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Photos: 'Ninth at Night' Revisits New Orleans a Decade After Katrina

Jane Fulton Alt came to help in storm's aftermath as a clinical social worker but decided she had to do more, documenting the destruction with her camera

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March 2015, Ninth Ward, New Orleans *JANE FULTON ALT*



Ten years ago, Jane Fulton Alt followed the coverage from Chicago as Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, and said she was struck with a “profound sense of helplessness.” Six weeks later, the photographer and clinical social worker left for New Orleans to volunteer her skills on a team of mental-health professionals.

She was assigned to a program created to serve people from the city's poverty-stricken Lower Ninth Ward in which mental-health professionals accompanied evacuated residents on their first, and sometimes last, visits to their homes in the aftermath of the storm. The experience was both physically and mentally taxing, leaving Ms. Fulton Alt wondering what more she could do to help.

“Within an hour of returning to the hotel room, something within me shifted and I knew I needed to do more,” she said. “I decided to photograph what I was seeing, with the hope of helping in a more concrete way by giving others visual access to my experience.”

Those images would eventually be published in her photography book *Look and Leave: Photographs and Stories of New Orleans's Lower Ninth Ward*. But her connection to the city didn't end there.

A decade later, the photographer continues to return to New Orleans, with her most recent series depicting the Ninth Ward at night between 2013 and 2015. She said she felt that the city “summoned” her, that she was “called back by lingering ghosts of that devastation to mark the Lower Ninth's slow and heroic transfiguration.”

In many images, homes are still and quiet, overgrown with vegetation and in disrepair. But in another, a porch light illuminates a group of people enjoying an evening on the front porch.

“Where house after house once bumped shoulders in raucous juke-joint jamborees, many now stand solitary, as if wallflowered,” she said. “But the fabric of community that remains, after being darned and patched, speaks to the enduring mystery and tenacity of a singular place and people.”

The project is a personal endeavor, shot at night to capture the photographer's own sentiment about the neighborhood. The late hour, she said, “offers a particular kind of light and atmosphere that speaks more clearly about the ghostly quality of the Lower Ninth. There is an absence of a once dynamic, thriving, multigenerational neighborhood.”