

PRESS RELEASE

Zillman Art Museum - University of Maine

May 1, 2023

Contact: Kathryn Jovanelli
207.581.3370
kathrynj@maine.edu
www.zam.umaine.edu

High resolution digital images available upon request



birchbrook

Admission to ZAM is FREE in
2023 thanks to Birchbrook

Zillman Art Museum (ZAM) announces New Exhibition

BANGOR – The Zillman Art Museum - University of Maine, located at 40 Harlow Street in Bangor, ME, opens a new exhibition that will run May 19 through August 19, 2023. ZAM is open Tuesday-Saturday from 10 am - 5 pm and brings modern and contemporary art to the region, presenting approximately 21 original exhibitions each year. Admission to the Zillman Art Museum is free in 2023 thanks to the generosity of Birchbrook.

MERYL MEISLER: 70s SUBURBAN SENSIBILITIES - FRIENDS & FAMILY

May 19 - August 19, 2023

Meryl Meisler was born in the Bronx in 1951 and raised in Massapequa, a Long Island suburb of New York City. Meisler's neighborhood was largely composed of Jewish and Italian families, although there were also Irish, German, Greek and other first and second generation Americans. Meisler's Jewish roots and family dynamics are celebrated in many of the works in this exhibition. "Our parents taught us pride in our heritage and the importance of sticking together with family," says the artist.

Inspired by the work of Diane Arbus and her dad Jack Meisler's family albums, Meisler enrolled in her first photography class in 1973 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. When back home on school breaks, Meisler photographed the people she knew and loved—family, neighbors, and friends—along with making self-portraits. Within this body of work, Meisler explored topics of sexual identity, while also questioning her place and future within this suburban lifestyle. Living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, and beauty parlors became the backdrop of personal comedic theater and drama in which her subjects played themselves. Meisler adds, "My lifelong love of musical theater influenced all of the interior photos."

Meisler's images in *70s Suburban Sensibilities* are steeped in humor. The photographer states, "My parents and their friends were fun-loving, adventurous people. Like many victims of centuries of bigotry and oppression, the Jewish people might have developed a strong sense of humor as a survival mechanism." Lively friends and colorful family members are pictured amidst the over-the-top interior decor prevalent in many 1970s suburban homes. For instance, in *Butterfly Bedroom Telephone, East Meadow, NY*, a room adorned with butterfly wallpaper and matching bedding is the setting for Meisler's amusing image of a friend's mother wearing a patterned housecoat while chatting on a Princess model telephone. When brought together, the comedic expression of Meisler's reclining subject, the bold graphic wall coverings, and a gigantic plant stand that appears to be a spiral staircase to nowhere, borders on the absurd.

In *My Favorite Jewish Mother*, Meisler's mother, wearing oversized glasses and freshly-set hair, gazes with a deadpan stare over the top of a newspaper emblazoned with the headline "A Scholarly View of the Jewish Mother." In another comical image, *Aldo Making Muscles*, Meisler's bikini-clad boyfriend awkwardly flexes his muscles, causing a less than flattering distortion of his neck and head. The earliest work in the exhibit, the 1973 image *Perfume Counter at Bloomingdale's*, illustrates the photographer's preference for subjects who possess a confident and audacious sense of style.

Documenting intriguing individuals and dynamic settings is also reflected in another series by Meisler that features images of charismatic club-goers partying in New York City's eclectic dance venues in the late 70s and in present day.

###