

It's My Party

Vince Aletti

I've always liked party pictures, even the elaborately staged tableaux of costumed revellers Horst and Beaton made at fancy-dress balls in the thirties. But it's when the photographer is in the midst of an event—surrounded by people who are paying him no mind—that you really get the feel of a party. Garry Winogrand's photograph, titled only *New York City* and dated circa 1969, has that you-are-there quality, and makes me wonder if I was. Like Lee Friedlander and Diane Arbus, Winogrand often took pictures at museum opening nights, and he could easily have noticed this casually dressed-up young couple, drinks in hand, at the Museum of Modern Art or the Whitney. Since I never passed up an invitation to an opening uptown, it's entirely possible that I was among the shadowy crowd milling in the picture's background, imagining that I belonged there. Winogrand was famously voracious—one of photography's hungriest eyes—and it would be fascinating to see the contact sheets from this event, if only to peer deeper into the dimness here. This is hardly Brassai's charged vision of a thrillingly illicit nighttown; Winogrand's shadows are hiding men in suits, not thugs and streetwalkers. But if there's no great mystery here, the dark scrim that falls beyond the couple puts them at theatrical centre stage. Her gesture, offering him a drag on her cigarette, invites him to lean in. His hair, a long post-Beatles shag, falls in front of his eyes, redirecting our attention back to her. She's clearly the one who caught Winogrand's eye—one of the many he included in his 1975 book *Women Are Beautiful*, a number of whom he found at parties. "Whenever I've seen an attractive woman, I've done my best to photograph her," Winogrand wrote in that book. He dithers around a bit, trying to define what he means by "attractive," but in the end he writes, "I suspect that I respond to their energies, how they stand and move their bodies and faces." The energy in this picture is subtle and contained, but look at her expression—open-mouthed, intent, amused, sly—and you can see exactly what he means.



Garry Winogrand
Untitled, New York City, c. 1969
gelatin silver print, 20.4 x 25.5 cm