

FESTIVAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY

**WILLIAM
EGGLESTON
PORTRAITS**

ARTWORK LABELS

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William Eggleston Portraits

Few photographers of the last century have had such a profound influence on contemporary photographic portraits as the American photographer William Eggleston, who was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1939. Although Eggleston is not usually regarded as a portraitist, pictures of people have long been central to his practice. Photographed near his home in Memphis, and in the Mississippi Delta where he grew up, many of Eggleston's images depict friends and family. Still more are of strangers – taken unawares, and performing everyday tasks such as dining, shopping or waiting for a bus. These spontaneous and unconventional pictures pose deep questions about humanity, self, memory and experience. Eggleston's 'portraits' are neither straightforwardly documentary nor sentimental. The artist instead asks that we view them 'democratically', pushing beyond the mere appearance of things to find something more valuable and more elusive.

This exhibition brings together 100 photographs, beginning with works made in 1960s when Eggleston first embraced colour. Many images are from the artist's personal archive and are exhibited here for the first time.

William Eggleston Portraits is organised by the National Portrait Gallery, London, with support from the artist and the Eggleston Artistic Trust and presented by the National Gallery of Victoria.

Initially, Eggleston photographed in colour using readily available films which he sent to drugstore labs for processing and printing. In his search for what he called the 'ultimate quality' colour print, in the early 1970s Eggleston happened upon the dye transfer process, a close cousin of Technicolor in cinema film. Marketed by Kodak since the 1930s, dye transfer had until that point been used mainly for high-end commercial work. Eggleston began to use it for artistic purposes and his 1976 exhibition *Photographs by William Eggleston*, at New York's Museum of Modern Art, is a landmark in the history of colour photography.

Dye transfer printing requires tremendous dexterity and skill. The printer separates the original image into three negatives – red, yellow and blue. These are printed separately onto transfer films dyed cyan, magenta and yellow, which are printed one on top of the other in perfect registration to build up the final, full-colour image. Following Kodak's decision to withdraw matrix film in 1991, in recent years Eggleston has taken advantage of digital printing techniques, which afford him greater control over colours and enable him to print in sizes that would have been unimaginable using earlier methods.

Untitled (Peter Lindamood)

1960s

gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Peter Lindamood was a bon vivant and art critic who wrote for publications including *Harper's Bazaar* and the avant-garde magazine *View*. *View* is credited with helping introduce the American audience to Dada and Surrealism. In March 1945 Lindamood edited an issue dedicated to his friend, the Dada artist Marcel Duchamp. 'Eccentric and delightful', according to a friend, Lindamood rented an apartment nearby to the Egglestons', above a carriage house that Eggleston used as a darkroom. Lindamood was part of a prominent circle of influential Southern writers that included Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams.

Untitled (Lucille Fleming, Sumner, Missouri)

c. 1965

gelatin silver photograph

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

2000.41.14

Eggleston grew up partially in the care of Lucille Fleming, who worked as a housekeeper for the families of his grandfather and uncle, in Sumner, Mississippi. Essentially a member of the family herself, Fleming spent more than fifty years in their employ. Fleming was also a talented quilt-maker, and examples of her work are held in several public collections, including the Center for the Study of Southern Culture in Oxford, Mississippi. Eggleston's father joined the Navy shortly after his son's birth, and was posted to a base in Florida. His mother followed him there, leaving the young William with his grandparents.

Untitled

1960s

gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

1973–74

gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

1973–74, printed 2005
gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled (Marcia Hare, Memphis, Tennessee)

c. 1975

dye transfer print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

In addition to its extraordinary colouration, this portrait is remarkable for its clever use of focus. Only the woman's camera, arm and head are rendered sharply, giving these elements of the picture extra dramatic weight. The grass on which she lies is largely out of focus, forming an ethereal, cloud-like bed, while her dress is sharp at the neckline, becoming increasingly fuzzy in the lower right. Her chest is adorned with a string of translucent red buttons, sumptuous and gleaming like jellybeans.

Untitled (Alex Chilton)

c. 1973, printed 2016
pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Eggleston shows celebrated musician Alex Chilton in a state of euphoria. Photographed on the front steps of Eggleston's house, he is illuminated from below by floodlights. A key member of the Memphis alternative music scene in the 1970s, Chilton co-founded the cult band Big Star. Eggleston and Chilton were neighbours and occasional collaborators: Eggleston supplied pictures for various Big Star albums, and even performed piano on the album *Third/Sister Lovers* (1978). Chilton's mother Maru ran an art gallery specialising in regional crafts, and she and her husband hosted soirees at their house, which attracted artists and musicians.

Untitled (Joe Strummer)

c. 1980, printed 2016

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

A local record shop owner introduced Eggleston to the Clash frontman and British punk icon Joe Strummer while Strummer was on tour in Memphis. The Clash had just released the follow-up to their hugely successful record *London Calling* (1979) and experimental triple-album *Sandinista!* (1980). Eggleston cleverly framed the photograph in camera so that the fan in the background – with his T-shirt from Stanley Kubrick's film of Anthony Burgess's dystopian novel *A Clockwork Orange* – is out of focus but clearly visible.

Untitled (William Eggleston III)

1973

dye transfer print

Collection William Eggleston III

Untitled (Winston Eggleston)

c. 1995, printed 2016

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled (The artist's nephew, Adyn Schuyler, Sumner, Mississippi)

1973, printed 2002

dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Untitled (Karen Chatham with the artist's cousin Lesa Aldridge, Memphis, Tennessee)

1974

dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

This photograph captures a specific moment of intimacy after a night at a Memphis bar named Yosemite Sam's. Lesa Aldridge comforts Karen Chatham, who sulks after being snubbed by Big Star co-founder Alex Chilton, with whom she was infatuated. Not long after, Aldridge would start dating Chilton herself. The romance between Aldridge and Chilton lasted, on and off, until 1980 and was characterised by periodic arguments. The extreme volatility of the relationship fuelled Chilton's songwriting. Aldridge decided to drop out of university to be with Chilton and would later lead the all-female punk band the Klitz.

Untitled

c. 1970, printed 2016

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

1970–74

dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Untitled

1969–71, printed 2004
dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Eggleston cautions viewers against symbolic interpretations of his work, but it is hard not to associate the woman in this picture, with her prim expression, tidy blue dress and neatly coifed 'flip' hairstyle, with the heavy chains coiled around the pole to her left. She sits stock-still on a curb painted warning yellow; eerily, only her hand moves.

Untitled (Memphis, Tennessee)

1965–68

dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Untitled (Biloxi, Mississippi)

1974, printed 1996

dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Untitled (The artist's uncle, Aydn Schuyler Senior, with assistant and driver, Jasper Staples, Cassidy, Mississippi)

1969–70, printed 2012

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Aydn Jasper was hired as a 'house man' by the Schuyler family in the late 1930s and remained in their employ until his death in 1992. In this photograph he unconsciously mimics his employer – shoulders slumped, hands in pockets and bearing a similar expression, but significantly positioned one step behind. The occasion of this photograph was a funeral. Jasper had responsibilities akin to those of a butler. He drove the car, helped maintain the house and grounds and took on odd jobs. Since Eggleston's parents were absent during much of his childhood, Jasper and others had an important role in his upbringing.

Untitled (Charlie Boykin, Morton, Mississippi)

1969–70

dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Charlie Boykin was the night watchman (sheriff) for the town of Morton, Mississippi. He escorted Eggleston around town to enable him to photograph late at night; the pistol was for protection. He is shown here in his bedroom.

Untitled (Frank Zito in Huntsville, Alabama)

c. 1970, printed 2016
pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

In the early 1970s Eggleston joined a group touring the missile defence station at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville. Taken at the height of the Cold War, this chilling picture shows another participant in his hotel room after the tour.

Untitled (Leigh Haizlip)

1970s

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Eggleston has often been drawn to photograph facial expressions, and even when his sitters are at their most emotional, as in this picture, he maintains professional detachment. Leigh Haizlip was Eggleston's girlfriend. The circumstances of her unhappiness are unexplained; the ambiguity allows the viewer to imagine the artist himself might have been the cause.

Untitled (Devoe Money, Jackson, Mississippi)

c. 1970, printed 2016

pigment print

Courtesy the Eggleston Artistic Trust and David Zwirner, New York/London

Devoe Money was distantly related to Eggleston on his father's side. 'She was a swell, wonderful person', Eggleston recalls, 'very smart, too ... she was not a rich lady. She didn't inherit a lot, I remember she was active in the little theatre there in Jackson. But there's no money in that'.

Untitled (The artist's daughter, Andrea, and son, Winston)

from the *Morals of vision* series

1978

colour coupler print

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

84.XO.762.4.8

Untitled

c. 1965–69

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

**Untitled (The artist's grandmother,
Minnie Maude McMullen May, Sumner,
Mississippi)**

c. 1969–71, printed 2016

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled (Shelly Schuyler, daughter of Aydin Schuyler Senior)

c. 1975

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

c. 1975

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled (Memphis, Tennessee)

1965, printed later
dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Eggleston identifies this portrait as his first successful colour photograph. 'The first frame', he has said, 'was a guy pushing grocery carts. Some kind of pimply, freckle-faced guy in the late sunlight ... And by God, it worked'.

Untitled (Memphis, Tennessee)

1965–68

dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Untitled (Self-portrait)

c. 1970, printed 2016

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

1965–68, printed 2004
dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Untitled

1970

dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Untitled (Anne Tomlinson and Chick Reeder)

1970–73, printed later
dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Although Eggleston is celebrated for his use of colour, his handling of light is arguably just as important. Tomlinson's dress illustrates this point. Is it a yellow dress, which takes on a bluish look in shadow? Or green, with a yellow cast under the glare of streetlights? Eggleston met Chick Reeder in 1962. Reeder recalls Eggleston entering open churches around the Mississippi Delta, where he would play Bach on the organ for hours on end. Reeder is shown with his then fiancée, Anne Tomlinson, shortly before they left Memphis for a trip across Asia.

Untitled (Winston Eggleston)

c. 1970, printed 2016

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled (Howard Graham and Clifton Yandell)

c. 1970, printed 2016
pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled (Randall Lyon, Memphis)

1973–74

gelatin silver photograph

Courtesy of Cheim & Read Gallery, New York

Randall Lyon was a longstanding friend of the artist. He was one of the founders of the Memphis video production company Televista, and cultivated Eggleston's interest in film and video. An artist, music promoter, roadie, cook and poet associated with Allen Ginsberg, Lyon embraced the role of provocateur. A self-proclaimed hippie, and openly gay at a time when Southern men feared to come out publically, he has been described as 'the Oscar Wilde of Memphis'. Lyon was also a pioneer in the appreciation of blues music, travelling to Mississippi Delta juke joints when few white people thought to do so.

Untitled (Tom Young resting, New Orleans)

1981–82, printed 2016

pigment print

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Painter Tom Young was a friend of Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock and other painters of the Abstract Expressionist movement, and was a founding member of the 10th Street Galleries in New York, a radical artist's cooperative. From 1960 to 1961 he was artist-in-residence at the University of Mississippi, where he met Eggleston. Young encouraged Eggleston to photograph seriously, and to expand his knowledge of abstract art and aesthetics. When Eggleston complained that he was uninspired because he felt indifferent to the things around him, Young suggested that he should channel this ambivalence and photograph with equal intensity, regardless of how he felt about a subject.

Untitled

1973–74

gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled (Memphis)

1970–73

dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Untitled (Elvis and Kennedy)

1983–84

dye transfer print

Wilson Centre for Photography, London

Untitled sketchbook

1978

sketchbook: watercolour, pencil, ink

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Eggleston began drawing and making small sculptures as a boy, and has long maintained a series of sketchbooks containing notes and brightly coloured drawings such as this, exploring pleasing combinations of colours and forms. He was deeply impressed by American Abstract Expressionist painting, which he learned about through his friend and mentor Tom Young, and others. However, Eggleston always professed a special admiration for Russian painter and theorist Wassily Kandinsky, whose involvement in the German Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider) group was a substantial influence on the development of modern painting.

Stranded in Canton

1973–74

video

Eggleston Artistic Trust

In 1973 William Eggleston purchased two Sony Portapak cameras, the first video camera designed for the consumer market. Ever inventive, he replaced the factory-supplied lenses with professional movie camera lenses and replaced the picture tube in one with an infra-red sensor so he could shoot in the dark. He filmed family and friends around him, and travelled with his cousin, the photographer Maude Schuyler Clay, recording scenes in nightclubs from Memphis to New Orleans. The project resulted in more than thirty hours of footage, which finally received commercial release in 2005 under the title *Stranded in Canton*.

Untitled

1960s

gelatin silver photographs

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Eggleston began photographing seriously around 1960 in black-and-white. Although he added colour to his repertoire only five years later, black-and-white remained central to his work throughout the decade. Made in public places, such as petrol stations, markets, diners or airports, his pictures from this time show people caught at awkward moments, or lost in thought. The glare of artificial light, often blazingly overexposed, is a recurring motif, as are windows and reflections – metaphorical, boundaries and illusions.

The photographs in this case are proofs, hand-printed by the artist for editing purposes. In the 1960s Eggleston would arrange stacks of these on tables in his home, trying out different arrangements, sometimes inviting visitors to join in. This helped him to refine his choices, and develop sequences he could use in exhibitions.

Untitled

1960s

gelatin silver photographs

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

1960s

gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

1960s

gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

1960s

gelatin silver photograph

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gelatin silver photograph

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Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

1960s

gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

1960s

gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

1960s

gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled

1960s

gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust

Untitled (William Eggleston III)

1960s

gelatin silver photograph

Eggleston Artistic Trust