

Paradise Lost & Found: Bushwick

Photograph by Meryl Meisler *Paradise Lost & Found: Bushwick* is a snapshot of this section of Brooklyn during the tumultuous 1980s and early 1990s. Carrying a point-and-shoot camera to her job as an art teacher at IS 291 – Roland Hayes, Meryl Meisler’s images—kept secret for decades—are a personal memoir. Upon her retirement from teaching, she began releasing them into the world.

Meisler felt strongly that the photographs be installed at IS 291, the nucleus of her depictions of real children and adults on the surrounding streets, in classrooms, or the schoolyard. IS 291’s Principal Janice E. Bruce co-curated the work from Meisler’s monographs, “*A Tale of Two Cities: Disco Era Bushwick*” (Bizarre 2014) and “*New York PARADISE LOST Bushwick Era Disco*” (Parallel Picture Press 2021). The images selected capture the school’s core values and slogan, “Juntos Se Puede.”

Now, four decades since the photos were taken, *Paradise Lost & Found: Bushwick* celebrates the beautiful, beating heart of the people and places of this resilient community. For lovers of the visual and performing arts, fashion, literature, and creative thinking, this installation asks the viewer to reflect on Bushwick’s past, present, and future.

PRESENTED BY

The logo for Photoville, featuring the word "Photoville" in a stylized, cursive font with a thick black underline that swooshes under the letters.

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This exhibit was made possible in part by a grant from the Phillip and Edith Leonian Foundation. Meryl Meisler was born in 1951 in the South Bronx and raised in North Massapequa, NY. Inspired by Diane Arbus, Jacques Henri Lartigue, her dad Jack, and grandfather Murray Meisler, she studied photography with Cavalliere Ketchum at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and Lisette Model in New York City. Meisler frequented and

photographed the legendary New York discos. A 1978 CETA Artist Grant supported her portfolio on Jewish identity. Upon retiring from 31 years as a New York City public school art teacher, she began releasing large bodies of previously unseen work, including her books, “A Tale of Two Cities: Disco Era Bushwick” (BIZARRE Publishing 2014), “Purgatory & Paradise SASSY ‘70s Suburbia & The City” (BIZARRE Publishing 2015), and “New York PARADISE LOST Bushwick Era Disco” (Parallel Pictures Press 2021). Meisler is co-recipient of the Center for Photography at Woodstock 2021 Affinity Award. She has received support from Artists Space, CETA, China Institute, Japan Society, Leonian Foundation, Light Work, LMCC, New York Foundation for the Arts, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, Puffin Foundation, VCCA, and Yaddo. Meisler lives and works in New York City and Woodstock, New York. She is represented by ClampArt.

IS 291 – Roland Hayes has been in Bushwick since 1974, serving the community as a large middle school for many decades. Today, 291 educates 300–320 students annually. Since 2015, Principal Janice Bruce has been the instructional leader. Guided by the belief that a quality education is the right of all children, Principal Bruce has collaboratively transformed 291 into an early high school where students prepare for Regents exams in the eighth grade. 291 offers a diverse program that challenges, supports, and accelerates learning outcomes through equitable access to a rigorous curriculum in literacy, math, science, and social studies, infused with the arts and leadership. Gifted, multi-lingual, special needs and students who need a second chance at middle school success practice “HAWKS” values, to be: hard-working, accountable, well-rounded, kind, steadfast/safe/successful—which guide them through high school, college, or a career. The school is supported by the Office of Community Schools which provides consistent access to social services. In the fall of 2021, the long-awaited health center will open its doors making 291 an on-site health care service for all students. At IS 291, we channel the ingenuity of Roland Hayes by turning struggles into triumphs.

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