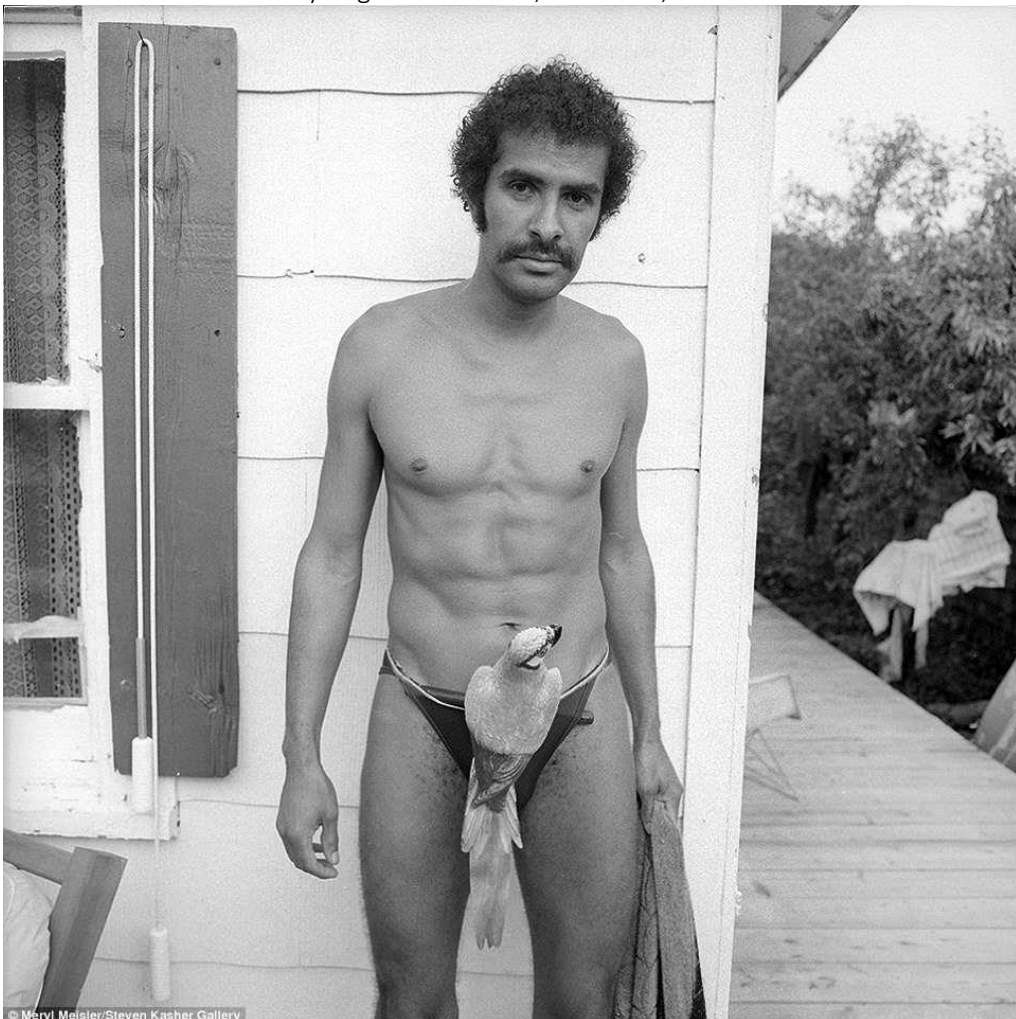


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Daily Mail.com

THE EAST COAST'S 'REALLY WILD' PARTY MECCA: FESTIVITIES FROM FIRE ISLAND'S 'VIBRANT, THRIVING, THRILLING CLUB AND LGBTQ SCENE' DURING THE LATE 1970S REVEALED IN CANDID PHOTOS

By Regina F. Graham, March 29, 2018



© Meryl Meisler/Steven Kasher Gallery

Everyone raves about Studio 54 being the epitome of debauchery and decadence, but few realize that the eccentric festivities of the 1970s spilled way out of Manhattan and onto Fire Island and the Hamptons, which played host to some of the wildest parties of the area and the age.

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Acclaimed photographer Meryl Meisler captured some of the rowdiest house parties in those locations where attendees wore little to no clothing along with similar images taken at the public beaches during the summers of 1977 and 1978.

'The parties were really wild, they were definitely very fun summers to be apart of,' Meisler told DailyMail.com of the numerous black and white images she captured during the time period.

'The club scene was very vibrant. The LGBTQ scene was thriving and thrilling. It's still a haven.

'Disco was in full swing and it was a blast. I would come out every weekend during those summers and would bring my camera. And I'm glad I took my camera, I have this record that you can't replicate.

'It was a time in New York history and the world where it was post-Stonewall, Women's Liberation, music changed, pre-AIDS/HIV - it was a time of innocence and I was part of it.'

Of her wide-ranging photo collection, Meisler, who is a New York native, explained the people in the captivating images were of all ages and were very friendly and open to allowing her to photograph them whether they were partying at one of the beaches.

The 66-year-old artist said: 'They were happy to be photographed. You know, life is a beach for them and it's very pleasant. Fire Island is an oasis and it's a Long Island treasure that's very fragile and very small.'

She added that The Ice Palace was a popular club where a ton of LGBTQ people partied, including herself. The festive establishment has been hosting the Miss Fire Island contest since 1966 where men dress in drag costume to compete for the title during Labor Day weekend.

'The Ice Palace still plays disco and there are still wonderful things happening in Fire Island all the time,' Meisler added.

Of the dozens of people she photographed during those summers, there are a few who stood out to her, including a man who would wear a 'costume every day.'

'He was one of our neighbors in Cherry Grove from South America, I believe,' she described of the man who she couldn't recall his name.

'He didn't just wear his bathing suit, but he would wear a costume everyday. One image shows him in a speedo with a fake parrot attached to his crotch and that was just one of the many creative costumes he would wear.'

Another one of her favorite memories was attending a Star Wars themed house party in Fire Island Pines that she described as being 'quite wild since the movie had just come out around then.'

'That was probably one of the wildest parties I have ever gone to. You were just very free to do anything and people had no rules,' Meisler stated.

Spending every day enjoying the beach for two summers in a row came to an end for Meisler who became an art teacher by 1979.

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She taught in New York City public schools for roughly 31 years, but still documented her surroundings around the city, more specifically the Lower East Side neighborhood.

'I've come to realize 40 years later after taking these images that photography is a sense of a memoir. And I'm just going back and editing it and releasing the images,' she added.

'I also am realizing in retrospect I photographed things that are upbeat and uplifting and things that made me smile.'

Her impeccable collection of photographs showcasing the area in the 1970s and 1980s is set to go on display in May at the Storefront Project located at 70 Orchard Street in New York City.

She is also the author of two books, *A Tale of Two Cities: Disco Era Bushwick and Purgatory & Paradise: Sassy 70s Suburbia & the City*, which include photos from Fire Island, Studio 54 and the Lower East Side.

Of everything, Fire Island is one of the top places Meisler still enjoys visiting during the summer.

'Every year it's a tradition that I go out with my friend Judi to Cherry Grove on Fire Island,' Meisler shared.

'It's a magical place and will always continue to be. People were there in the 70s to have a good time and that still exists.'