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Exhibit | Meryl Meisler

By Miss Rosen

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Picture it: Massapequa, 1973. In a little Jewish and Italian enclave just outside of New York City, glamour and glitz was flourishing, nourishing itself, eagerly yearning for its close-up, in full hair and makeup. Homes were styled to the nines, as outlandish décor provided the perfect backdrop for a cast of characters delightfully parading about. A young Meryl Meisler was there, camera in hand, to document the lives of her friends, family, and neighbors.

What inspired you to begin photography in 1973?

Meryl Meisler: Photography was an integral part of my upbringing; my dad Jack documented important family and life occasions. My parents gave me Adventurer 620 box camera at age seven and then as a teen I used an Instamatic. I accepted a scholarship to the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and thought I might as well take a photography class and learn how to use a “real camera.” I bought a Pentax SRT101 35mm, read the directions on the plane to Wisconsin, and immediately jammed the camera. Professor Cavalliere Ketchum helped un-jam it first day of class. I was 22 years old. I still jam up equipment when I get new ones. I’ve been hooked on photography ever since; something I do for the joy of doing.

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I love that this show focuses on 1970s suburban New York life, as that was such a classic scene. That is a photographer's dream. Everyone seems so wildly campy and glamorous. What did you find most compelling about your environment, and what were you seeking to capture in the photographs?

The first photo exhibit I saw was Diane Arbus at MoMa 1972, and I was moved. In Photo 101, Cavalliere showed Henri Lartigue's zany family photos in their period attire. Arbus' interiors and Lartigue's playfulness were the inspiration to photograph myself, family, friends and neighbors- people I knew, laughed and cried with my whole life. I photographed from gut instinct and sought to capture the playfulness and humor of where I came from and the people important in my life. I wanted to capture the comedic chutzpah and warmth of my parents' "Mystery Club"—a group of eleven couples who would take turns planning "mystery" outings. Cavalliere was shocked by the interiors, said he'd never seen anything like them. To me, they were very normal; this was where I came from.

As a brilliant counterpoint to suburban life, you've selected photos taken in New York City nightclubs during the era. What was it like moving back and forth between these two worlds as a photographer?

I moved back and forth between the worlds of the suburbs and my new life and nightlife in NYC, seamlessly. One did not negate the other. It was natural to take my best friend, my camera, everywhere I went. The idea to exhibit my suburban and NYC life side by side was inspired by my first book *A Tale of Two Cities: Disco Era Bushwick* (Bizarre Publishing, 2014), which juxtaposed my Disco photos with the Bushwick I encountered as a New York City public school art teacher in the 1980s. Many people commented or questioned how I found humanity, humor and beauty in a neighbor that was so distressed. Bizarre Publishing invited me to propose a second book. I decided to do the prequel. *Purgatory & Paradise SASSY '70s & The City* literally shows where I was coming from. I came to realize my photography is memoir.