

National September 11 Memorial

New York, New York

Photographs by Alan Ward 2011, 2023, 2024

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

Peter Walker asked me to photograph the September 11 Memorial in 2011, just after it opened. It was a challenge, because the 9/11 Museum building was still under construction. Security was still in place at the site with a fence around the perimeter, limiting access to only one location on the west side. However, it was possible to photograph the Memorial Plaza, while avoiding the museum construction, because the design included an extensive urban forest with over four hundred swamp white oak trees. These sizable, limbed-up trees, about thirty-feet tall when planted, were positioned around the two square voids with waterfalls marking the sites of the destroyed twin towers.

I returned to photograph the site in 2023 and 2024. The Memorial Plaza was transformed. It was open and accessible from all directions, and more like entering a beautiful urban park, than a solemn reverential landscape (1,2). Pedestrians traverse the plaza to the large new office buildings, performing arts center, and transportation hub, all built around the Memorial site in recent years (22,28). These photographs elaborate on the underlying concept of moving through a forest on a level plane, that was now even more pronounced, as the trees had grown to make a lacy canopy overhead, before arriving at the two cuts in the plaza that are thirty-feet deep with thundering waterfalls.

A number of the images online depicting the Memorial landscape feature overhead views, which show the layout and design in the context of Lower Manhattan. However, it is such a carefully calibrated and sensory-rich processional, that it is best depicted with eye level views. The visitor enters the grove from surrounding streets, leaving behind the sights and sounds of the city, hears the cascades when approaching the two voids, and arrives at the bronze parapets around the squares with the names of almost three thousand victims. It is a poignant and emotional experience. People are included in the photographs to show the use of the site as both a memorial, as well as urban park. The subjects are not posed, as it was important not to impose. It was more about seizing and capturing the situation, without intruding on their recollections or grieving.

The 9/11 Museum building was completed in 2012 and designed with a tilting façade and angles, in contrast to the flat plaza, perhaps echoing the appearance of a collapsed building (16,17,28). Several images of the museum from the plaza show these tilted and skewed geometries. There are times when the conventional frameworks of perspective and overlapping objects are somewhat ambiguous, as seen here, and the tight framing of a view can produce a surreal image (29,30).

List of Photographs

1. View north on west side of Memorial, West Street, 2024
2. Entry at southwest corner, 2023
3. View northeast approaching the Glade, 2023
4. View northeast in the Glade, 2023
5. View east in the trees approaching south void, 2024
6. View north with trees aligned, 2024
7. Survivor tree near south void, 2024
8. East to west rows of trees along Fulton Street, 2024
9. Detail of paving bands, 2011
10. View west of trees, 2011
11. View north to south void with trees aligned, 2011
12. View north of lawn and children, 2011
13. View northeast of trees and south void, 2011
14. Stone seating near south void, 2011
15. North tower void and Performing Arts Center, 2023
16. View north of south tower void, 2023
17. View north of south tower void and museum, 2023
18. Panoramic view of north void and Battery Park City, 2023
19. Waterfalls at north void, 2011
20. Flowers and momentos on the parapets, 2011
21. Approaching the north void, 2024
22. North void and transportation hub beyond, 2024
23. Evening view in Memorial Plaza, 2011
24. View toward survivor tree in Memorial Plaza, 2011
25. Approaching north void, 2011
26. West edge of north void, 2011
27. Evening view south of south void, 2011
28. 9/11 Museum and Perelman Performing Arts Center, 2024
29. Memorial Plaza and 9/11 Museum, 2024
30. Façade of 9/11 Museum, 2024

































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Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

“National 9/11 Memorial,” *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, Awards Issue, 2012

Exhibitions of the Photographs:

“Luminous Landscapes: Photographs by Alan Ward” The National Building Museum, 2016
“American Designed Landscapes: Space and Light” Sarasota Center for Architecture, 2018