

ALTA

Press release

William Wegman's Polaroids Exhibition

MIA Photo Fair Milan

18 – 22 March 2026 / Booth A 009 / AON



William Wegman, Ionian, 2005

MIA Photo Fair 2026's theme of "Metamorphosis" provides the perfect framework for presenting William Wegman's unique Polaroid photography.

An exhibition organized by Alta speaks directly to the fair's exploration of transformation, demonstrating photography as a vehicle for profound metamorphosis.

The Eternal State of Becoming

Wegman's practice embodies metamorphosis fundamentally. As he articulates, "The dogs are always in a state of becoming something. They become characters, objects, when they are lying down they become landscapes". This constant transformation defines his four-decade collaboration with beloved Weimaraners—first Man Ray, then Fay Ray, and subsequent generations.

Each Polaroid captures canine subjects transcending their natural state to become archetypal human figures, abstract forms, or art historical references.

The dogs morph into hunters, housewives, astronauts, lawyers, and countless personas, creating what curator William A. Ewing describes as portraits where "these performers are us and we are them". This fluid interchange challenges fixed identity categories and invites viewers to reconsider boundaries between human and animal nature.



William Wegman, Underwear, 1992

The Transformative Power of Polaroid

Wegman's adoption of the large-format 20x24-inch Polaroid camera in 1979 marked a pivotal shift in his artistic practice. This massive apparatus transformed his conceptual video work into monumental instant photographs possessing both snapshot immediacy and formal portraiture gravitas.

The Polaroid medium embodies metamorphosis through instantaneous development, capturing and materializing fleeting moments. Unlike traditional photography, these unique prints cannot be reproduced, making each image a singular artifact of collaboration between artist and animal. Over three decades, Wegman created many Polaroids, each documenting unique instances of transformation.

Collaborative Transformation

Most remarkably, Wegman's practice represents mutual metamorphosis between artist and subject. His relationship with dogs evolved from documentation to genuine collaboration, transforming both parties through the creative process. Scholar Susan McHugh notes this work "compels reconceptualization of human as well as animal aesthetic agency", suggesting dogs became active participants in their own transformation.

The artist's account is revealing: "When Man Ray lost his figure he was no longer a sculpture or space modulator but a character actor". This progression from object to collaborator reflects deeper shifts in understanding artistic agency and interspecies relationships.



William Wegman, Entertainer, 1995

Art Historical Metamorphosis

Wegman's Polaroids demonstrate how contemporary art transforms historical traditions. His portraits reference Renaissance portraiture, Surrealism, Cubism, and color field painting. By placing canine subjects within art historical frameworks, Wegman creates dialogue between past and present, transforming familiar visual languages.

The work operates as both homage and critique, "humorously investigating themes of identity and fantasy" while elevating family pets to fine art subjects. This challenges conventional artistic hierarchies and demonstrates photography's capacity to bridge cultural contexts.

Gallery as Transformation Space

Within MIA Photo Fair's "Metamorphosis" theme, the AON's booth becomes a space where viewers witness multiple layers of transformation. Large-scale Polaroids invite intimate contemplation while their gallery presentation transforms private moments into public art. Visitors encounter not just dog photographs, but mirrors reflecting human experience.

Initial humor gradually reveals deeper meaning—apparent whimsical anthropomorphism becomes sophisticated exploration of identity, perception, and the human condition. This evolution in viewer understanding exemplifies the dialogue the fair seeks between artwork and audience.



William Wegman, Marlowe, 1996

Contemporary Relevance

In our moment of rapid change, Wegman's exploration feels particularly resonant. His work anticipated contemporary discussions about fluid identity, human-animal relationships, and visual meaning construction. The "expanded register of possible human-canine collaboration" suggests transformation as collaborative rather than individual process.

As MIA Photo Fair 2026 explores metamorphosis as "a vital process influencing photographic language, artistic practices, and fair identity", Wegman's Polaroids exemplify works continually transforming our understanding of photography's possibilities. They remind us profound metamorphoses occur through patient, playful exploration—one Polaroid at a time.

Through this exhibition, visitors witness how artist-dog collaboration became a transformative force in contemporary art, proving metamorphosis isn't merely an illustrated theme, but a living process shaping how we see ourselves and our relationships with the world.

Superstudio Più
Via Tortona 27, 20144 Milan, Italia
Booth A 009 / AON
Opening Day: 18 March 2026
Show Dates: 19-22 March 2026