

## Prospect: A Year in the Park

### Meeting the Men in Vale

October 12, 2015

It's not a very well-kept secret that the lovely, secluded and currently neglected Vale of Cashmere has long been a furtive meeting spot for men seeking men. Today's New York Times introduces a book of hauntingly evocative photographs by Thomas Roma, *In the Vale of Cashmere*.



Roma explains: "I photographed the landscape between 2008 and 2011 and introduced myself to the men I encountered. I'd ask them if I could make a portrait for a possible book, explaining that the long exposure I had to use, between 1 and 6 seconds, meant

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they'd have to stay very still. Many declined, but many said yes, and I was grateful every time they did.

The resulting photographs are about a time and place — 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."

There's no knowing how the future renovation of the Vale area, now in its early planning stages, will affect these assignments. The Vale's seclusion, sadly, has also made it an occasional haven for possible hate crimes against gay men, and parks in general are not the right places for sex--especially when it involves leaving behind the disgusting detritus once targeted by the Litter Mob in Prospect Park's historic woodlands. But these photos bear witness to the poignancy and human dignity of their subjects. I wish them health, safety, and love--elusive prizes on a walk through the Vale.

