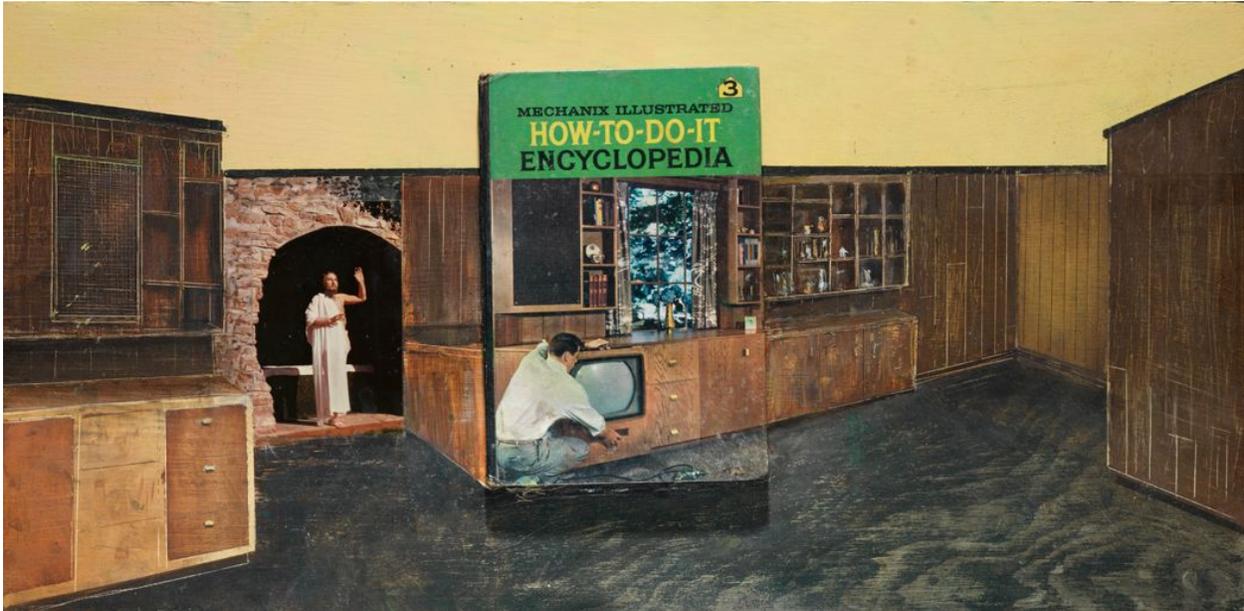


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BLOUIN ARTINFO



William Wegman, *How--To--Do--It #3*, oil and mixed media on wood panel, Courtesy William Wegman and Sperone Westwater, New York

William Wegman resides with his family in a sprawling, multi-floor live/work domain in Chelsea. It's the house that dogs built — specifically, the emotive Weimaraners that the artist has photographed, often garbed in human clothing, for decades. But Wegman has quietly and significantly amassed an oeuvre, stretching back to the early '70s, that has nothing to do with man's best friend. A series of exhibitions in 2012 helped broaden the understanding of Wegman's larger practice: "Hello Nature," a retrospective at Bowdoin College Museum of Art; a selection of drawings presented at Salon 94 Freemans; and "Artists Including Me," a solo painting show at Sperone Westwater. This month, New York has another chance to take in Wegman's comic genius and serious artistic chops, with barely a dog in sight.

First, there's "Postcard Paintings," also at Sperone Westwater, through April 23. These small- and large-scale paintings on panel exploit a simple conceit: a cheap postcard used as the centerpiece of a larger composition. The postcards themselves are of various types — sourced from museum gift shops and holiday destinations alike — and they offer Wegman both a prompt and a cheat. While the postcards are collaged onto the surface, these works aren't collages; the cards, whether depicting a famous Edward Hopper canvas or a romantic waterfall, act more like a conversation starter, while simultaneously (and subtly) doing the heavy lifting of building a composition. By focusing the eye on the often photographic, found image, Wegman tricks the viewer: the painted passages around the postcards achieve, via osmosis or some form of vampirism, a clarity and grace that they might not have on their own. In the best works, it's difficult to discern the boundary between postcard and painting. What Wegman essentially does is build up a frame or environment for the postcard to live or float within. The surrounding paintings are often architectural in

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nature, depicting unreal spaces whose planes and perspectives are all out of whack (reminiscent at times of the exploding angles and walls of Leipzig School painter David Schnell).



William Wegman, *Lobby Abstract*, 2015, oil and postcards on wood panel, 30 x 40 inches, Courtesy William Wegman and Sperone Westwater, New York

Often the juxtapositions are played for laughs, as Wegman extends the postcard imagery out past the frame (a station wagon goofily distended, in one instance). Two or three or more postcards can coexist in a single painting, creating worlds within worlds whose contradictions amuse and confuse. These more complicated works are impressive, but Wegman does just as well when he keeps it simple — as in a small painting based around a postcard of the Golden Gate Bridge, which becomes an abstracted landscape populated by purple mountains and boxy cars. A series of paintings on the gallery's second floor break form by including books, rather than postcards — namely a series of vintage how-to home-repair guides, bulkily affixed to the panel's surface — giving Wegman additional chances to land sly visual puns.

The “Postcard Paintings” are a charming mixture of the serious and the silly, a mood that carries over into the second Wegman exhibition, at Magenta Plains on the Lower East Side through April 24. Here we get drawn-on photographs and drawings, many of them in the form of perverse or absurd cartoons. As with the postcards, photographs are a “way in” for Wegman here — his doodles and defacements act to finish the existing image. In one of the most striking (and disturbing) works, from 1979, we see a young girl, her face — only half of it retroactively lipsticked in ink by the artist — poised at the edge of a kitchen table, which

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William Wegman, *Inside Outside*, 2014, oil and postcard on wood panel, 30 x 40 inches, Courtesy William Wegman and Sperone Westwater, New York

is bare save for a bone-shaped dog biscuit. The effect is a discomfiting combination of the commercial and the erotic, of wholesomeness and fetish.

But the main event at Magenta Plains is the drawings, which generate strange laughter. (Fans of Glen Baxter will feel right at home.) In one, resembling a captionless New Yorker cartoon, a Native American woman, her baby snugly papoosed on her back, converses with a yellow-blazered society lady. In another, a man and a woman sit in an apartment that's literally raining money from the ceiling; on the wall hangs a Wegman dog portrait (it's unclear whether the man in the frame is Wegman himself, flush with canine cash, or simply a money-hungry collector). In his sketches and studies and one-offs the artist wanders casually

from the puckish — photos of Bruins hockey players with lipstick and thick eyelashes drawn on their faces — to the sweetly sentimental, as in a washed-out purple landscape depicting ducks in migration. “More my impression than actual rendering,” reads a line of text below the painted scene. “(how I felt).”



William Wegman, *Reinstallation*, 2013, oil and postcards on wood panel, 48 x 72 inches, Courtesy William Wegman and Sperone Westwater, New York