

JUDGING THE CREATIVE/MONTAGE IMAGE

Since its creation some 27 years ago in 1988 the word “Photoshop” and allied software has become synonymous with Camera Club Photography – and as the Camera manufacturers developed the technology some 11 years later in 1999 with the launch of Digital capture SLRs – the computer enhanced image has almost totally replaced the enlarger as the main source of the Creative Image.

In the days of film this was the domain of the few who pioneered some interesting techniques – with the likes of lith, smeared Vaseline, hammered glass, solarisation etc. both in the darkroom with chemicals and with the use of projectors and re-photographing processes. These images always seemed to do well in all types of competitions as they stood out from the ordinary as they gave a strong visual impact on judges.

So how should we approach judging these images today now that photographers can stretch the bounds of reality by producing images that are only constrained by your depth of imagination?

It is important not to get hung up with or try to second guess the “how” – what as judges you are required to do is to assess the image be it a print or projected image that is presented in front of you, without making any reference to the various bits of software that could have been used in its creation.

They should be treated in much the same way as any other image in the competition in that we should be looking at:

Technical Criteria: Exposure Focus/Sharpness, Depth of field, Colour and/or tonal rendition, Contrast, Lighting.

(This should apply to all the elements in a montage – and if the image has been over sharpened and is pixelating then this should be a salient point to mention, as would an image that has been poorly blended together)

Visual and Aesthetics: Framing and choice of viewpoint, Background, Design elements and principle, Appropriate application of photographic and/or manipulative techniques, Visual impact, does the treatment chosen for the image work.

(Bear in mind that great Photographs tend to be made and not taken – Ref: ANSEL ADAMS)

Content : Information, Emotion, Mood, Feeling, Meaning, Relevance, Subject Impact

(We are looking for both denotative and connotative substance)

Viewer’s (Judges) response: Visual, Aesthetic, Intellectual, Emotional, Excitement, Interest

(Not every image will have the “Wow” factor but it your opinion needs to be an improvement on what you think was the original image)

General characteristics: Originality, Style, Context, Photographic Vision, Empathy, Insight, Validity

(More recently the Monochrome projected image has been reinvented and has become a statement and medium in its own right)

Every Photographic Club/Society will have its own competition rules which may include a section on what is and what is not allowed as to what constitutes a photograph or parts thereof – it is possible to create an artistic image in today's software that has no photographic input whatsoever – that along with the dearth of so called royalty free images of objects, backgrounds, textures, patterns and filters available on the internet – should be clarified before you start the judging.

Finally, remember creativity is in the eye of the beholder, it's what comes from the photographer's heart, which makes creativity special.