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Thomas Roma: In the Vale of Cashmere

By William Meyers November 14, 2015



Thomas Roma is to Brooklyn what George Tice is to suburban New Jersey, the indispensable chronicler of the quotidian. He has photographed the borough's backyards and streets, its churches and synagogues, and more recently the Vale of Cashmere, a wooded area in the northeast section of Prospect Park. Homosexual and bisexual black and Hispanic men use the Vale as a meeting ground. Kasher has up over 60 untitled black and white photographs, some of which picture the Vale's groves, but most of which are portraits of the men who frequent them. These are not pictures of the fit bodies and handsome faces photographed by George Platt Lynes in controlled studio situations; they are ordinary looking men in ordinary clothes shot against the somewhat unusual backdrop of a nature preserve.

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The pictures are cooperative efforts, the subjects having agreed to be photographed by Mr. Roma. Although a few of the men are in vaguely suggestive poses, they more commonly just present themselves to the camera, and several look away or have their eyes shut as if they are uncertain of the propriety of being documented. One young man in a Boston Red Sox baseball cap looks at the dog he cradles in his arms. There is just one picture with two men in it and they both look directly at the photographer. Mr. Roma typically worked in even lighting so that none of the texture of the tree trunks or ground cover got lost in shadows; similarly the faces of the men are fully visible and not made overly dramatic.

