediately. Voilà! Being a genius inventor, within one hour Land visualized the requirements for a camera and the chemistry of instant film. It would be another three years before the first instant sepia film was introduced to the world in Boston.

From the start, Polaroid Corporation hired artists to experiment with its cameras and film. Land stated, "The purpose of inventing instant photography was essentially aesthetic – to make available a new medium of expression to numerous individuals who have an artistic interest in the world around them. The process must be concealed from – nonexistent for the photographer who, by definition needs to think of the art in taking and not in making photographs." Talented artists working with Polaroid products have contributed photographs to The Polaroid Collections, now burgeoning with more than 20,000 fine art images.

Programming in conjunction with *It's a Dog's Life: Photographs by William Wegman from the Polaroid Collection* includes a gallery talk on September 20 with Barbara Hitchcock, Polaroid's director of Cultural Affairs; *Focus on Dogs: A Photography Workshop* at Animal Friends in the North Hills on October 7; and Portfolio Reviews with Rod Slemmons, Director of The Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago on October 21. In addition, Silver Eye will be hosting a special Steelermania program on September 20. Regional photographers Lake Fong, Annie O'Neill, Kevin Sweeney, and others will share their images of the 2006 championship Steelers' season.

It's a Dog's Life: Photographs by William Wegman from the Polaroid Collection is organized by the DeLand Museum of Art in partnership with the Polaroid Collection. Funding for this exhibition is provided by The Heinz Endowments and the Polaroid Foundation. Broadcast media sponsorship is kindly provided by WYEP/91.3FM and DUQ/90.5 FM.

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The mission of Silver Eye Center for Photography is to serve the public through exposure to a wide range of work by locally, nationally and internationally recognized photographers. A Pittsburgh institution since 1985, Silver Eye Center for Photography is the oldest non-profit organization in Western Pennsylvania dedicated solely to the understanding, appreciation, education, and promotion of photography as an art form and as an expressive form of visual communication.

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Gallery Hours:
Wednesday, Friday & Saturday,
Noon – 5:00 p.m.
Thursday, Noon – 9:00 p.m.

ADMISSION IS FREE

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