

During the late 1970s and early '80s he ran with Garry Winogrand and his pack, building cameras for himself and others. But rather than turning a lens on Manhattan, Roma chose to work closer to home. The portrait of Brooklyn he has built up over the last three decades has many dimensions. He has photographed everything from the borough's criminal courts to its synagogues—found in last year's unheralded masterwork published by powerHouse, *On Three Pillars*—to its public parks and residential streets, and may one day match in its scope what Atget did for Paris.

Like a Japanese artist, Roma saves most of his energy for his books. His latest, *House Calls with William Carlos Williams, MD*, is a

collaboration with writer Robert Coles. Roma's longtime publisher, powerHouse Books, has issued it in a hand-friendly format seldom found in art tomes these days. It pairs writings by Coles and quotes from Williams with Roma's quiet photographs of places around Rutherford and Paterson, N.J., where the American poet-doctor made house calls.

His next literary-photography project will sandwich a poem by Walt Whitman and one by Lawrence Ferlinghetti between 18 portraits of National Guard soldiers and 18 portraits of mechanical horses in front of candy stores. (Roma, whose obsessions can be hard to predict, is currently guided by Hebrew numerology. "The number 18 is their symbol for life," he says. "I want to do 18 books and then stop.")

Until an enterprising dealer snaps him up, he is likely to be more appreciated by his peers than the public. And he sounds ok with that. "How many people would recognize Helen Levitt walking down the street?" he asks. "My work is not about Tom Roma being a great artist. It's a service job I have." □

*Richard B. Woodward's most recent essay on photography appears in Natural Affinities: Georgia O'Keeffe and Ansel Adams, published by Little Brown.*



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