

Behind the Lens

Katy photographer and philanthropist Fatima Donaldson shares her passion for photography and teaching the art to others

Written by Cherri Northcutt | Select photography by Fatima Donaldson

Photography is more than just taking pictures; it's an art form. One that Fatima Donaldson, head of Fatima Photography and Fala Creative, is passionate about. With a background working in advertising and corporate marketing, Donaldson now operates her own companies and is the director of the Katy Contemporary Arts Museum's School of Art photography program.

Where It All Began

When she was only 7 years old, Donaldson and her family left their home in Portugal and moved to Maryland, near Washington DC. "I had to learn English during the first grade," she remembers. It wasn't until junior high when Donaldson took a photography class that she discovered her love for the camera.

"I connected with it on many levels," she shares. "It gave me a certain peace." She learned her craft back in the days before digital photography, using a pinhole camera she built from a shoebox. "That's how we learned to shoot," Fatima remembers. "It forced me to understand composition and exposure."

Family Support

Fatima says her husband of 27 years, Brett Donaldson, is her biggest supporter. "He is the lifetime president of my

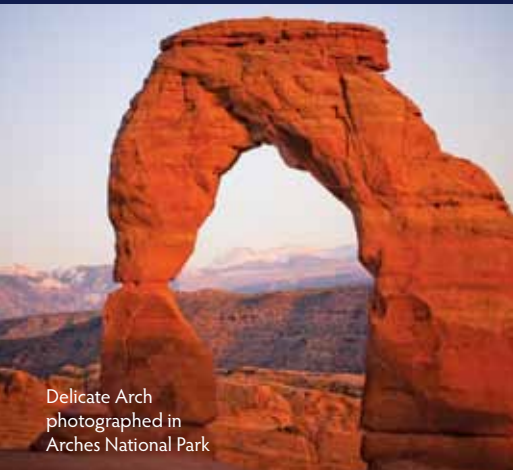
fan club," she jokes. Brett is an optometrist at Grand Vision Center in Katy, and the couple has three children: Brittany, age 22; Shane, age 19; and Brooke, who will start her senior year at Seven Lakes High School in the fall.

Five years ago, when Donaldson was considering spending three months in Montana at the Rocky Mountain School of Photography, she was reluctant to leave her family for such an extended period. "Brett and the kids sat me down and said, 'If you don't go to Montana, it's on you because we will be okay,'" Donaldson remembers. "It's wonderful to have people who are behind you."

To date, Donaldson has photographed as close as Katy Heritage Park, and as far away as Istanbul, London, and South Africa, capturing breathtaking images from all over the globe.

Reaching Out

Donaldson is a firm believer in supporting the community and has served on boards for the Katy Visual and Performing Arts Center and ARTreach. She and her husband support the Krause Center and are frequent volunteers with Katy ISD. "Everybody has gifts," Donaldson says. "If everybody applied their gifts in a positive way, the world would be a beautiful place."



Delicate Arch
photographed in
Arches National Park



Male leopard
photographed in Sabi
Sand Game Reserve,
South Africa

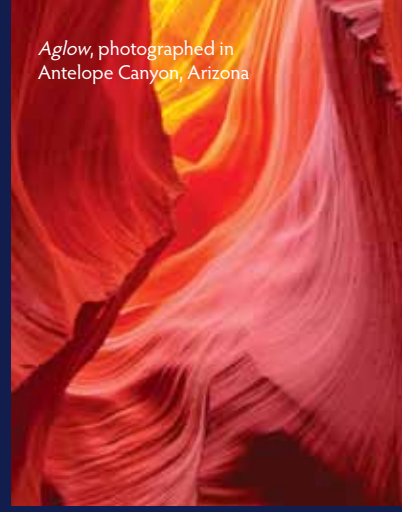


Iron Gates photographed
in California

Fatima Donaldson first learned to photograph images using a pinhole camera she built from a shoebox, she has since captured images from around the world



Aglow, photographed in Antelope Canyon, Arizona



Cheery Oh!, photographed in London



Photo by Marit Nordvik

Grapes at Harvest, photographed for LangeTwins Winery



Reach, elephant in Sabi Sand Game Reserve, South Africa



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Another way Donaldson gives back to the community is through her work at the Fort Bend Juvenile Detention Center, teaching a photography workshop for juvenile boys. "Our theme one week was on footsteps," Donaldson says. "We took photos of what their first footsteps will be upon leaving the detention center." The exercise fostered creative and fun ways to think about what those first footsteps would be and how to capture that image. "There are lots of opportunities to guide life skills, and I use photography as a way to impart that," Donaldson says. She is one of very few people providing this type of program and has been asked to document her techniques.

A Passion for Teaching

Fatima has been active in the Katy arts community for many years. She and her friend Ana Villaronga-Roman discussed the plans for the Katy Contemporary Art Museum before its conception. "I thought art education was an important part of that," Donaldson says. "So we founded the School of Photography, bringing in different instructors for different interests and skill sets." This has since developed into the School of Art, encompassing several focuses and offering a variety of classes to budding artists.

The school meets at the museum and offers a variety of classes for beginners to skilled photographers. "Camera 101 basically teaches people how to use a camera," Donaldson explains. "It's not specific to any particular brand or model." Other classes include Real Housewives with a Camera, Creating a Web Presence, and a monthly critique session.

"I love teaching," Donaldson shares. "I've been blessed to have great teachers in my life, and I want to pay it forward." In addition to the classes she teaches as part of the School of Art's photography program, Donaldson does workshops for clients and mentors young photographers. "There's a personal fulfillment that comes from imparting my knowledge and skills," she says. "It's fascinating to see what they do with that building block."

A Driven Artist

She enjoys sharing her excitement for photography with her students and connecting to memories through photos. "I love what I do, so it doesn't feel like work," she says. "I don't know how to slow down. Being active and involved is what relaxes me." Donaldson believes that everyone has an influence on the others around them. "Even though we're creating our own journey, our journey is never alone," she explains. "What we do impacts other people." KM



CHERRI NORTHCUTT is a freelance journalist and long-time resident of Katy. She and her family love visiting Katy's museums.

For more information on the School of Art's photography program, visit katycam.com.