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THOMAS ROMA TAKES US INSIDE THE
'VALE OF CASHMERE'

By Cameron James October 26, 2015



Photographer Thomas Roma turns his lens on Prospect Park's picturesque landscapes and also introduces us to an area that has thrived as an underground meeting place for gay and bisexual men in his new book: "In The Vale of Cashmere".

Located at the northeastern end of Brooklyn's Prospect Park, the area known as the Vale of Cashmere, is the focus of Roma's work.

Roma, who is heterosexual, was introduced to secret hangout for gay and bisexual men in 1976 when he gave his close friend, Carl, a ride to Prospect Park.

Consisting of a row of benches facing a sunken moss filled fountain the area has been a prime spot for, Black and Latino, gay and bisexual men to go for camaraderie and occasionally satisfy sexual desires for decades.

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“When people think of cruising the first thing that comes to mind is men looking for sex, but during that time the area primarily served as a meeting place for gay men. At times Carl would make friends there and just have them over for dinner,” he said.

25 years after watching Carl disappear, through the fence into the valley-like area of the park, fate lead Roma to the former oasis of his close friend.

In 2001 during a stroll through Prospect Park, he’d often take while his son attended baseball practice; the photographer stumbled up on area that resembled the meeting place Carl had described.

Roma said that finding the Vale of Cashmere 10 years after Carl’s death and after being inspired by what he saw Roma decided that his next book would commemorate Carl.

“I’ve tried to address personal issues in my life through photography,” he said of the decision to dedicate the book to Carl, who died of AIDS in 1991.

Between 2008 and 2011, the 65 year-old photographer and director of Columbia University’s School of the Arts photography program, photographed the landscape and the men who came to spend time in the Vale Cashmere for his 14th book.

“We all loved him, my wife loved him and my son, Giancarlo, is named after him. This is the fruit of my labor,” Roma continued to say. “People make themselves outsiders most times when they create their own barriers or can’t see the value in someone different from them,” he explained.

On October 29 the Steven Kasher Gallery will host a book release party and opening reception of Roma’s first, exhibition: Thomas Roma: In the Vale of Cashmere, that will run through December 19.

“It’s a beautiful and inspiring part [of Prospect Park] with its own sub-culture. There are people who will say it’s not the nicest part of the park, but I am sharing what I saw from my own perspective,” Roma said.