

# THE LIVING GALLERY

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Websites: [The-Living-Gallery.com](http://The-Living-Gallery.com)  
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media release



Pink Twins, 1982 June © Meryl Meisler

## **DEFYING DEVASTATION: BUSHWICK Then & Now Meryl Meisler | Vanessa Mártir Patricia O'Brien | El Puente Bushwick Center**

Dates of exhibit: May 31 - June 30, 2013  
Opening Reception: May 31, 7 – 11 pm

Bushwick Open Studio hours  
Friday, May 31, 7 - 11 pm  
Saturday, June 1, 12 - 8 pm  
Sunday, June 2, 12 - 7 pm

Gallery Hours: June 3 - 30  
Weds. & Fri. 1 - 5 pm  
Weekends, 1 - 6 pm | and by appointment

Brooklyn, New York – Writer Vanessa Mártir and photographer Meryl Meisler have teamed up again after the success of last year's exhibit *Defying Devastation: Bushwick in the 80s*. In this year's installment, Vanessa's reflections of the neighborhood give voice to Meryl's iconic images of urban decay at The Living Gallery as part of the seventh annual Bushwick Open Studios.

Between 1965 and 1980, there were over a million fires in New York City. The South Bronx is infamous for the aftermath of the Fire Wars but Bushwick was just as ravaged. Add the black out of 1977, the resulting riots, and the crack epidemic of the 1980s, and the result was a neighborhood that was a pile of rubble. This was the neighborhood Vanessa grew up in and that Meryl photographed while she worked as a teacher in a local school. But Meryl wasn't interested in taking pictures of the crack vials that littered the gutter or the addicts who walked the streets; she sought to chronicle the families and the love that defied the devastation. Thirty years later, Vanessa, now a writer, found herself at seven in one of Meryl's photographs.

The result of that find and their meeting is this second collaboration. In creating **Defying Devastation: Bushwick Then and Now**, Vanessa and Meryl wanted to include the voices of the community in the exhibit. As such, the exhibit includes an interactive wall where visitors can post their own photos, sketches, memories and thoughts about Bushwick then and now. Community organizations El Puente and Brooklyn Acts will perform on June 1st. And on that same day at 5pm, the event entitled "Brooklyn Writers Remember" will feature writers ages 8 to 101 sharing their stories about the neighborhood as inspired by Meryl's photos. These narratives are also included in the installation. Artists talks are scheduled throughout the weekend, and on June 2nd, a Bushwick History and Walking Tour will take place at 2pm.

There will also be music, dance performances and readings throughout the month. For a schedule of events and bios on participants, visit: [the-living-gallery.com](http://the-living-gallery.com).

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The Living Gallery, 1094 Broadway, Brooklyn, NY 11221

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Pink Sisters, 2013 © Meryl Meisler

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**Vanessa Mártir** is an award-winning writer and educator. She is currently completing her first memoir, *A Dim Capacity for Wings*, which chronicles her formative years in Bushwick. A seasoned speaker and workshop facilitator, Vanessa's first novel, *Woman's Cry*, was published in 2007, and she is currently shopping her second novel, *To Play Right*. Vanessa most recently co-wrote, *Do Something!: A Handbook for Young Activists*, an interactive workbook that gives young people all the tools they need to change the world. Vanessa works as a teaching artist in NYC public schools, and created the *Writing Our Lives Workshop* which she facilitates at Hunter College.

**Meryl Meisler** taught art in Bushwick from 1981-1994. "Was the other art teacher killed?" Meisler wondered when she started teaching in Bushwick 1981, "Bushwick resembled a ghost town war zone. Scorched and seemingly forgotten since the '77 blackout, Bushwick hit the skids. "To me, Bushwick's natural light was beautiful; kids were kids, vacant buildings whispered: Here I am, take my picture before I collapse." Using a plastic point and shoot and color slide film, Meryl photographed while walking from the subway to school, through classroom windows and back again. The images, many forgotten in boxes for nearly three decades, are a wink, quick sketches of the neighborhood's people and places during a disparate decade. "Revisiting to photograph Bushwick today, I feel like Jimmy Stewart's character George Bailey coming home to Pottersville in 'It's a Wonderful Life.' There's been a paradigm shift. Burnt out Bushwick has become fertile ground for community activism and the arts."

Meryl Meisler has received fellowships/grants from New York Foundation from the Arts, Time Warner, Artists Space, CETA, China Institute and Japan Society. She's exhibited her work at the Brooklyn Museum, New Museum, Dia Center NYC, MASS MoCA, The Whitney Museum of American Art and in public spaces such as Grand Central Terminal and throughout the NYC subway system. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Historical Society, Library of Congress, Islip Art Museum, American Jewish Congress, and in artist book collections of the Whitney, MOMA, Metronome, Carnegie Mellon, Chrysler Museum and the Pompidou Centre.

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Picking Bricks, 1982 © Meryl Meisler

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[Patricia J. O'Brien](#) taught art in Bushwick from 1985-1992. Patricia is a multimedia designer and information architect whose work has appeared extensively on major news, financial and entertainment websites, network and cable affiliate stations including ABC, CBS, NBC, Disney Digital Media and Reuters. Patricia has exhibited at the New York Hall of Science and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and received an Artists Space Grant.

[El Puente Bushwick Center](#) is a staple of service in the Bushwick community. For the past 20 years, El Puente Bushwick has cultivated and nurtured young leaders and organizers. We use art to inspire action and illuminate the ills that afflict our community, as well as the beauty that inhabits it.

[The Living Gallery](#), founded April 2012 by Nyssa Frank, offers artists and teachers a platform for dreams to manifest. This exhibition exemplifies everything they feel Bushwick needs: compassion, communication, and understanding. The Living Gallery seeks to create an environment based on collaboration, not competition. They have consistently engaged The Bushwick Community, from having inexpensive children's classes and concerts, to hosting philosophy discussions and political debates. The space will always be alive with new artwork, events and ideas.