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## THE PHOTOGRAPHERS WHO CAPTURED THE FLASHY, FEVERISH NIGHTS OF DISCO

By Rachel Lebowitz, March 15, 2018



When Studio 54 opened in Manhattan in 1977, disco was in its heyday, having emerged at the beginning of the decade in New York City's gay and black clubs, and permeated the mainstream with movies like *Saturday Night Fever*. The music style and accompanying club scene embraced participants of diverse racial backgrounds, ages, sexual orientations, and gender identities. It was the product of a unique moment in time: Minorities such as women, African-Americans, and a post-Stonewall, pre-AIDS LGBT community were empowered in unprecedented ways; meanwhile, New York was plagued by economic decline and high crime rates. Against this background, disco arose as both a site of celebration and a form of

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escapism. From the sheened-up, rollicking clubs of Manhattan to the more down-to-earth roller discos of Brooklyn and beyond, the following six photographers captured disco's inclusivity, unfettered joy, and wild bacchanalia.

Meryl Meisler

Once a student of Lisette Model, New York-born Meryl Meisler snapped photos on the streets of then-seedy Bushwick in the early 1980s. At the time, she was an art teacher at a public school in the Brooklyn neighborhood. After she retired from her three-decade-long teaching career in 2010, she unearthed a more glamorous past series of work: images of famed Manhattan disco clubs like Studio 54 and Paradise Garage, which she'd shot with her medium-format camera in the late '70s before becoming a teacher. In these photos, singer and model Grace Jones strikes a regal pose; scantily clad men partake in a Star Wars Party on Fire Island; and The Village People exit a club in iconic leather and feathered garb. The photos capture exuberant, sexually fueled reveling and were first shown in Meisler's book *A Tale of Two Cities: Disco Era Bushwick* (2014), where they are thoughtfully juxtaposed one-to-one with the gritty Bushwick scenes.