

UNDEREXPOSED

Install Theme

interviews, news and photographic musings...
through the eyes of fine art photographer & journalist [susan burnstine](#)



In Focus: Jane Fulton Alt



Jane Fulton Alt's *The Burn* was one of the bodies of work I viewed in [Photolucida's Critical Mass](#) that resonated on a profound level for me. After viewing the work, I contacted Jane who graciously agreed to an interview.

Here's an excerpt from a recent chat we had.

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SUSAN BURNSTINE: What were your beginnings as a photographer and when did you realize it would become your chosen form of expression?

JANE FULTON ALT: I started photography after my youngest child began first grade, having dabbled in the arts much of my life. Prior to taking classes at a local art center, I was a proficient quilter but frustrated by the limitation of the materials. I was fortunate to have had a really gifted photography teacher whose vision and curiosity allowed me to consider the potential for poetry with the medium.



SUSAN BURNSTINE: Congratulations on all of your recent successes most recently with your exceptional series, *The Burn*. Can you discuss the personal impetus behind this body of work?

JANE FULTON ALT: The work found me, as have most of my projects. In 2007 I was awarded the first of several artist residencies at Ragdale which is located in the former Howard Van Doren Shaw's estate overlooking a beautiful prairie in Lake Forest, Illinois. There is something very magical and

compelling about the setting. During my first residency restoration ecologists from a local organization, the Lake Forest Open Lands, were conducting a small burn on the property. Being in a mind state of openness and wonder, I watched the fires and took a few photographs. I inquired about the possibility of following them the following season. In mid April I picked up the phone realizing that I could have very well missed it, as I forgot to call earlier. Well, as fate would have it, they were going out that very morning for the first time that season. It was a monumental day in my mind because my sister was simultaneously undergoing her first chemotherapy treatment after having been recently diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

Photographing the burn that day was a very emotional experience. As I looked thru the view finder I kept thinking about what was occurring in my sister's body and the parallels were stunning. I could imagine the burn that was happening in her body at the very moment the prairie was burning to make way for the new spring growth. The insight of that first day has influenced how I have photographed, edited and printed the work. It has been a very hopeful and inspiring project and an anchor for me during these past four years. Through this project I have tried to look deeply into the essence of life cycles. If we listen closely, nature has so much to teach us.



SUSAN BURNSTINE: How did you gain access and how did you know about the controlled burns you photographed?

JANE FULTON ALT: After the first spring shoot I developed a trusting and respectful working relationship with the restoration ecologists. I am now familiar with the particular weather conditions that must exist to carry out a controlled burn and am contacted by the team during these times to photograph.



SUSAN BURNSTINE: Can you tell me a bit about the areas where these images photographed? Are they personal properties or publicly owned?

JANE FULTON ALT: All of the properties are part of a land trust located in Lake Forest, Illinois and run by the Lake Forest Open Lands Association whose mission is to conserve the natural environment through land acquisition, habitat restoration, environmental education and conservation advocacy. They have acquired over 800 acres of local native landscapes, including prairies, savannas, woodlands and wetlands.



SUSAN BURNSTINE: You have been photographing this series for four years. Is the series ongoing or complete? If ongoing, do you foresee any new directions for this project?

JANE FULTON ALT: Interesting question. I am in the midst of another artist residency and my goal was to think more deeply about the work. My ideas have been in a state of fluidity, which has been really

exciting. I have always felt that the images were fine as photographs but that the series was not fully realized. I love the depth and mystery of the images but wanted more surface to the work. After much grappling with aesthetics and technical issues, I am very pleased to have returned to working with encaustics, which I utilized in two other bodies of work, Mourning Light and Chiapas.

I have also been fascinated by the ash remains and have spent many hours thinking about how to incorporate the found ash and seeds into the new work. Happily, the creative muses paid me a visit and both elements will be incorporated into each piece. I have been working on several small pieces to identify and master the technical challenges. Once I have a handle of the full range of issues that need to be worked out, I plan on creating larger pieces.

The best part of being on an artist residency is the time and space to daydream about one's work. It is an incredible gift to be able to focus without interruption and has been an amazingly productive time for me. I have also thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated the camaraderie and critiques from the other residents.



SUSAN BURNSTINE: Is there one image in this body of work that speaks to you more so than others? If so, can you discuss why?

JANE FULTON ALT: My favorites keep changing, especially now that I am working with beeswax. I am attracted to images with warm tonalities, quiet compositions and an air of mystery. I am thinking more about the abstracted images and will be culling thru all my files to reconsider or “audition” new images.



SUSAN BURNSTINE: Are there plans for The Burn series to become a book?

JANE FULTON ALT: I would love to make a book of The Burn. I am hoping / waiting for the right time and publisher. Creating a book is a tremendous amount of work and everything needs to line up to start the process. When the work was shown in New York for the Photo District News Curators Choice, I was speaking with one of the judges. His insights and ability to articulate his thoughts about the photographs were thrilling. He did offer to write an essay about the work. Now I just need a publisher. When the work does get published, I plan to dedicate the book to my sister.



SUSAN BURNSTINE: When looking at your career as a whole. You have created varied, but truly fascinating and poignant bodies of work. Is there one element amongst the subject matter or perhaps within your psyche that connects all of these series?

JANE FULTON ALT: I would say that my training and practice as a clinical social worker, my extensive

travels and raising my family have greatly influenced my thinking and seeking to understand what is universal to all people. My inquiring mind sought to understand humanity and the meaning of our existence. I have used the camera to explore issues around birth, death, and everything in between. The human condition is what interests me most.



SUSAN BURNSTINE: What are you working on now?

JANE FULTON ALT: I am continuing my work with The Burn but in using the new materials, it feels like a different body of work. The use of encaustics, my interest in ash and the infinite qualities of the subject matter will keep me occupied for many lifetimes!

I am also working on a project from this past summer's Frontera Grill/Topolobampo staff trip to Mexico. I have been traveling with the award winning Chef, Rick Bayless and 35 members of his staff for 15 years now, creating new work for the entryway to the restaurant. I am collaborating with a writer whose book influenced the current butterfly installation that is in the entryway of the restaurant. I just finished transferring images onto a gold leaf surface, which will then be mounted onto copper...a loose reference to retablos. But that is another story!



SUSAN BURNSTINE: Do you have any upcoming exhibitions?

JANE FULTON ALT: Burn No 49 is currently on exhibit at the Corden Potts Gallery in San Francisco. Images from my Crude Awakening portfolio are currently in a satellite show at the Hereford Photography Festival in England and will also be in a group show at Wall Space Gallery in Canada this spring.

I will be included in the Critical Mass traveling group show and will have a solo show at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center in my home town next fall. Finally, I always have work up at the Frontera Grill and Xoco restaurants in Chicago.



To see more of Jane's work, pop over to her [website](#).

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