

10.23.2005

# STYLE

Section D

## PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

**P**HOTOGRAPHER Art Rogers spent New Year's Eve 2000 at San Francisco's old M.H. de Young Memorial Museum the night it closed, before the wrecker's ball brought the old building crashing down. Rogers and the museum staff rounded up hundreds of people who'd come to bid the old girl farewell, posed them in the Spanish-style Hearst Court and snapped a group portrait.

Nearly five years later, on the opening day of the new de Young Museum, Oct. 15, Rogers assembled a similarly diverse crowd in the angular new Wilsey Court — politicians, artists, musicians, museum trustees and an array of

### Portrait photographer creates a bridge between old and new de Young

people whose faces formed a typically polyethnic Bay Area portrait — and shot a picture of that happy civic moment. Together, these images, which were commissioned by the museum, book-end a momentous chapter in the de Young's 110-year history.

"There was a very proud feeling there both days, a swelling inside for San Francisco," says Rogers, a Point Reyes photographer known for portraits that document West Marin families and spaces as they change over time. The people who appear in the old and new de Young pictures "were aware that these were historical photographs," said Rogers, whose 16-year-old daughter, Hannah, who's in both pictures, counted 634 people in the 2000 portrait but hasn't yet tallied the total in the new shot. "They were big moments for me personally, and for the city."

Rogers' old de Young portrait, which shows the symmetry and classical ornamentation of Hearst Court, features some people who also appear in the new picture, which captures the dynamic asymmetry of Wilsey Court. Fine Arts Museums Director Harry Parker and the museum trustees sit in the first few rows of both shots. In the old picture, they pose behind a line of well-dressed lads from the San Francisco Boys Chorus, sitting cross-legged on the floor. The boys sang at the closing ceremonies that day. Another performer, jazz saxophonist John Handy, stands at the back of the pack.

On Oct. 15, Parker and the brass sat for their picture in the same general location, this time fronted by a loose line of random kids. Mayors Gavin Newsom and Willie Brown are among the bigwigs in the picture, co-starring with a cast of lesser-known opening-day celebrators.

"It's everybody who wanted to be in the photograph," Rogers said. "It's a beautiful thing because of the diversity of the people. It was the same thing when the museum closed: every race, creed and color, every variety of San Franciscan and Bay Area."

Studying the Wilsey Court portrait, the photographer noted a number of chance elements that energize the image and capture the feeling of the new space. There's the blurred figure in motion at the back left side of the mob, and the person out in far left field, so to speak, contemplating a painting on the diagonal wall, oblivious to the mass of people peering at the camera.

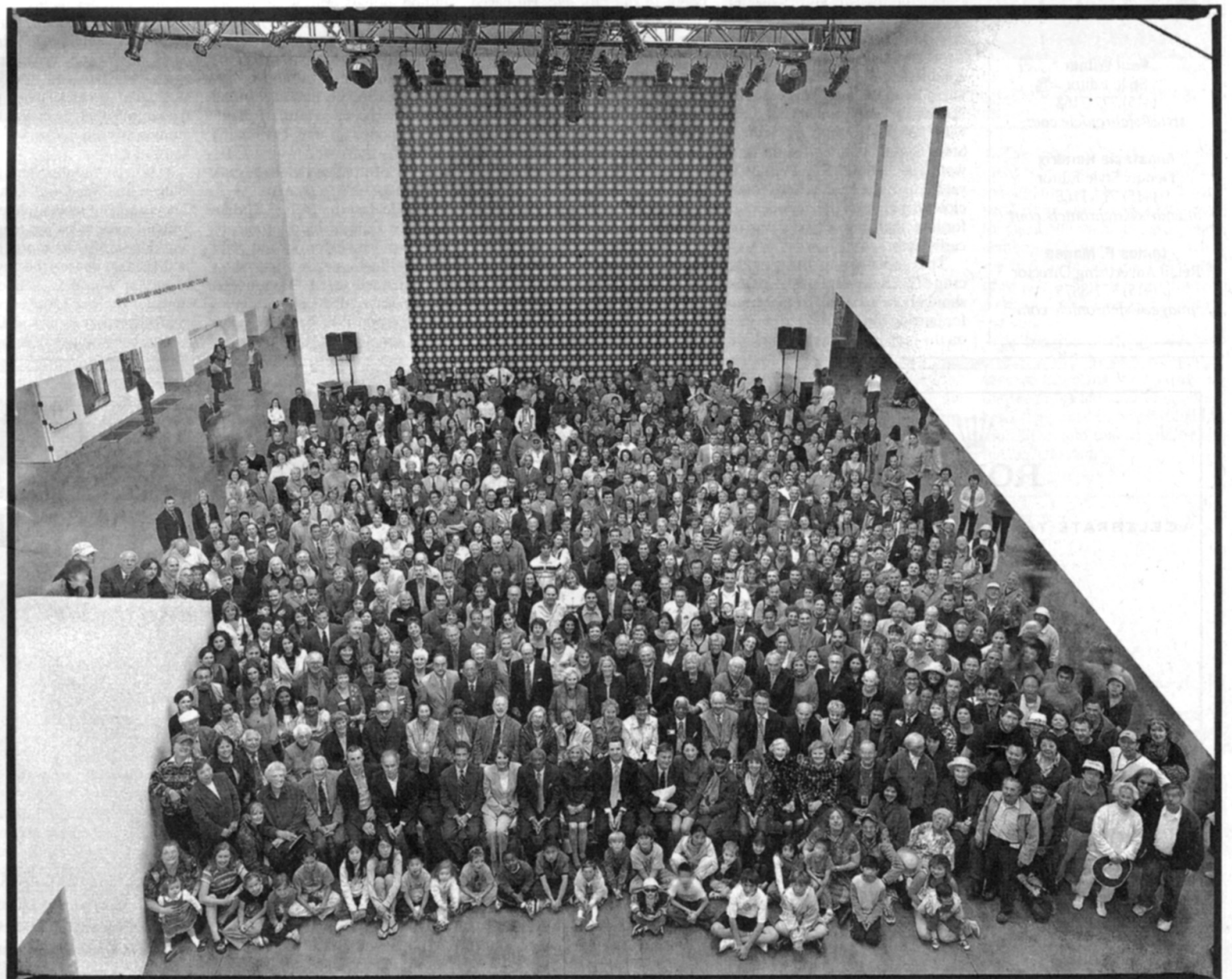
As always, Rogers shot in black and white. Color is seductive, he said, "but it can be a distraction. Without the color, you're more interested in the faces and patterns and shapes."

— Jesse Hamlin



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**2001** Dec. 3, Hearst Court: The day before the old museum closed. First row, S.F. Boys Choir; second row, luminaries included Nan McEvoy, granddaughter of museum founder M.H. de Young; the late arts patron Phyllis Wattis; former FAM Board President Walter Newman; third row, center: Dede Wilsey.



**2005** Oct. 15, Wilsey Court: Among those at the opening of the new museum were (second row) House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, former Mayor Willie Brown, Fine Arts Museums board President Dede Wilsey, Mayor Gavin Newsom, Museums Director Harry Parker, journalist Belva Davis and state Sen. Jackie Spier.