

# Elegance in the Ordinary

And other shows worth seeing in New York

By **WILLIAM MEYERS**

**Pictures for Books:**  
Photographs by  
Thomas Roma ▶  
**Wallach Art Gallery**  
Schermerhorn Hall,  
Columbia University  
Through March 27

Thomas Roma doesn't do easy: He's a major talent who has devoted his career to what others would consider negligible subject matter—nondescript sections of his native Brooklyn that evidence the decades of the borough's decline. It is his remarkable achievement to have produced works that are attractive, even elegant, from such unlikely material. Since 1980 he has published 11 books; the current exhibition comprises almost 100 black-and-white pictures from four of them.

The streetscapes from "Found in Brooklyn" have lots of cyclone fences, houses with aluminum or asphalt siding, and gardens filled with gasping flowers, scraggly vines and undistinguished concrete statues. Mr. Roma's sophisticated eye does not so much make order out of this mix of stuff as find a point from which the extent of the jumble can be properly ascertained. The textures of worn building materials are treated with enormous respect. The black parishioners in "Come Sunday" are mostly shot straight on; their religious fervor is presented as a simple



fact, as when a woman in a white robe is shown singing into a microphone with her eyes shut, a glisten of tears running down her face. The pictures of the unprepossessing synagogues in "On Three Pillars" are not about architecture, but rather the quotidian aspect the pursuit of holiness assumes on Brooklyn's streets. Mr. Roma teaches at Columbia; his pictures are lessons in the possibilities of photography.

**Massimo Vitali:**  
**Landscape With Figures 2**  
**Bonni Benubi Gallery**  
41 E. 57th St., 13th floor  
Through March 6

These sun-bleached photographs by Massimo Vitali provide a quick respite from a severe New York winter. The six images were taken at holiday sites in Sicily and Turkey, and

are presented as 72-inch-by-86-inch chromogenic prints. One is a diptych, and so twice that width. The technique that unifies these large pictures, and all Vitali work from recent years, is that they are overexposed; keeping the camera's lens open longer than required leeches color from them. The effect is similar to what you see just after coming from a darkened interior onto a brilliantly lit beach.

The bathers in "Scala del Turchi Island, Sicily (2009)" stand on a spit of the white rock that projects into the pale blue-green Mediterranean. Mr. Vitali uses an 8-by-10-inch view camera whose negative records each of the bathers in significant detail. There is something languid in their postures; they are lotus-eaters fading in the intense light. "Ephesus, Turkey (2008)" shows a gaggle of pic-