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These Beautiful Photos Capture
An Unexpected Place Where
Queer Men Connect

By James Michael Nicholas October 29, 2015



For the first time, one photographer and artist is sharing a selection of his photos that document a specific queer experience for many men who have sex with men in New York City.

Thomas Roma is a photographer who used to make a living working on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. In the 1970s, he stumbled across something known as the Vale of Cashmere in Brooklyn's Prospect Park by way of a close friend named Carl. The two eventually became extremely close prior to Carl's death, Roma calling him a mentor and someone that he deeply loved.

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In 2001, Roma again found this place -- and decided to photograph the landscape and the men navigating the Vale.

The Vale functions as a cruising grounds of sorts, but it's much more than that: It's a space where queer men, particularly queer men of color, can meet one another and form a sense of community that they may not be able to do otherwise.

The Huffington Post chatted with Roma this week about *In The Vale Of Cashmere* and his work over the years documenting this queer space.

"I conceived of this as a book right from the beginning -- not just a collection of photographs," Roma told The Huffington Post. "So the book has a lot of landscapes because what struck me right from the beginning is that it made sense with what was going on. It made sense that it was a place for people to come and meet and sit on the bench and talk and leave -- and leave together. People avoid the Vale of Cashmere because they see men either standing or moving and they think it's not for them, but the fact of the matter is this was not some historic act on my part. I was as welcome as



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anyone while I was there."

Roma began photographing the landscape of The Vale and those frequenting it in 2008. He hoped to document a specific, special and important time and place for the men who sought to "fulfill their wish for community and to satisfy sexual desire."

Now, Roma is making these compelling photographs available to the public through a new book titled *In The Vale Of Cashmere*. The photos will also be available in an exhibition opening Oct. 29 in New York City.

"You know, some people have seen the book and they've said things like 'Oh, how did you do it?' or 'How did they let you?' Frankly I find that idea offensive," he said. "No one let me, I let myself. No one was against me -- that's all. All those things are in people's minds. There's prohibition, there's boundaries -- but part of the battle for our same-sex marriage is to make everything "normal." And then the first thing that comes through someone else's mind is the Other? I don't get. Or maybe I'll say it even more honestly that I don't want to get it."

