



GALLERY
ARTHUR TRESS

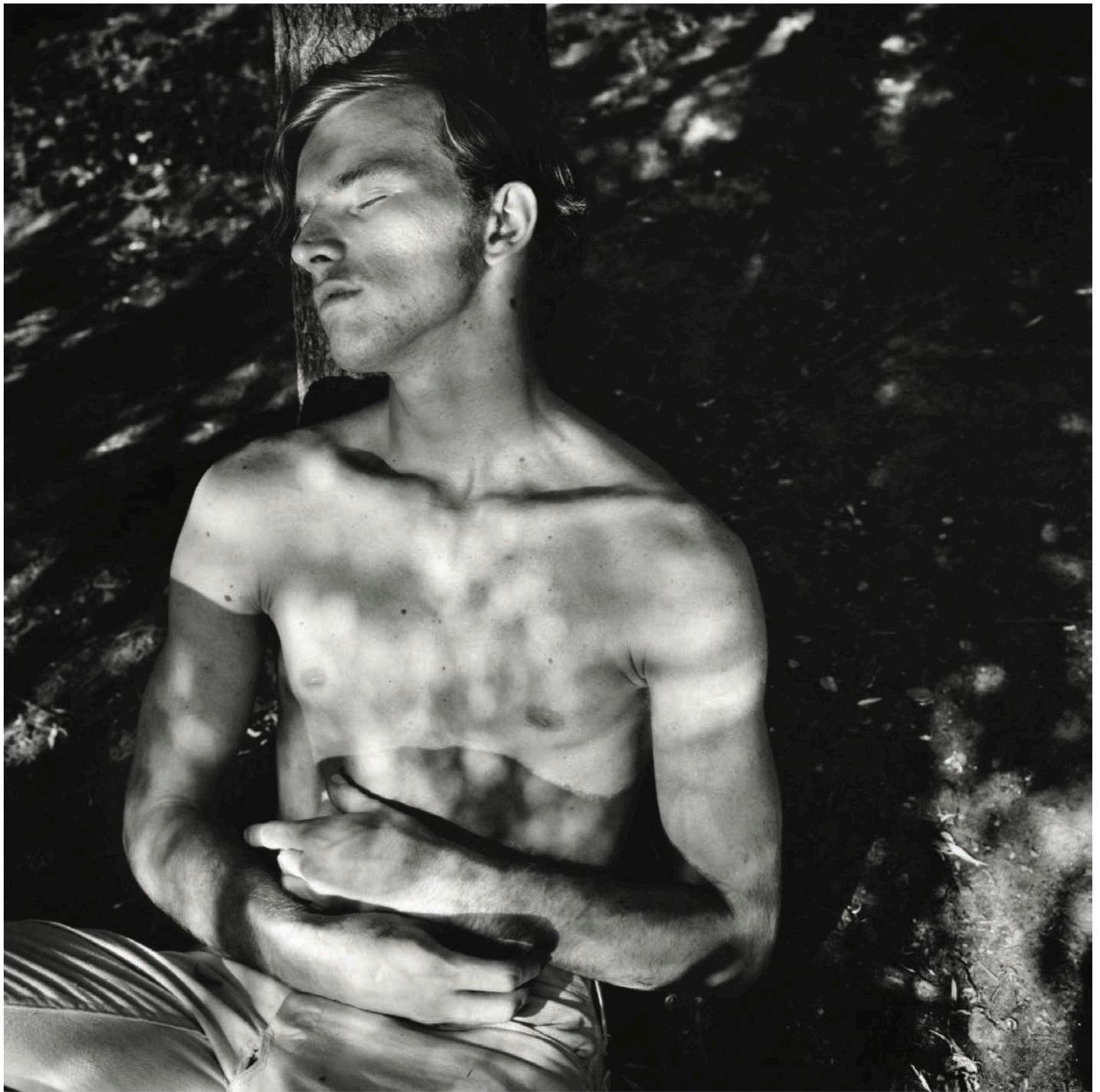
by JOSH LUSTIG

In 1857, when the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted set about designing The Ramble, an area of about 38 acres in New York's Central Park, he wanted to create a space with "a degree of obscurity not absolutely impenetrable, but sufficient to affect the imagination with a sense of mystery".

More than 100 years later, in 1969, the photographer Arthur Tress documented these overgrown, intertwining trails and paths, which would disappear and reappear, leading to new paths, clumps of bushes, rocky outcrops, caves

and bridges. A designed wildness that Tress describes to me as "a kind of Borges dreamlike labyrinth", that by the late 1960s had become synonymous with gay cruising. It was a place of both freedom and fear, where gay men were exposed to the threat of beatings or arrest, yet simultaneously, as Tress describes, "an open area of 'owned' gay community space, a zone where their true gay selves could be more freely expressed".

Published as a book last year by Stanley/Barker and now longlisted for the prestigious



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Kraszna-Krausz book award, the photographs remained largely unseen for decades. “When I first took them back in 1969,” Tress says, “they could not be easily published because of their controversial nature, and they sort of became melded into other work of mine from that time.”

A mix of reportage and staged portraiture, the photographs in *The Ramble, NYC 1969* carry with them this tension between liberation and paranoia. Many of the snatched, surreptitiously taken photographs show men in a state of wide-eyed apprehension, whereas the staged portraits,

such as the two seen here, feel fantastical and otherworldly, like a scene from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Throughout the 1960s, Tress worked as a self-described “ethnographic photographer”, photographing the Maya, Dogon, Sámi and Toda people. By bringing his camera with him on his walks through The Ramble, Tress wanted to see if he could “search out similar patterns of social communication amongst my own particular gay tribe. The Ramble became a sort of laboratory of my own insights into

that complicated body language of desire and rejection I also intimately spoke.”

The year 1969 was pivotal for LGBTQ+ rights. Just months after these photographs were made, the Stonewall riots broke out, and a year later the first Gay Pride march took place. Tress’s photographs are an essential piece of queer history, showing a part of the community on the cusp of seismic change. **FTI**

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“*The Ramble, NYC 1969*” is published by Stanley/Barker; stanleybarker.co.uk