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On Bushwick Nostalgia: Meryl Meisler's "Bushwick Chronicle" at Stout Projects

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October 10, 2016



In "Bushwick Chronicle" art critic James Panero describes the after affects of his first ever visit to Bushwick:

"...the need to see it all, to see the art, to meet the artists, to seek out the galleries...and not to blink."

During tours for Bushwick Open Studios I stopped in for Meryl Meisler's exhibit "Bushwick Chronicle" up at Stout Projects, 55 Meadow Street, through October 30th.

## BUSHWICK CHRONICLE

I never thought I would be in Bushwick. But there I was, a Manhattan-based art critic, a Manhattan-based person, standing on the corner of Wyckoff Avenue and Suydam Street on a warm spring evening in 2009. The curator Jason Andrew (how many times have I now written these words?) had emailed me the day before about “a big broadcasting event out here at my place tomorrow night” with performances amplified onto the sidewalk. I knew Jason a bit from a Chelsea gallery, his day job when he was not planning art events out of his Bushwick living room. His lineup that night: “Bob Holman, poet; Ara Fitzgerald, choreographer / performance artist; Julia K. Gleich, choreographer; Sean Hagerty, musician; Andrew Hurst, performance artist / musician; Andrew Nemr, tap dancer; Morgan Price, musician; and David Powers (D.O.V), rapper / poet.” I hadn’t heard of any of them, which should tell you a ;pt. Then my wife, Dara, a poet who admires Holman, suggested we go for it. “What’s the best way to get there from Union Square,” I wrote back to Jason.

That evening really did a number on me. I went on to write some 30,000 words on the neighborhood. But more than that I came to feel the need to see it all, to see the art, to meet the artists, to seek out all the galleries tucked into apartments and storefronts, and not to blink. With the birth of our daughter around that time, I was getting ready to settle into family life in my native Upper West Side. Then Bushwick happened to me. So I found myself carrying her up flights of stairs for a studio visit in 17-17 Troutman and changing her diaper in the back room of English Kills. One day she will thank me for this.

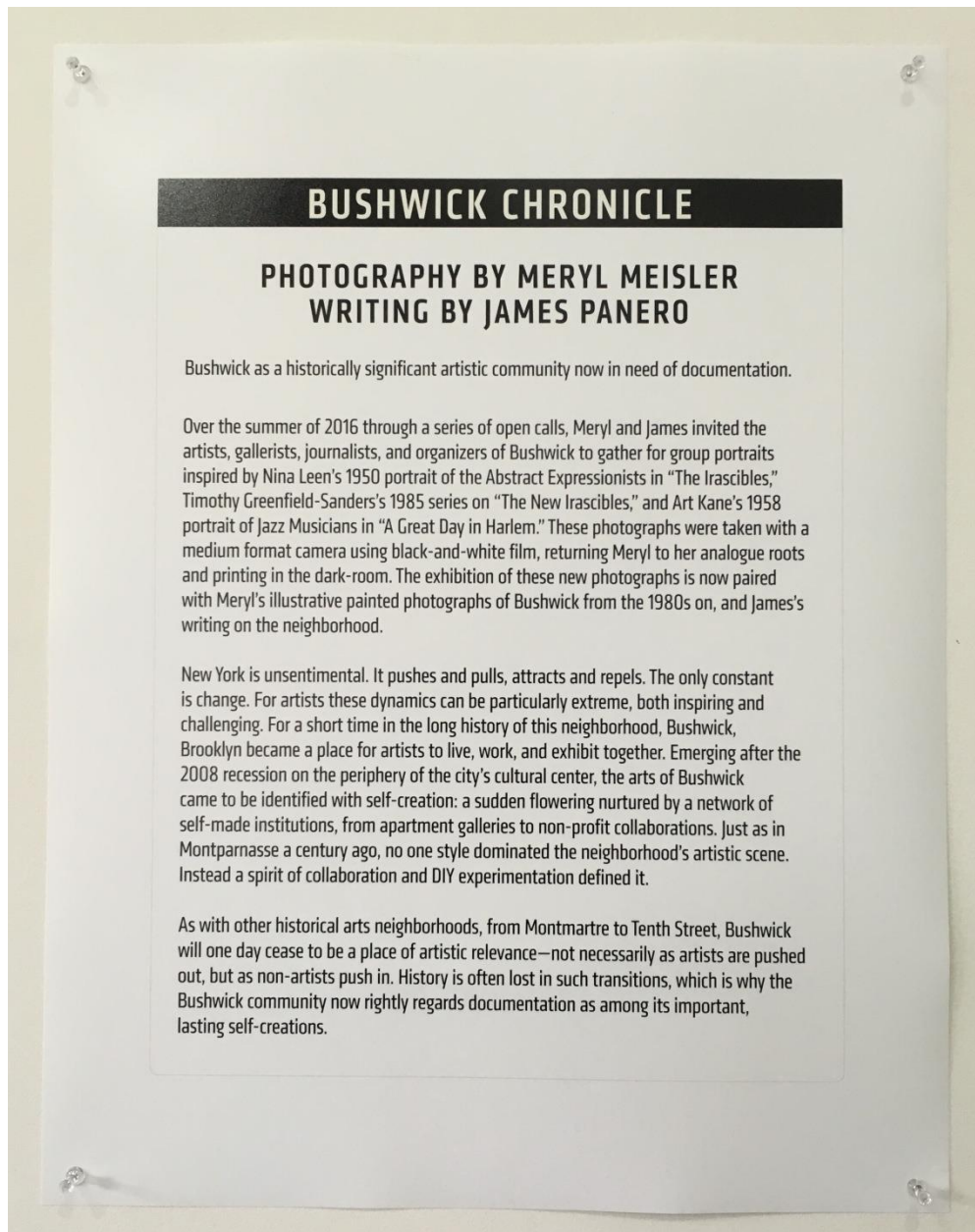
What did it for me was not so much any particular Bushwick style. It was the substance of the neighborhood I saw and the artists who made it. Coming off the Chelsea art scene, off the 2008 hangover of celebrity status and auction returns that seemed to be all there was to art, Bushwick offered something radically different. Part of it was a return to “art for art’s sake.” There was very little money to be made by the artists out here. Nevertheless they filled the neighborhood with their creative energies. There was also the acceptance of experimentation and failure, of imperfection, of working small. And there was the sense that creativity can be radiant, that it can be shared. This was the spirit I saw in apartment galleries like Centotto, through the volunteerism of Arts in Bushwick, in the den mothering of Deborah Brown, and right there on the street for those 2009 performances broadcast from Norte Maar: Nemr’s tap shoes, Hurst’s harmonica, Hagerty’s violin.

“Bushwick Chronicle” is an exhibition dedicated to remembering these moments and to say they were important. They made their own art history. I am grateful for the many artists, writers, gallerists, and organizers who came out for our photographic open calls over the summer of 2016, and to Robin Stout and Paul Behnke for giving them a home at this gallery. And we are all thankful to Meryl Meisler for giving vision to Bushwick by continuing a photographic project she began as a school teacher here in 1981—for reminding us of the long history of this neighborhood and the power of remembering.

—James Panero, October 2016

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Above, Panero writes on his experience of first coming to the neighborhood in 2009, and falling for it. Same thing happened to me that year after visiting apartment studios during the Summertime BOS. We all seem to have this hazy memory of a first-time journey on the L train from Union Square, coming up from the underground into industrial landscapes unknown. Now famous and well-known, I think some of us are holding onto this place by a thread before it becomes too cool for us. I certainly feel like it will soon move on without me and I only just moved here in 2013. Panero addresses Meryl's documentation of the "long history of the neighborhood" and "the power of remembering," reminding me of my own avid nostalgia for every place in New York I've come to feel close to over the past ten years – especially the one and only Bushwick.



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These pictures look like they were taken decades ago, but it was only this past Summer. I'm not sure what time or dimension I'm in when I look at them, it's like waking up from a nap. They say not to hold onto the past, but I think with Panero's text and Meryl's photos it's fitting to be nostalgic, even of the present and future.

