

STEVEN
KASHER
GALLERY

BEDFORD + BOWERY

MERYL MEISLER'S NEW EXHIBITION CAPTURES THE DIVERSITY OF
THE LES IN THE '70s, '80s

By Libby Torres, April 20, 2018



Meryl Meisler, the New York-based photographer known for her images of the city in the '70s and '80s, will show previously unseen photos of the Lower East Side during those years in an upcoming exhibition. Opening May 3 at The

STEVEN
KASHER
GALLERY

Storefront Project, “LES YES!” focuses on the rich cultural history of the neighborhood and takes an unflinching look at the daily lives of the working-class people and immigrants who lived there.

Born in the South Bronx and raised in Long Island, Meisler lived much of her life in Bushwick. She also spent copious amounts of time in downtown Manhattan, where she frequented art galleries during the day and infamous New York City discos at night. Her oeuvre is filled with dynamic images of the city’s nightlife, but “LES YES!” offers a poignant glimpse into what was one of the city’s most diverse neighborhoods.

One of the central figures in the show is Morris Katz, an elderly friend of Meisler’s and the self-appointed “Mayor of Grand Street.” A former carney at Coney Island and generally friendly character, Katz was a fixture around the neighborhood during that time. In a phone interview, Meisler emphasized that much of her work was a result of “making the rounds” with Katz– he later turned out to be a distant relative. “[Katz] was a delight,” she said. “And that’s why I have these very intimate looks at the lives of people who were living [in the Lower East Side] at the time; they were all people that he was saying hello to and checking up on.”

Meisler’s photographs vividly portray the diversity of the Lower East Side, before it was taken over by gentrifiers and high rise apartment buildings, capturing children at play or women dancing in the street. She doesn’t ignore the grittier aspects of the neighborhood– one of the photos shows Mr. Katz in the aftermath of a home break-in– but instead includes it all, bringing to life the vibrancy of the past. “I didn’t even realize at the time how strong of images they were,” Meisler said of the photographs. “But 40 years isn’t a long time, the memory is as fresh as yesterday.”

Meisler admits that she’s seen some change in the Lower East Side in recent years, but that’s not necessarily a bad thing. “It’s busy and alive and yet, there are still people on the street that are true New Yorkers,” she explained. “New York is always changing, but I still see the essence of it there.”

“LES YES!” opens May 3 and runs through June 3 at The Storefront Project, 70 Orchard Street.