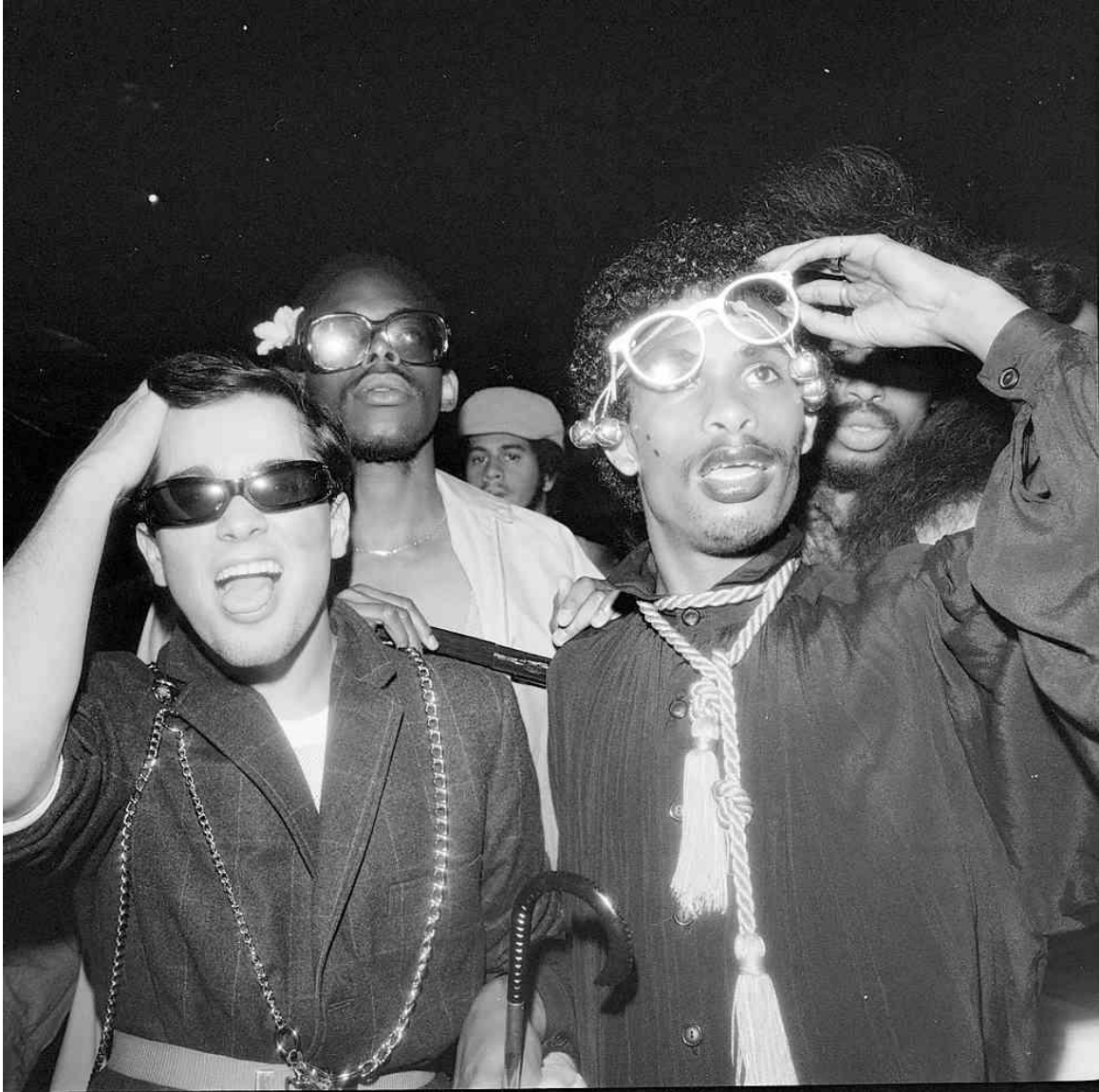


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INTO THE DARK ROOM WITH-MERYL MEISLER

By Itchysilk in Photography, May 11, 2018



In a slightly different IntoTheDarkroom, our first-time writer Dallas talks from a personal perspective about the Brooklyn based photographer Meryl Meisler. Dallas in part looks at her book *A Tale of Two Cities: Disco Era Bushwick* (2014) a collection of images circa 1970's where Meryl Meisler makes 'normality' stunning.

Here Dallas talks with affection about the impact Meryl Meisler has had on her work but more significantly her life and that is probably what it is all about. The intrinsic power of art to effect and affect others-stay #itchysilk.

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I take my best friend (who's visiting from London) to Bizarre—a bar in Brooklyn that holds everything from rap shows to drag shows, with a disco ball hanging from the ceiling that reflects in the glasses of absinthe they serve.

Since my friend is a drag scholar who's currently writing about disco, I knew this was a must. I ask the bartender for a copy of Meryl Meisler's *A Tale of Two Cities : Disco Era Bushwick* to show my friend. In true artsy-bar fashion, Bizarre also owns a publishing company which allows it to also sell Meryl Miesler's book. It's been nearly five years since this book's release and over 35 years since these photos were taken. Despite the years, they're relevant as ever.

Many of us have seen Meryl's photos on the internet or in print, featured in places like *Vice*. It's also true that many New Yorkers have seen Meryl herself. In fact, if you're interested in art and you live in NYC and haven't seen Meryl, then I don't know what you're doing. You also may be noticing that I'm referring to her as "Meryl" in this article and not by her last name, "Meisler," which is typical in journalism. That's because Meryl makes it possible to know her—really know her. Although her work has blown up in recent years, she's no stranger to counterculture and she hasn't left the people. She attends everything from openings at DIY galleries in Bushwick, to huge launches in Chelsea. She learns the names of those around her, whether they're "important" or not. When you tell her that her work moves you, she goes out of her way to write you an email. She asks questions. Most importantly, she uses this rare quality of truly caring to look at everyone as someone who should be photographed, and that's what makes her photography beautiful.

When Meryl was young she picked up a camera and just captured the color around her, even if it was just her parents reading the newspaper in bed in their wallpaper-lined master bedroom. During the nightlife scene at Studio 54, she photographed glittery drag queens, go-go dancers, models and celebrities as a spectator. She sat, studied and appreciated the moment and the beauty of dressed up, dancing and promiscuous people through the lense.

In the 80s, when she became a teacher in Bushwick, Brooklyn she also recognized it as something that deserved to be photographed. People jumping across puddles on a snowy street, staring into a beauty salon and play-wrestling on an old refrigerator box were just as iconic as those who danced the night away in artistic-Manhattan fashion. The truth is, Meryl herself didn't do anything out of the ordinary, other than take note of those around her which is an act that's revolutionary in its own right. She is proof that life is art and what stands the test of time isn't who's famous or important in that moment, but what makes us human.

Years later, her photos have become bigger than her or anything anyone could have anticipated. In fact, whenever I see her, I tell Meryl her work has grown into one of the most important retrospectives of our time. Her photos of different worlds from the 70s and 80s, printed side by side, mirror the hipster scenes taking over places like Bushwick today. With gentrification we can reflect on the scenes in big cities and understand how they exist within a parallel universe despite their similarities.

The last time I saw Meryl I told her I began doing what she did back then—just documenting the world around me. Taking it all in, instead of feeling like I had to be the main person on a "who's who" list or reviewed writer today. While I travel I photograph houses, scenes, sometimes people. I take notes. I try to really feel what's happening. After all, everytime I open my copy of *Disco Era Bushwick* I find something new. Just today I opened my copy to reflect on her work for this article to find a note she took the time to write to me:

"For Dallas, With lots of love and admiration. Keep doing whatever it is that draws you in. XoXo" Meryl"