

A DOG DAY AFTERNOON WITH WILLIAM WEGMAN

In conversation with the
painter, artist photographer,
writer and... hockey player.

Words Victoria Sambunaris

Portrait by Christian Anwander





Wegman with
Topper and Flo.

William Wegman may be best known for his legendary and often humorous photographs of his Weimaraner muses, but his work is more than images of dogs. The painter, video artist and photographer, and mind you — hockey player — recently launched his most recent book, *Writing by Artist*. What you do or don't know about Wegman is included in this charming collection of early photographs, drawings, texts of imagined restaurant reviews, musings on ancient footwear, and deliberate mistranslations. Wegman's former assistant and neighbor, Victoria Sambunaris, walked across the field that joins their properties ...

VS Tell me a bit about *Writing By Artist*.

WW I worked with Andy Lampert, who's a really great artist and curator, and person — and very entertaining. Andy came over to my studio every Tuesday, for a year, and looked through boxes and boxes of written material and drawings. We decided we should do a book, but we weren't sure what it was going to look like. We knew that it would have a lot of drawings in it and these writings that I made in '70–'71 on Princess Cruises stationery. In 1970 I had a studio in San Pedro, and I found this stash of Princess Cruises paper. So, I would type these little stories which I thought were really entertaining — and I loved typing. I had started doing videos in '69 and I never really wrote text for those, but the texts that I found I was typing were a lot like some of these video stories. In the new book there are lots of drawings, texts, vintage photos and altered found images.

VS I've known you for 30 years, since 1992. And I live across the field from you!

WW We're probably a quarter of a mile from each other.

VS How did that happen?

WW I guess it's the David Deutsch factor, right?

VS I feel that I've learned a work ethic from both of you. Early on, when was I working for you, you were constantly in the studio. Working all the time. You have a dedicated practice that you... that you're obsessed with. Has anything changed since you've been up here?

WW I'm doing less photography now, and more painting, basically, since I've been here. Because I really require a lot of help to take photos.

VS Tell me about when you and David came up here to look at land.

WW David and I have been friends since 1970. We were both young LA artists and we were both in the 1971 show, "24 Young LA Artists." We immediately hit it off and we became best friends. We both liked classical music and we both liked fishing.

VS Two very opposite sorts of things.

WW And we would get each other's jokes. We brought certain things out in each other. And David was very kind to include me in different things. The first thing was... he thought that I should move to New York. After 3 years in LA, he found a sublet from another artist for me, near him on Greene Street. And when I got there, the artist said, "No, you can't live here." (laughing)

VS So you moved to NYC and had no place to live?

WW Yeah, really. Anyway, we were up here scouting properties. There was a snowstorm — and Fay took off following Charlie — my assistant Randy's dog. We found Fay 10 miles



down the road, heading towards Albany. Charlie was found 4 days later going the opposite direction, towards New York City.

VS So you lost all the dogs! (laughing) Did you grow up out in nature, like camping and the Boy Scouts — was that your childhood?

WW I grew up in Western Massachusetts, near Springfield. There were beautiful red sandstone quarries there then and, when they would stop mining them, they would fill up with water and become great, mysterious swimming holes. And there were streams that I used to fish in, and lakes.

VS Do the postcards and the other source material you use in your paintings remind you of your childhood?

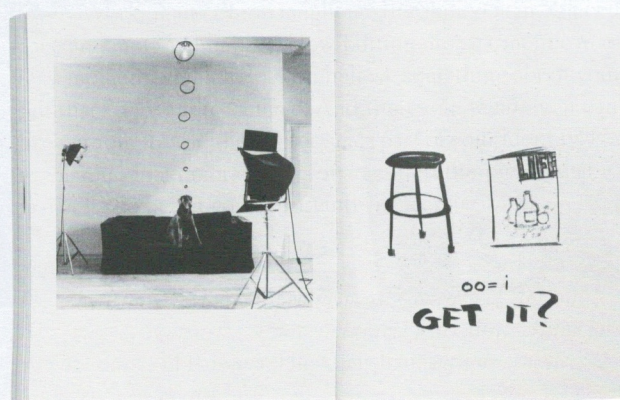
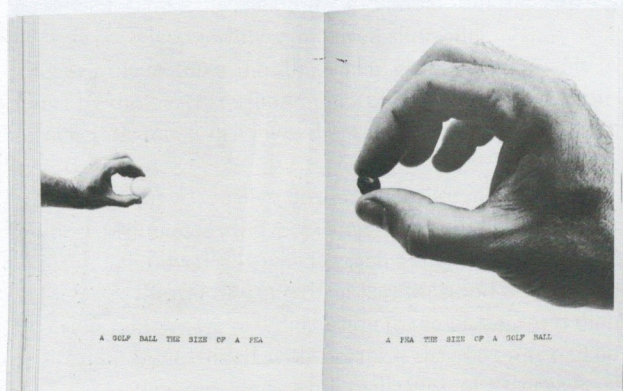
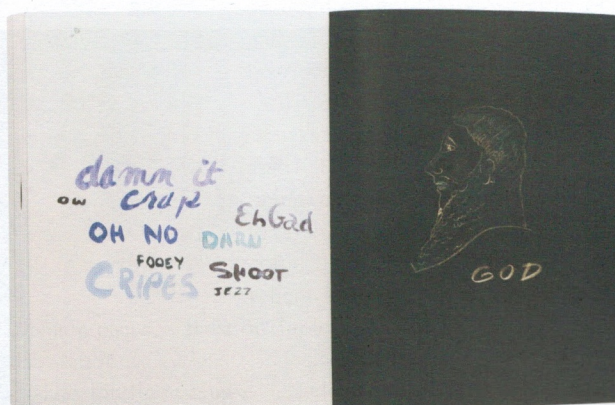
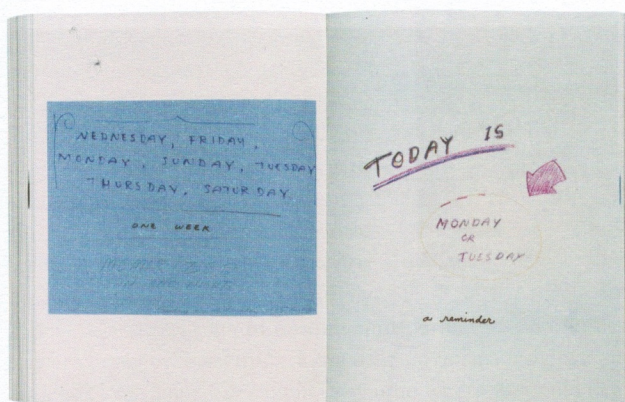
WW Pretty much. I loved *The Book of Knowledge*. I used to copy pictures out of that. And I used to draw pictures of Indians, and my hockey equipment, and things like that. Growing up, everyone called me an artist, I was always "Billy the artist." So, when it was time to go to college, my art teacher in senior year said, "You should go to MassArt." So, I did. I applied to one school, and got in. It was \$200 a year. I remember all my teachers really well. There were great ones, and really dumb ones. And I found that you learn more from dumb ones. Because you realize you're smarter than them, and it empowers you. You need that sort of ego to be an artist. But the smart ones are inspiring too. I had one, Arthur Hoener, he was an architect and taught design. He was the only person ever to win the Million Dollar Massachusetts Lottery, twice. Luckiest person in the world. But died when he was only 54.

VS No, no way. So, he never got to spend the money?

WW No. Then there was my design and color teacher. I remember her because she was very voluptuous, and she would get up on her desk and demonstrate OG rhythms with her body.



Opposite: Wegman with Flo. Above: Detail of *No Vacancy, '22*, by William Wegman. Courtesy of Sperone Westwater, New York. Below: Four spreads from Wegman's book *Writing by Artist*, edited by Andy Lampert.





Above: Where the magic happens, Wegman's studio.
Below: Exterior of the studio, nestled amongst trees.





Above: A studio for thinking, playing and working.
 Below: A picture of Man Ray amidst Wegman's collection of music.

