

feature shoot

PHOTOGRAPHER UNCOVERS A HOTSPOT FOR GAY CRUISING IN BROOKLYN'S PROSPECT PARK



by Efrem Zelony-Mindell

The Vale of Cashmere, in Brooklyn's Prospect Park, is a well-kept secret to many. Thomas Roma, a Brooklynite and New Yorker, was introduced to the Vale by chance. A close friend frequented the park, asking Roma – one summer day – for a ride there. The Vale is synonymous to those who know it, as a location where countless men are able to feed desire, gender, identity, race and community with other men. This is where Roma has constructed his new body of work for Steven Kasher Gallery. A body of work aptly named, *In the Vale of Cashmere*.

Sometimes it's not so surprising how a place, in nature, can become innately human. A photograph can characterize. It often takes an image-maker to add light, and the subtle magic of intimacy for a connective relationship. Thomas Roma conjugates the subjects of his show *In the Vale of Cashmere*. "There always needs to be the potential for failure, right at the surface," he shares with me. A park goer doesn't merely shift through the trees – nor does a photographer. Roma feels his

way in the brush and with the men hidden in the Vale. Men who more often than not, declined being photographed by him.

There is an interchange of fellowship kindled by the ability of the landscape. Roma's photos are a quagmire of these affections. *In the Vale of Cashmere* is a dedication to Carl Spinella, the friend he dropped at the park that summer day. This friend and memory never left Roma, nor did the park. "I'm interested in changing. Change as much as possible and accepting the realities of change up 'til death. Death is a waste of time." Through Roma's images viewers are able to get a sense of motion and patience. Men waiting and wanting, for desire or disappointment, levels of uncertainty and scrutiny. The photos converse as a group. Uplifted roots, shapeless and almost human, confuse. A man waits off to the edge of a trail, a portrait; some men make eye contact, others don't.

Prospect Park Alliance has announced that the park is due for an overhaul, with much focus on the Vale of Cashmere. The Vale is a place of changing and staying, and the assumed stigmas of sex are only a piece of the place. Intimacy is about becoming new, a chance meeting. The depth of its description is something hard to put your finger on, but you don't have to. The answers are in the photographs. "I want to be surprised just like everyone else," Roma chuckles, "Real art making is dealing with something elusive."

Thomas Roma's *In the Vale of Cashmere* is on view at Steven Kasher Gallery in New York through December 19th, 2015. The book can be purchased [here](#).

