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Meryl Meisler: Suburban Shutterbug

By Greg Garry

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Massapequa, Long Island is your typical suburban hamlet, just 30 minutes or so from midtown Manhattan. The burg is nicknamed Matzoh-Pizza due to its large population of Jewish and Italian families who fled the mean streets of Brooklyn for the peace and space the bucolic village offered. For such a small town on the south shore of Lawng Eyeland, quite a few boldface names have emerged from there. Jerry Seinfeld and the Baldwin brothers, as

well as '80s rockers Brian Setzer of the Stray Cats and Twisted Sister's Dee Snider are all locally grown. Most interestingly, trans pioneers Christine Jorgensen and Warhol superstar Candy Darling are both native Massapequans. You can add to that list of local heroes photographer Meryl Meisler, who currently has a show at Steven Kasher gallery in New York.

Meisler's photos are a joyous window into several 1970s New York demi-mondes; family dinners, wild Bar Mitzvah dancing, the local beauty salon, the exciting disco scene and nearly naked boys of Fire Island. "The City I moved to in 1975 was magnificently diverse; ethnically, racially, economically and sexually" she recalls. "My gayness is part of my identity and naturally influences my work." Meisler crossed paths with Jorgensen at Mardi Gras in 1977; "I let her know we were both Massapequa girls," she adds. Meisler

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was also a pioneer, teaching and photographing in Bushwick, Brooklyn in 1981, eons before it became the pricy hipster mecca it is today, documented in her book *Disco Era Bushwick*.

Meisler's strong point of view and affinity for the underdog bring to mind Diane Arbus, one of her personal heroines. "The first time I went to a photography exhibit was the 1972 Diane Arbus retrospective at MoMA," Meryl says. "I was struck, deeply moved." The influence is there, but Meryl adds a bit more heart, humanity and a hell of a lot of fun. Not bad for a nice Jewish girl from Matzoh-Pizza.

Meryl Meisler, on view through April 9 at the Steven Kasher Gallery, 515 West 26th Street, New York, NY