

# vantage



## The Best Six Photography Books Of 2015

A Lebanese journalist's archive, prisons worldwide, gay cruising, child labor in DRC, an inside view of Chinese celebrity, and a newspaper about a newspaper.

It's been another year for photobooks. Some got made. Others have to wait. Mmm, smell that ink. What's the paper? Was it printed in China? The rollicking debates are endless. Blink at that flipping book and you'll miss a flipping page. **How to keep up?**

*Photoeye*, *Slate* and *Time* have done lists. Others have too. Lists in their dozens! Olia at *Phot(o)lia* is keeping a **list of the photobook lists!** The voluminous "Best Photobooks Of" lists are as Christmassy as eggnog. They're the gift that won't stop. They're rammed down social media channels to you, by virtue of their titles that include a numeric and the words "Best" and "Of."

The year-end "Best Photobooks Of" lists-frenzy sometimes cut through the fog and instruct us on what's attention-worthy. At other times they add more fog. I'm perplexed by how exactly the photo-world goes about constructing its holiday exhortations. So much so that **Joachim Schmid's polite takedown of the Photobook-Industrial-Complex** is just the best thing. (*Actually, you should just click on over to Fotokritik, read Schmid's piece in full and abandon my here listicle all together.*)

For those of you still reading, a quick note about the title of this post: **Of course these aren't the best six photobooks of 2015. Duh.** And, of course, I used that headline to grab eyeballs and clicks. Please rewrite, in your head, the title and subhead to:

## **Six Books Pete Picked Up This Year and Liked**

How four books mailed to the author and two other books he bought in crowdfunding campaigns made the grade

Honesty pays. So they say. Or in this case, sending me a press copy of your photobook pays. No, no, let's dismiss that myth right now. I am not bought. Sure, I see a photobook if it lands in my mail box, and I might not have otherwise have known it existed. But, I get sent a fair number of books and the ones I don't like, I don't mention. The ones I do, I yell about a lot.



### **'In The Vale of Cashmere' by Thomas Roma**

***Disclosure: I learned about the book via an email press release. Powerhouse's PR person sent me the book after I made a request for a press copy.***

**Thomas Roma's** portraits of gay African American and Caribbean men in a small pocket of Brooklyn's Prospect Park are thrilling. How the hell did Roma get so close and so intimate? The simple answer is that he photographed over years, but the truer answer is that there must be something in the rapport he and his subjects built. 9 out of every ten requests he made to photograph were declined, but the book has hundreds of portraits. That's a commitment of hours.

From within the midst of a hushed and furtive social milieu these men — these cruisers — stand in confidence and with knowing gazes. Roma wasn't considered a snoop, or rejected. Conversation and respect underpin this work and allowed Roma — an outsider — to capture the individuals of this community.



***In The Vale of Cashmere*** does what all good photobooks should do; it reveals a subject and then wraps around it a full and rounded narrative. Through its comprehensive and careful description, the book becomes the authoritative portrait of a previously invisible population.

Read Vantage's full book review: ***Loving Portraits Of Gay Black Men Cruising In Prospect Park***

Roma's collaborative portraits retain a mystery and they are a tribute to a subculture that exists on the edge, proudly.