

**"Intimate City: The
Photographs of Thomas Roma"**
International Center of Photography,
through Sun 29 (see Photography).

Thomas Roma's show of candid yet lyrical views of New York City and its inhabitants deserves the word *intimate* in its title; there is indeed an intimacy in the connection the photographer makes with his subjects, as well as in the scenes themselves. Whether Roma turns his attention to empty backyards or group portraits, the feeling is always the same: a real sense of the connectedness-in-detachment that is part of coping with this city.

In one image we see a couple of kids, probably brother and sister, using the subway like a mobile living room as they

tuck into a lunch of fried chicken; a puppy sits in the seat between them. A chrome subway pole slices through our view, as if to afford them more privacy. Another shot on the subway focuses on a pair of scantily clad African-American women and a bearded Hasid. Although each person seems perfectly self-absorbed, there's a similarity in their postures: One lady has her hand to her head, the other has her hand to her chin; the Hasid has his finger to his lips as he reads. Roma seems to suggest that people may be united after all by the simplest of things, like the flutter of a hand.

Roma traversed various ethnic and neighborhood boundaries to get these pictures—girls lounging, Lolita-like, by a public pool in Sunset Park; a bunch of kids on the sunlit steps of the B train's Bay 50th Street station—yet we never feel he's unwelcome. Only in a couple of the emotional images of healings in a Baptist church are we reminded (when someone looks at or away from the camera) that these scenes might be a little too private for some. Still, Roma usually finds a way for us to see ourselves—and something poetic—in the daily life of New York City.—Sarah Schmerler



Thomas Roma, from "Higher Ground," 1995.