

# MANINTOWN

## THOMAS ROMA: IN THE VALE OF CASHMERE OPENS AT THE STEVEN KASHER GALLERY

---

REDAZIONE MANINTOWN



Opening October 29, Steven Kasher Gallery will present *Thomas Roma: In the Vale of Cashmere*, an exhibition of 75 black and white portraits and landscapes photographed in secluded section of Prospect Park where black gay men cruise for sexual partners. Roma is one of our greatest photographers, and sadly under-known. Roma is a Walt Whitman of our times, a Bard of Brooklyn, a poet-photographer who has been making profound images of the people of his native city since 1969. *In the Vale of Cashmere* is Roma's first major New York exhibition of new photographs since his acclaimed solo exhibition *Come Sunday* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1996.

With *In the Vale of Cashmere*, Roma brings us into a little known Eden, one that has been quietly thriving for decades. Roma's portraits of men set in an uncanny urban wooded landscape carry a history of New York and Brooklyn that predates and parallels the gay rights and civil rights movements. Roma brings us into a secret world, giving us the opportunity to consider the individual with sensitivity and respect while also engaging in a larger discussion of race, gender, sexuality, and class in an increasingly gentrified New York.

*In the Vale of Cashmere* is the latest project in Roma's continuing documentation of local cultures in Brooklyn, including African-American, Latino, Jewish, and Italian communities and institutions. Roma, the founder and director of the photography program at Columbia University, selects every project based on a profound personal connection with his subjects. *In the Vale of Cashmere* was created as a memorial to Carl Spinella, one of Roma's closest friends, who died in Tom's arms of AIDS in 1992. Their bond was so close that Tom often would drive Spinella to the Vale of Cashmere and sometimes pick him up at the drop-off site, an act of faith in a time before cell phones, when who knows what could happen in the woods. It was to these woods that Roma returned alone. In 2008, after years of wandering the Vale camera-less, Roma decided to bring his camera to the Vale. Over the course of two years of weekly visits, he approached the men there, introducing himself and explaining why he was taking pictures. Nine out of ten times Roma's request to make a portrait was declined; it was from that tenth ask that these pictures come. The subject is particularly timely, as *The New York Times* has recently reported the Prospect Park Alliance has plans to renovate the Vale so that it will no longer be a location for cruising activity.