



## Untitled, Philadelphia, from the portfolio “Party Pictures”

### Date

1981 (published 1985)

### Primary Maker

William E. Williams

### Medium

Gelatin silver print

### Description

Born in Vicksburg, Mississippi, William E. Williams attended Hamilton at a time of profound change, from 1969 to 1973. On the Hill, he benefited from Kirkland College’s progressive curriculum by taking a number of literature classes there and was strongly influenced by Sylvia Saunders (see cat. nos. 71–73), who introduced him to the work of the famed documentary photographer Walker Evans. His admiration for Evans, along with Saunders’s encouragement, inspired him to apply to the Yale University School of Art, where Evans had taught photography from 1965 to 1971. Williams received his master of fine arts degree from Yale in 1978 and began teaching at Haverford

College, where he is currently the Audrey A. and John L. Dusseau Professor in the Humanities. This photograph is from the series “Party Pictures,” shot between 1977 and 1983 at nine different social occasions, ranging from society galas to drag balls. The artist was drawn to such soirees on account of their participants’ “ritual behavior,” including their dress. The series was likely informed by Williams’s thesis portfolio at Yale, “Flash Portraiture of People in Dark Spaces.” Williams used the flash in this untitled work, and in many others in the portfolio, to compress the space in which the subject coexists with the photographer, creating a forced intimacy familiar to most partygoers. Here, a bow-tied server is captured in the flash’s glare, standing against a column that cuts the image in two. The photograph’s short depth of field reveals the limited reach of the flash and implies the activity lost in the darkness that continues beyond, deep into the night. The crisp white shirt worn by Williams’s subject pops in the artificial light, contrasting dramatically with the grisaille elements of the image. Tom Beck, a professor of photography at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and chief curator of its archival collections, gave a complete “Party Pictures” portfolio to the Emerson Gallery in 1992. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017) From the portfolio “Photographs by William Earle Williams: Party Pictures”

### Dimensions

Image: 14 5/16 × 14 7/16 in. (36.4 × 36.7 cm) Sheet: 19 7/8 × 15 15/16 in. (50.5 × 40.5 cm)