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The Vale of Cashmere – Brooklyn's Secret Meeting Ground

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"In the Vale of Cashmere", Thomas Roma's most recent project, consists of an intricate sequence of 75 black and white portraits and landscapes photographed in a secluded section of Prospect Park, a meeting place where black, Latino and other gay and bisexual men have long sought one another out to fulfill their wish for community and to satisfy sexual desire.



With his large, tripod-mounted, hand-made camera, Roma stepped into the center of this community, an obvious but mostly ignored presence. Understandably, many of the men Roma approached to photograph in a formal portrait were not interested, but surprisingly, many were. After they agreed to be photographed, Roma would offer the

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men time and the opportunity to show him something of themselves they might not have the chance to otherwise.

Although originally conceived solely as a portrait project, the more time Roma spent in the Vale of Cashmere, the more the physical beauty of the Vale became inseparable from the portraits, and many of the landscape photographs were integrated into the series. In addition to the inclusion of landscapes, a custom miniature camera was utilized to provide sequential pictures depicting the steady march of the mostly solitary, unidentifiable men as they cruised the pathways of the Vale.



Roma's motivation for doing the project came from his wish to honor the memory of a close friend who died of AIDS in 1991, and who had introduced him to the Vale of Cashmere.

Thomas Roma is a two-time recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship (1982 and 1991) and a New York State Council for the Arts fellowship (1973). Roma's work has appeared in one-person and group exhibitions internationally, including one-person shows with accompanying books at the Museum of Modern Art (New York) and the International Center of Photography. He has published 12 monographs, including: "Enduring Justice,"

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with an introduction by Norman Mailer; "On Three Pillars," with text by Phillip Lopate; and "Dear Knights and Dark Horses" with an introduction by Alec Wilkinson, all published by powerHouse Books. He taught photography since 1983 at Yale, Fordham, Cooper Union and the School of Visual Arts, and in 1996 became director of the photography program at Columbia University School of the Arts, where he is a Professor of Art. Roma lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Anna, and their son, Giancarlo.

The exhibition "Thomas Roma: In the Vale of Cashmere" opens on Thursday, Oct. 29, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Steven Kasher Gallery, and will be on view through December 19. The accompanying book, "In the Vale of Cashmere," is published by powerHouse Books.