

The Museum of Modern Art

For immediate release
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COME SUNDAY: PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS ROMA
April 4 - June 18, 1996

The first exhibition of a new series of photographs by Thomas Roma (b. 1950) opens at The Museum of Modern Art on April 4, 1996. **COME SUNDAY: PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS ROMA** features approximately eighty black-and-white photographs made between 1991 and 1994. The exhibition is drawn from a larger body of photographs made during more than 150 services in fifty-two African-American Christian churches in Brooklyn, which were inspired by Roma's desire "to make religious pictures for modern times." Organized by John Szarkowski, Director Emeritus, Department of Photography, **COME SUNDAY** is on view through June 18, 1996.

In January 1990, Roma began photographing houses of worship in his native Brooklyn, a borough once called the "City of Churches." One day in 1991, encountering the pastor of an African-American congregation, the photographer explained his project, which he planned to call "God's Work." The pastor responded that "God's work is not the building itself but what goes on inside" and invited Roma to return the following Sunday to photograph the service itself. The invitation transformed Roma's work, as he soon found many other pastors and congregations who shared his view of the project as a spiritual mission.

"Religion is not a common theme in contemporary art," states Peter Galassi, Chief Curator, Department of Photography. "Roma's photographs, remarkable for their skill, are still more extraordinary for the unapologetic candor with which they embrace spiritual passion."

The exhibition is accompanied by a publication whose eighty-seven tritone plates faithfully reproduce Roma's delicate, richly descriptive prints. In an introductory essay, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., writes, "If it is true that God is in the details, then Roma has shown us God's many guises." The essay concludes, "Gesture and movement, faith and belief, silence and dance, rapture and ecstasy, commitment and hope, the sublime immersion in the vale of tears -- all the signal elements of the black dance of religion Thomas Roma has captured in these works of art that are as timeless as is the passion of spritual transcendence itself. Roma's is a triumph of metaphysical empathy, frozen dynamically in black-and-white."

Published by the Museum of Modern Art, the clothbound edition of *Come Sunday: Photographs by Thomas Roma* is distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams. Both the clothbound (\$35.00) and paperback (\$22.50) editions are available at the MoMA Book Store. The publication is made possible by a generous grant from CameraWorks, Inc.

For more than two decades Thomas Roma has made most of his photographs in Brooklyn, where he has always lived. An exception is a series of photographs made in Roma's ancestral Sicily, which were exhibited at the Museum in NEW PHOTOGRAPHY 3 (1987). Roma received Guggenheim Foundation Fellowships in 1982 and 1991. He currently teaches at The School of Visual Arts, New York, and The Cooper Union, New York. In the fall he will become Professor of Art at Columbia University.

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