



THOMAS ROMA/FROM "COME SUNDAY"

Pictures of Faith

It isn't God but faith that is in the details of Thomas Roma's dramatic, honest photographs of services in black Brooklyn churches in **COME SUNDAY** (Museum of Modern Art/Abrams, \$35). Tapping every shade of gray between starch white and stark black, Mr. Roma's photographs gracefully capture countless details: the shine on an exposed tooth, the precise thickness of a braid, a hand's tight clutch on a Bible. Mr. Roma is particularly skilled at portraying texture, finding and exploiting contrasts among the corduroys, silks, polyesters and wools of Sunday-best suits and dresses. Between walls of plywood paneling and stucco, in pews and in folding chairs, Mr. Roma's subjects chat, crack smiles, doze, read, weep and cheer. But mostly they pray, and in his introductory essay Henry Louis Gates Jr., the chairman of Harvard University's Afro-American studies department, writes that the intensity of their prayers is linked to earthly hardships. "Roma's worshipers are figures of transcendence, paradoxically all-too-rooted in this world by the burdens of unemployment and underemployment, ghetto housing and crime-infested neighborhoods," he writes. Mr. Gates is of course correct. However, "Come Sunday" is not primarily concerned with belief itself; if one sensibility pervades the praying faces of Mr. Roma's subjects, it is absolute trust — perhaps the most dramatic evidence of faith available.

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