

WHAT DO THE JUDGES LOOK FOR?

It is sometimes said that the judging of photography is subjective (i.e. a matter of opinion). Whilst this may be true, there are certain criteria that judges look for when judging an image submitted into a competition.

Here are 12 points that judges may look at -

- 1.) Impact - This is the sense one gets upon viewing an image for the first time. Compelling images evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another intense emotion.
- 2.) Presentation - Judges will look for a finished look. When submitting for a competition/panel, the mats and borders used, either physical or digital, should support and enhance both the submission and individual images.
- 3.) Technical Excellence - Judges consider the quality of the image/print itself as presented for viewing.
- 4.) Lighting - The use and control of light is central to photography and critical to Judges. Regardless of whether the light applied to an image is man made or natural, Judges will look for the effective use of it in order to enhance an image and the purpose of the image.
- 5.) Technique - This is the approach used to create the image. Printing, lighting, posing, capture, presentation media, and more are part of the technique applied to an image.
- 6.) Creativity - Judges look for the original, fresh, and external expression of the imagination of the maker to convey an idea, message or purpose.
- 7.) Story Telling - This refers to the image's ability to communicate to the viewer and evoke imagination.
- 8.) Subject Matter - This should always be appropriate to the story being told in an image.
- 9.) Colour Balance - Judges look at the effective use of colours and tones in an image. An image in which the tones work together, effectively supporting the image, can enhance harmony. By contrast a lack of harmony can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect.

10.) Composition - This is central to the design of an image and should bring all the visual elements together in concert to express the purpose of the image. Proper composition holds the viewer in the image and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends. Effective composition can be pleasing or disturbing, depending on the intent of the image maker.

11.) Centre of Interest - This is the point or points on the image where the maker wants the viewer to stop as they view the image. There can be primary and secondary centres of interest, and occasionally there will be no specific point of interest as the entire scene collectively serves as the focus of interest.

12.) Style - Judges look for a specific style ie your specific style. This can be defined in a number of ways. It might be defined by a specific genre or simply be recognisable as the characteristics of how a specific artist applies light to a subject. It can impact an image in a positive manner when the subject matter and the style are appropriate for each other, or it can have a negative effect when they are at odds.

There is also an over-riding arch to all the above – "Congruence or Harmony". In other words all the components above must work together to create 'one'. The strongest submissions are cohesive and evidence consistency in all areas.

WHEN SUBMITTING - DON'T MISS THE OBVIOUS!

The most common reasons entries get marked down in a competition are usually the obvious, which has been missed. Below are some of the regular 'obvious misses' –

- There should be no business logos on an entered image yet this is regularly done and those images are disqualified.
- Lines that should be straight should be straight, yet this is missed several times so watch your verticals and horizontals (especially in the background).
- Subjects are sometimes too central with surplus space on either side (containing distractions) which does not contribute to the story within the image. Don't be afraid to frame things tighter in such circumstances.
- Watch for potential distractions from the subject in the foreground or background, including bright colours or light spots, and branches or other objects by a subjects head.
- Generally speaking, the TIPS of items (fingers, toes or dresses etc) should not be cut off by the frame - unless an obvious close-up.

- White should be white, so watch for blue tints to wedding dresses or white shirts etc. Make sure the White Balance is correct.
- The judges like detail so watch for the over-exposure or loss of detail in 'blown-out' whites or in 'blocky' blacks. The detail should be there!
- Vignettes are regularly applied yet they are not necessarily a good thing. If applied they need to be congruent to the image and generally should be subtly blended in. Heavy vignettes can draw the viewer's eye from the subject.
- Post Production is sometimes overdone so halo's are visible around subjects, artefacts left or chromatic aberration is clearly visible.
- If too much skin smoothing is done it can flatten a subjects dimensionality.
- Textures sometimes intrude onto the subject when they should just be in the background.
- It's very frustrating to see obvious dust spots spoiling otherwise stunning images (The positive thing is that it tells members they have an issue).

TWO BIG TIPS

- Turn your image upside down, close your eyes then open them and think about where your eyes are drawn. Simply by doing this you will become emotionally detached from your image and will spot any distractions drawing your eye from the focal point (bright areas etc..).
- View your image at 100% as the Judges will. This way you can spot things like dust spots and post production issues such as halo's, textures overlapping subjects, repetitive cloning etc..