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Introduction

Welcome to Issue 3.

In this Issue there is an update on Assessment Forms, an update on Judging Natural History by Peter Jones, an article on Studio Portraits from Steve Myall as well as some extracts of "Judging from Around the World".

Assessment Forms

A few Assessment Forms keep trickling in please try and encourage clubs you visit to complete them, Supplementary Judges especially as this will help considerably in assessing suitability to move to the senior list.

I have received no Club Assessment Forms from any Judge or Lecturer. This obviously means that all clubs we visit are perfect, which is good.

Change of details

Retirements

Dennis Shipman has retired from Judging with immediate effect. I would like to thank Dennis for his many years of excellent service to the Federation. For his services to Long Eaton and N&EMPf over the last 30 years, I am delighted to report that Dennis was awarded the APAGB which I had great pleasure in presenting at Long Eaton on 26th April.

Barbara and Rowland Hill have resigned from the Lecturers list for health reasons.

Paul Pratt has died

New Lecture

Robert Falconer has a new lecture "**A Tale of Two Winters**".

Winter is the most dramatic time to photograph Robert's two favourite subjects – landscapes and steam trains. When it was decided to cover the winter of 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 Robert had no idea just how dramatic the conditions were going to be, with heavy frosts, mist, fog, ice and snow making it one of the coldest times in over 30 years!

The landscapes of the Peak District being on the doorstep, dominate the lecture. There are also visits to preserved railways around England and a trip to frozen China to see the world's last working steam trains.

Please ensure that your Programme Secretary is aware of these changes.

Judging Natural History

Following the excellent article by Bill Hall in Issue 2 I have now received an article from practicing nature photographer **Peter Jones ARPS DPAGB** (Eastwood and Clay Cross).

To follow up on Bill Hall's article in the N&EMPF e-news Issue 2.

In this article there is a tremendous amount of information which should be followed precisely, this is a first class article and I feel in particular that all non natural history judges should read and take in all the points into consideration when judging wildlife pictures in particularly with regards to, is the subject in its correct habitat (this I realize will be hard for a none NH judge) but common sense can prevail, and at the same time does the subject look under any stress.

The trend now days is to take excellent pictures of wildlife under controlled conditions, i.e. animals at Zoo's and wildlife parks, one can nowadays go anywhere in the world and photograph subjects like Snow Leopards, Puma, Wolf, Lynx, Bears under controlled conditions but at the end of the day in my opinion there's nothing like the challenge of capturing an animal which is totally wild and free but we all don't have the time to spare and the money to travel further afield.

This in particularly also applies to insect photography, so many people are breeding their own butterflies which are hatched cooled down and then put out onto a plant often a none correct food plant and taken in perfect conditions. Is this classed as wild and free no, not in my opinion but it happens all the time, the same applies to insect put down a tube flies out towards the light and takes its own picture, it's still controlled. If pictures are taken under these conditions one should declare the fact and the judge can compare it with wildlife that is stated wild and free.

Under the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 it is an offence to photograph schedule 1 birds at or near the nest.

For more information visit www.rspb.org.uk
Natural England at www.naturalengland.org.uk
RPS Nature Group at www.thenaturegroup.org

Only last year I had to report a group of photographers who were attempting to photograph a Dipper at its nest and in the end the Dipper had to desert its nest what a waste all in the name of photography, the following paragraph proves my point even more.

All wildlife photographers please remember that the most important thing to remember is. **The welfare of the subject is more important than the photograph.**

Peter Jones ARPS DPAGB

Studio Judging

The following article has been written by **Steve Myall** *EFIAP* (Keyworth CC).

Photographing people in a studio means the photographer is in complete control. They are able to direct the pose and light the model in a sympathetic or dramatic way. But is there a 'best' way? Of course not as we all see things differently.....but there's always room for improvement, and in this article I'm going to point out a few hints and tips that could help make images of people taken in a studio that little bit more pleasing.

The Background

In my opinion this is just as important as the subject. Many photographers choose to use a material background and too often this is full of creases (made all the worse if side lighting has been used), this should have been ironed/pressed before use – or smoothed out in Photoshop later.

Another often seen problem is the over-lit background, particularly when trying to create a white background. Many photographers over light it, making it far brighter than the model – if the model is wearing white the clothing will appear dull, even greyish. If white, or pale colours, are being worn then the background needs to be lit at the same exposure, or slightly duller, than the model to ensure they seem crisp and bright. Over-lighting a background can also cause flare - light bouncing back and giving a dull flat look to the model.

Many photographers place their model too close to the background, resulting in shadows that don't enhance the image in anyway. Ideally you need at least a six-foot space between model and background. This way shadows go off to the side and don't appear in the final image. This kind of set-up also allows you to light the background independently to the model.

Lighting the Model

Very hard to cover this in depth without writing a book, or two, so I'll just cover a few basic points not covered in the other sections here.

Eyes - Does it matter if there is more than one catch-light in each eye? If it bothers you then suggest they are removed in Photoshop. Catch-lights can be a judges' best friend, helping you work out what type of lighting has been used and from what angle. Here's a couple of examples to give you an idea of what I mean: Square catch-light means a softbox. Umbrella shape means a shoot-through umbrella. Umbrella shape with a black dot in the middle indicates bounced light from a brolly (the black dot being the strobe).

Hair-lights/rim lighting is often used and if not done correctly this can result in very burnt out areas in the image. These days this can be checked easily on the camera screen and the lighting turned down until a good balance is achieved.

Balancing fill-in lighting to the main light - This is often done more or less at the same exposure which can result in flat lighting, and can produce awful cross shadows on the face – particularly noticeable on either side of the nose. Again checking the light ratios on the camera screen can enable the photographer to alter the balance of the lights to create a pleasing result.

The Pose

This depends on the type of image being created, but like any composition there are a few basic points that can help make the subject look better.

A head a shoulder image is improved by having the head and shoulders at different angles. Taking this a step further if more of the body is included then a pleasing effect can be achieved by having the hips at another angle. An 'S' shaped pose often works well.

Generally it doesn't look right if cropping is done through a lower limb: if the elbow is included then have the hand in too, if the knee is in shot then the foot should be also. If the head is at an angle then it looks better if the nose doesn't break the cheek-line. Fingers look more graceful when together.

Altering the pose or getting the model to stretch slightly can often eliminate creases in the skin – often seen in the neck – and rolls of fat. If all fails then get rid in Photoshop or cover with clothing, or in the case of the neck long hair can conceal these unwanted lines. Many portraits can be improved by getting the model to sit up straight thus giving better poise by removing the 'round-shoulder' look.

Expression

Often seems forced and unnatural. This is often the result of the photographer not working quickly enough and not talking to the model. The mouth can smile but the glint goes from the eyes if not captured straight away. I also think a more natural smile can be achieved by making your model smile rather than asking them to do so. Again, not working fast enough can result in a bored expression.

Clothing

Unless the logo on the clothing is important to the final image then it's usually best to avoid them as they can distract from the rest of the image.

Mixing black and white clothing can result in problems with lighting; to get detail in both can be hard. If it seems the photographer has struggled in this area then suggest they don't mix the two.

Creases and labels showing through should be spotted before the image is taken but once more Photoshop can come to the rescue.

Make-Up and Jewellery

Make-Up needs to be checked carefully. Lipstick on teeth is not desirable, nor is 'blobby' mascara. Shiny areas on the skin, usually evident on the face, should be toned down with foundation.

A heavily made-up face can look wrong if other flesh on show isn't made-up to a similar tone, most noticeable in a headshot when the shoulder is uncovered and included in the image.

Jewellery often produces distracting highlights, so it is wise to avoid it if it's not an important part of the image.

Photoshop

Friend or foe?

Both?

As I've mentioned above Photoshop can be used to correct certain areas of the image. There are obviously many other enhancements that can be done with it such as bringing out details, removing bags under eyes, cloning out spots, scars, clothing marks, and tattoos if not wanted. It can also be used to whiten teeth and brighten eyes – this latter area is something that in my mind many people go to far with, making the whites of the eyes too bright. Flyaway hairs can be removed. New backgrounds added. Colours can be changed. Skin can be softened: this is something that is often overdone, giving an almost plastic appearance to the flesh, making the model look like a mannequin. If softening skin tones can be overdone then so can over-sharpening, it's generally not a good idea to bring out every pore in a woman's face.

Final Comments

Hopefully the above tips have offered some insight into what can make a studio image of a person that little bit more pleasing to the eye, and will help you when next asked to give some constructive comments on this type of photography.

My thanks to Steve for his very informative article. If there are other portrait specialists who would like to respond please email me.

Judging Articles from Around the World

I have been reviewing the extensive number of articles on the Internet, predominantly from America, that will hopefully provoke discussion and thought amongst our group. Some articles seem to support club judging whilst others challenge club judging. My intention is to share some of the key points.

Judging and Critiquing Photographs by *John Meek of City of Edmonds, Washington State*

The subject of judging and critiquing photographs has been discussed by many people. There are those that feel that photography is an art, much the same as painting and sculpture, while others would lend you to believe that it is a science, such as chemistry. Photographs can be used to illustrate a point or to express a feeling. Most of the photographs in the world are taken simply to preserve a memory. It is this variety which makes the job of the judge interesting, as well as challenging. Does one need to be an artist to appreciate the likes of Van Gogh? Just as some see beauty in his work, others can make no sense of the bold strokes and colours which appear on the canvas. Because one person "doesn't get it," is it a bad painting? I think not. Van Gogh had a distinctive style that was, and is, appreciated by many, but not by all. The same can be said for photography. Some favour portraiture while others like landscapes. To some, colour is passé and to others, black and white is nothing to get excited about. All are worthy of equal consideration when being judged. It is the ability to set personal preferences aside which makes the task of judging both interesting and difficult.

I have found many writings on the subjects of judging and critiquing photographs. The methods described vary as much as photographs themselves. Some authors suggest complex charts and graphs while others base their judging on experience and instincts. Some judges value black and white more than colour, portraits more than landscapes or prints more than slides. I even spoke to one that told me that he based his scores solely on the difficulty in obtaining the image! Why should that matter? Many Pulitzer Prize winning photographs were taken by someone who was in the right place at the right time, with a camera in hand. Not necessarily difficult, but the results speak for themselves.

As a competitor and a judge, I feel it is important to score an image based on its own merits, not on what I prefer to shoot or what I perceive to be a difficult subject. As a photographer, I have two basic decisions to make. One is where to point the camera and the other, when to trip the shutter. There are many more things to consider but those are the basics. When I am the judge, I ask myself three questions. First, does the image convey a clear message (hopefully one that the maker intended) and was it worth saying? Second, is the composition appropriate for the subject, and third, does the exposure add or detract from the image? Sounds easy but you would be amazed at how few judges use this or any other criteria. Let's break the three questions down and delve into them further. It all begins with the message.

When a photographer records an image, there is a message he wishes to convey. Since the photographer is not available to give you that message, does the image stand on its own and convey the message without words? That message can be one of "this is a cold but wonderful land," "this woman is in bitter pain," "the water looks so good I can taste it," "the colour is so vivid that I felt part of the landscape," "the

lions' fighting is so intense I can feel their rage," or a message of grief, beauty, tranquillity, confusion or a host of others. As I am looking at the image, how does it make me feel? In viewing a spectacular panorama, I should get the feeling of space and grandeur. Am I getting the message if I feel confused or cramped? Most photographers will tell you that a good portrait relates the personality of the subject. Do I get a feel for the person in the photograph or is it just a face? When I look at an image of a mother that has just lost a child, do I feel her pain? The message being sent in any photographic image is vital to the success of that image. Ask yourself, "What did the maker see when taking this photograph?" If you get the message, score it well. If not, deduct accordingly.

The second question I ask myself when evaluating an image is in regard to composition. Is the subject plainly visible to me? This can be difficult in evaluating an abstract design but should be considered, nonetheless. Is the depth of field appropriate to the subject? If the so-called "rule of thirds" was broken, was the maker successful? Are there merges that could have been avoided? Was the selection of focal lengths appropriate for the subject? All of these questions and more are answered when considering the composition of an image. When a photograph provides a sense of balance and flows freely, it is probably well composed. That being the case, apply the points that it deserves. If, however, you get the sense of falling over or if your eyes tend to wander off of the image, it probably could have been composed better and points should be deducted.

The third thing I evaluate when judging an image is the exposure. Is the sky blown out? If so, was that the intent of the photographer? Are there details in the shadows? Should there be? If the colours are pale, does that add or subtract from the overall image? Are the colours too 'punchy' for the subject? If black and white, do I see the full range of tones or is the print "muddy?" Did the photographer use the best light available to photograph the subject, such as overcast days to shoot flowers or morning and evening light for added mood, etc. Simple questions that are so very important to the quality of the final image.

When assigning scores to these images, the methods used are once again quite varied. Some people initially view the image as having no points and add, while others start by assuming that it is perfect and subtract. Is your glass half empty or half full? First impressions, otherwise known as the "WOW" factor, can make a big impression. On a five point scale, for example, I award three points for an average image. When there are obvious flaws, I score it two points. Images which are lacking in two or more areas generally receive one point from me. On the other hand, when a photograph is above average, it gets four points while an exceptional image is awarded five points. Note that I did not say it has to be perfect to get five points, only exceptional. What you may deem to be perfect may not be the same for me. If your club or competition uses a nine point scale, you would adjust your scores accordingly with an average image getting four to five points. That was easy, wasn't it? I think so. Now critiquing is a different matter entirely.



When I am critiquing an image, I ask myself the same three questions that I ask when I am judging. The difference being that I need to be able to rationally discuss what I feel is positive or negative about a photograph, and do it in a constructive way, rather than destructive.

It takes a lot of courage to display an image for the first time, whether it is at the club level or in a major international exhibit. When one has finally built up that courage and chosen to share an image, it is often the critique and not the score that will determine if that maker will try again or stop sharing their images. The perception by many is that the score is just numbers while the comments made are personal.

If I am asked to critique an image of a mountain, for example, I may ask myself the following questions: Does the mountain fill the frame or is it a distant speck in the background? Can I see the crevasses clearly or is there a blocking haze? Are the plants and trees in their fall colours? Do they have any foliage at all? Are the highlights and shadows harsh or are they pleasing to the eye? Why did the photographer point the camera at this subject? Why did he trip the shutter?

I would probably begin by vocalizing my opinion of what the photographer saw. If the mountain is clearly the subject, I would make note of that. If it is small, I would suggest a longer lens or a different view point which would bring the mountain closer to the photographer and eliminate the power lines. Next, I would attempt to assess the composition. Is the mountain "bulls-eyed" in the centre of the image or has the maker employed the so-called "rule of thirds?" Comment on the horizon, whether it is straight or tilted. Is the image sharp? Suggest that a tripod and cable release might help in reducing camera shake. If the sky is overexposed, I might suggest a split neutral density or polarizing filter. Note the word suggest. There are too many times in life when we are told exactly what to do. Photography need not be one of those times. As a photographer, I find it better to hear suggested methods for improvement rather than to hear only what the critiquer felt that I had done wrong. In my opinion, one method offers suggestions for improvement while the other only serves to highlight what one person perceives as failures.

If you currently judge and/or comment at your club or other levels, I hope that this opens up some new methods in evaluating images. If you are not currently a judge or commentator giving critiques, why not give it a try? As you have read, it only requires that you ask three simple questions.

The above article was written by **John Meek** Washington State, US. I will include another article in the next Issue.

If anybody would like to produce an article for the e-news and the website which will benefit all of us Judges and Lecturers then I shall be very pleased to receive it.



Judges and Lecturers Confirmations

The Federation will be updating the Handbook during the summer. Over the next couple of weeks I shall be writing to all Judges and Lecturers asking for their confirmation to remain as a Judge or Lecturer. For the majority contact will be made via email.

David Gibbins *ARPS AFIAP APAGB*

Judges and Lecturers Secretary