

It's Nice That



Jade Duskow's *The Neighbor I Never Knew* explores intimacy, loss, and commemorative Frank Sinatra plates

Jade Duskow is thinking about architecture. More specifically she's thinking about how architecture is a direct echo of who we are in specific points of time, both of our actual selves and of our idealised selves.

The American photographer's latest project, *The Neighbour I Never Knew* is a tender, intimate exploration of both presence and absence, of being and not being. A series of photos of the house the titular neighbour whom she never knew, it asks the viewer to consider our relationship between architectural space and how we process the loss of a loved one.

“In 2016 my husband, young son and I moved out of New York, where I had lived for the last twenty years to the Hudson Valley, to a small, bucolic city an hour and a half away from NYC,” she tells us. “A few months after we moved to our new house, the elderly woman – who I will call VM – who lived across the street passed away.”

She watched VM’s children “doggedly” clean her house for weekend’s on end after she died. “There were objects of her life everywhere, but it was not a hoarder’s house,” she says. “It was just a life well lived.”

The children would hold garage sales, and it was through those that Jade formed a relationship with the family. A living time capsule, she found herself intrigued by the visual and textural qualities of VM’s house. While she admits that the children were initially somewhat confused as to why Jade would arrive with a 30-pound large format camera in tow, they eventually gifted her a key to the abode, meaning she was free to come, shoot, and go as she pleased.

In *The Neighbor I Never Knew* the viewer finds themselves almost hovering over Jade’s shoulder, looking at plates left out on workbenches, bathtubs still draped in towels that’ll never feel the damp warmth of a human body ever again, and the sight of Frank Sinatra staring out of a dresser for all of eternity. This is a place where time has stopped for good.

That ties into one of Jade’s overarching themes as a photographic practitioner: the sensations of energy that seem to hum in the spaces left behind by humans. Her previous large-scale project, *Lost Utopias* saw her explore the leftover architecture that remains when the World’s Fair leaves town.

“Studying how an interior or exterior is treated over time, how it ages, or how it is transformed by changing norms in design or functionality, reveals, much like the idea of a palimpsest, layers and layers that accumulate over time but still leave faint traces of the original intention,” Jade says. “As an artist I work slowly, taking time to respond viscerally to the energy of a place while making the pictures, and prefer little or no distractions from my experience of space, light, and time.”

Alone with her camera, shooting on 4x5 film, with exposure times ranging from one minute to ten, Jade had ample time to reflect upon on how a space that’s suddenly found itself devoid of life, of spirit, can feel tomblike. “The air felt eerily thick as I waited, shutter release in hand, for the right time to stop the exposure,” she says.

A photographic representation of Jade’s post-move mindset, this work is, she feels, “a direct extension of my disquiet over our new life as seen through the life that had left the house-vessel across the street.” To the outside viewer, it is a record of the eerie stillness of the domestic space that’s been robbed of who made it what it was.

Between shoots, Jade kept notes on the experiencing of spending so much time and attention on meticulously trying to capture the essentials of a life she’d never intersected with: “She died last November and we were two months new neighbours. I never met V but gazed upon the brightness of her home and it brought me joy, even while sinking into a darkness from the

choices we had made, the difficulty of this new life. Mockingly our friends called us suburban and I was unable to take it lightly, so heartbroken I was to be away from the glow of Red Hook, my home, lost for now or forever. In her empty stuffy home a time warp to release my loss the diffuse rays streaming in through my camera lens the colors flying around in that black box before ultimately resolving themselves on the film, her lifelong home seen through the spirit-eye of my eyeball through the upside-down secret prism-world captured and fixed in a new way, intimacy to intimacy.”



Jade Duskow: Bathtub, The Neighbor I Never Knew



Jade Duskow: Untitled (Third Bedroom), The Neighbor I Never Knew



Jade Duskow: Dining Room after Rug Was Stripped, The Neighbor I Never Knew



Jade Doskow: The Entrance, The Neighbor I Never Knew



Jade Doskow: The Landing, The Neighbor I Never Knew



Jade Doskow: Untitled with Flower Paper, The Neighbor I Never knew



Jade Doskow: Red Door, The Neighbor I Never Knew



Jade Duskow: Miller's Restaurant, The Neighbor I Never Knew



Jade Doskow: The Cape, The Neighbor I Never Knew