

## A PICTURE CAN SPEAK A THOUSAND WORDS OR ILLUSTRATE A SENTENCE

*Elliott Erwitt: Dog Dogs, Canine Beauties: Sleeping or Otherwise, and William Steig: The Man Who Never Grew Up*, on view at the Woodson Art Museum April 17 through June 20, 2010, explore the visual richness of photography and illustration.

- In *Dog Dogs* and *Canine Beauties*, photographers Elliott Erwitt and Butch McCartney, respectively, explore man's best friend, as members of our everyday lives and as portrait subjects.
  - *The Man Who Never Grew Up* comprises enchanting examples of children's book illustrations by prolific artist and cartoonist William Steig. Among his well-known characters are Brave Irene, Dr. DeSoto, and Shrek.
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*This pre-visit packet explores all three artists as they relate to the larger themes of reading visual images and illustrating stories.*

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### ELLIOTT ERWITT: FINDING HUMOR IN EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES

#### **BIOGRAPHY:**

Born in France of Russian émigré parents in 1928, Erwitt's formative years were spent in Italy. At age ten, his family moved back to France, then immigrating to the United States in 1939, settling in New York for two years and then relocating to Los Angeles.

During high school, Erwitt worked in a commercial darkroom processing "signed" prints of movie stars for fans. In 1949 he returned to Europe to photograph in Italy and France, thus marking the start of his professional career.

While looking for work during exploratory trips to New York City prior to military service, Erwitt had the good fortune to meet established photographers Edward Steichen, Robert Capa, and Roy Stryker, who liked his work and became his mentors.

Drafted into the US Army in 1951, Erwitt continued to take photographs for various publications apart from his military duties while stationed in New Jersey, Germany, and France.

In 1953 after completing his military service, Erwitt was invited to join Magnum Photos by the agency's founder, Robert Capa. In 1968, Erwitt became president of the prestigious agency for three terms. He continues to be an active Magnum member and one of the leading figures in the competitive field of photography.

Erwitt's portfolio includes books, journalistic essays, illustrations, advertisements, films, and comedy and satire programming for HBO. He leads a remarkably varied professional life encompassing many aspects of photography. While actively working for magazine, industrial, and advertising clients, Erwitt still finds time to create books and exhibitions of his work. To date, he has produced more than twenty photography books.

-Adapted from <http://www.elliottewritt.com/lang/en/index.html>

**AUDIO INTERVIEW WITH ERWITT:**

Navigate to <http://www.elliottewritt.com/lang/en/index.html>

Select "About"

Select "Interview Audio" and listen to Erwitt talk about his photography.

***Use the biographical information and/or audio interview to introduce Erwitt to your students.***

***Following the classroom introduction, share the images of his work.***

***Elliott Erwitt: Dog Dogs URLs***

[www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt4.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt4.jpg)

© Elliott Erwitt, *New York City*, 1946

[www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt1.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt1.jpg)

© Elliott Erwitt, *Paris, France*, 1957

[www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt2.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt2.jpg)

© Elliott Erwitt, *Amagansett, New York*, 1990

[www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt3.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt3.jpg)

© Elliott Erwitt, *New York*, 1999

[www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt5.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt5.jpg)

© Elliott Erwitt, *New Jersey*, 1971

[www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt6.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/ellioterwitt6.jpg)

© Elliott Erwitt, *Birmingham, Great Britain*, 1991

While investigating each photograph, ask students to share their reactions:

- ***What's happening in the photograph? Tell its story.***
- ***Why is it funny?***
- ***How would you react if you saw this scene?***
- ***Why is the dog important to the photograph?***
- ***Why do people like dogs so much?***

***Following the classroom activity, ask students to select a favorite photograph (or use a photograph of their own that includes a dog) to use as the basis for a short story featuring the characters in the image. The story should be written***

*from a dog's point-of-view and incorporate the humor that permeates Erwit's photographs.*

*These "Tall Tails" can then be shared among students in the class and also with other students/grades, as appropriate.*

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## BUTCH MCCARTNEY: MAN'S BEST FRIEND

Butch McCartney has a knack for casting a human light on canine subjects.

*Canine Beauties* showcases McCartney's work as a dog portrait photographer. A portrait is an artistic means of capturing the personality of a subject. In McCartney's case, his medium (artistic means) is photography and his subjects are dogs.

The human-canine bond is one of the oldest animal-human bonds known. It's believed that dogs were first domesticated 15,000 years ago. Imagine how well you'd know someone if you were friends with them for 15,000 years! Talk about best friends!

***Look at the image links below. For each, make a list of the human-like characteristics that can be observed. Title these lists "Characteristics of a Best Friend."***

*Canine Beauties: Sleeping or Otherwise* URLs

[www.lywam.org/media/mccartney1.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/mccartney1.jpg)

[www.lywam.org/media/mccartney2.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/mccartney2.jpg)

[www.lywam.org/media/mccartney3.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/mccartney3.jpg)

[www.lywam.org/media/mccartney4.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/mccartney4.jpg)

[www.lywam.org/media/mccartney5.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/mccartney5.jpg)

***As a classroom activity, direct students to create "Wanted Ads" for a best friend. Students should use the lists of "Characteristics of a Best Friend" as a word bank. After students complete their ads, ask each student to read it aloud. Then discuss the similarities and differences (if there are any) of the characteristics we look for in a human best friend and in a canine one.***

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## WILLIAM STEIG: ILLUSTRATIONS

### RESOURCES ON WILLIAM STEIG:

#### THE JEWISH'S MUSEUM WEBSITE FOR *FROM THE NEW YORKER TO SHREK: THE ART OF WILLIAM STEIG*

[http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/site/pages/content/exhibitions/special/steig/steig\\_onlinefeature.html](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/site/pages/content/exhibitions/special/steig/steig_onlinefeature.html)

(This website relates to another William Steig exhibition, however, the information provided is thorough and helpful)

#### From the Introduction

Known for his brilliant cartoons for *The New Yorker* and his award-winning children's books, William Steig (1907–2003) leaves a legacy that spans the twentieth century. A son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, Steig was born in Brooklyn on November 14, 1907, and grew up in the Bronx. He drew his first cartoons for his high school newspaper and then went on to spend two years at City College, three years at the National Academy, and five days at Yale before dropping out. In 1930, prompted by the need to support his family during the Depression, Steig began illustrating for *The New Yorker* and for other magazines such as *Judge*, *Life*, and *Collier's*, which published humor as an antidote to hard times.

"I always begin with the face," Steig simply explained, but his variety of drawing styles is remarkable, ranging from classic cartoons to psychologically fraught pen-and-ink creations, from Picassoesque portraits to delicately rendered sketches. His protean nature made him hard to categorize—a trait he shared with the other colossus of *The New Yorker*, Saul Steinberg. Steig's desire to draw freely and whimsically pervades much of his art, and his intense love of color is apparent in his opulent illustrations for children. Just as the scale of his drawings was modest, the artist's attitude toward his work, "made to be reproduced," was unassuming.

Filled with empathy, Steig's drawings resonate long after our first encounter with them. In his art, the isolation of the self—one of the artist's lifelong preoccupations—is treated in its various guises. The children he drew are often grouchy and ill-mannered, and his adult world is populated with convicts and lovers, drunks and drifters, philosophers and the absurdly rich, and couples engaged in bewildered attempts to understand each other. These characters—often warty and scabrous types depicted with great affection—are both a rich source of humor and crucial to one of his central insights: there is much in this world that can perplex and frustrate us. Above all, Steig's work is about the redeeming power of nature, art, and love, to which we seem to be most receptive as children, or when we are in touch with our own childhood as adults. "I think I feel a little differently than other people do," Steig said. "For some reason I've never felt grown up."

### **From Sylvester, Shrek, and Friends**

Even though Steig's first book for children—*C D B!*—was published in 1968, when he was sixty years old, the artist had been preparing for this moment his entire career. His continued interest in the doings of youngsters and the childlike quality of much of his cartoon art evince a lifelong need to remain in contact with his inner child. His father liked to tell of a brilliant Polish Jewish jester who kept the king in check, a story that captivated young Steig and perhaps propelled the artist to overturn traditional narratives later in life. In his drawings for adults, damsels are often depicted chasing away serenading suitors or shielding themselves from knights in the protective arms of monsters. In his children's books, ogres fall madly in love with each other and the ugly inhabitants of a "rotten island" are "very happy at being unhappy." Steig's empathy for the underdog is both intense and genuine, which partly explains why his work appeals to children.

The artist's ideal of social justice, instilled in him by his parents, finds its most vivid expression in his children's books. To communicate meaningful concepts to a young audience, Steig populates his fanciful stories with animal protagonists who embark on quests of self-discovery, struggle with their emotions, and survive through self-reliance. "I think using animals emphasizes the fact that the story is symbolical—about human behavior," Steig once said. "And kids get the idea right away that this is not just a story, but that it's saying something about life on earth." Steig's favorite book as a child was *Pinocchio*, which may account for why his tales are filled with magical transformations. Ever sensitive to the child's point of view, Steig refuses to patronize his young readers and acknowledges their sophistication and love of learning by introducing complex words while keeping them utterly absorbed.

### **Steig books represented in *The Man Who Never Grew Up* exhibition at the Woodson Art Museum**

*Shrek!*

*Spinky Sulks*

*Dominic*

*CDC*

*Brave Irene*

*Gorky Rises*

*Doctor De Soto Goes To Africa*

*Amos & Boris*

*Farmer Palmer's Wagon Ride*

*Abel's Island*

*When Everybody Wore a Hat*

***Select from the books above and read one or more or excerpts aloud to your class. Ask students to make observations about the illustrations and the text.***

- ***How are actions illustrated?***
- ***How do the words match up with the pictures?***

- *If you were given the opportunity to write new words or change the illustrations, what would you do and why?*

***Look at the illustrations below as a class; discuss each one using the guiding questions above.***

*William Steig: The Man Who Never Grew Up* URLs

[www.lywam.org/media/spinky.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/spinky.jpg)

© William Steig, from *Spinky Sulks*, 1988

[www.lywam.org/media/shrek2.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/shrek2.jpg)

© William Steig, from *Shrek*, 1990

[www.lywam.org/media/irene2.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/irene2.jpg)

© William Steig, from *Brave Irene*, 1986

[www.lywam.org/media/farmerp3.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/farmerp3.jpg)

© William Steig, from *Farmer Palmer's Wagon Ride*, 1974

[www.lywam.org/media/doctorde.jpg](http://www.lywam.org/media/doctorde.jpg)

© William Steig, from *Doctor De Soto Goes to Africa*, 1992

***Following this activity, direct students to write and illustrate a short story. Encourage students to be inspired by Steig's style.***

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#### HANDS-ON AT THE WOODSON ART MUSEUM

***Use these suggested activities to prepare your students for their upcoming Woodson Art Museum visit. Utilizing these materials ensures students will get the most out of their visit.***

***Museum visits include an illustration activity, except May 11 – 14, when students will observe canine photographer Butch McCartney in action.***

***If you have questions regarding your upcoming visit, please contact Erin Narloch at 715-845-7010 or via email at [enarloch@lywam.org](mailto:enarloch@lywam.org)***

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#### FOLLOWING UP YOUR WOODSON ART MUSEUM VISIT

***Prior to leaving the Museum, teachers will be given Activity Guides for each student. Using the guides back in the classroom is a great way to build on the experiences students had while at the Museum. Also encourage students to take the Activity Guides home to share with their families.***