EVALUATING PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES

HOW APJA HELPS CAMERA CLUBS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS TO IMPROVE THEIR PHOTOGRAPHY

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THIS SESSION WILL COVER

- Why do we take and share our photos
- What makes a 'good' photo
- Do your pictures "replace a thousand words"?
- An approach to reducing subjectivity and bias in image evaluation
- How understanding this approach will improve your photography
- Role of APJA in training of judges
- What APJA offers and how it can help your photography
- Conclusion

WHY DO WE TAKE AND SHOW OUR PHOTOS ?

- **To remember**
  - Photos anchor memories
- **To communicate an idea**
  - Good photos SAY something, great photos say it clearly and emotionally
- **To share experience**
  - “Look where I’ve been”, “Look how beautiful this is”
- **To express ourselves**
  - Images reveal how the photographer sees the world

WHY DO WE TAKE AND SHARE OUR PHOTOS (CONT)

- **To influence and persuade**
  - A powerful image can move people faster than an argument
- **To seek recognition**
  - Pride in craftmanship
  - Desire for validation
  - Sharing achievement
  - Learn and improve

Camera Club Competitions

Photography is the way we say "this matters"

WHAT MAKES A 'GOOD' PHOTO?

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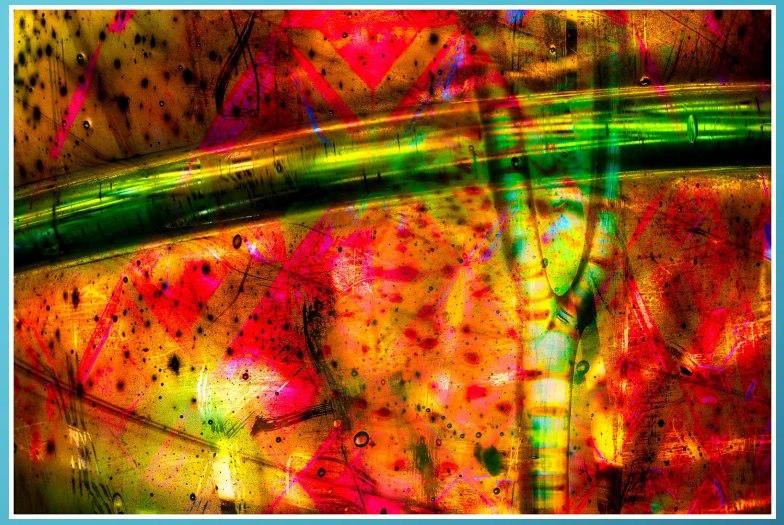


Which is best photo?

DOES YOUR PHOTO REPLACE 1000 WORDS?

This well known saying recognises the relationship between written and verbal communication and visual communication – i.e. Photography and other visual arts

A good piece of writing succeeds in three areas simultaneously:

- **What is says – the idea, message or concept**
- **How it says it – choice of style and prose**
- **Execution – mastery of language, vocabulary and grammar**

THE CONCEPT (C A T)

If a well executed photograph can communicate more powerfully than words, it must excel in the same categories, namely it needs:

- **A clear concept (C)**
  - What is the image about?
  - Intent – why was it taken
  - Does it communicate a story, mood or emotion
  - Does it show something in a fresh or unusual way

CONCEPT (C)

Here the concept is to communicate:

- Affection
- Enjoyment
- Shared culture

Here the strong concept overcomes technical faults

AESTHETICS (C A T)

- **How well does the image communicate the concept – Aesthetics (A)**
- **This is the visual language of the image, and includes:-**

- **Composition**
  - Balance
  - Placement of the subject
  - Use of negative space
  - Leading lines
  - Shooting position

Light

- Direction
- Quality (Soft or hard)
- Contrast
- Colour

AESTHETICS (CONT)

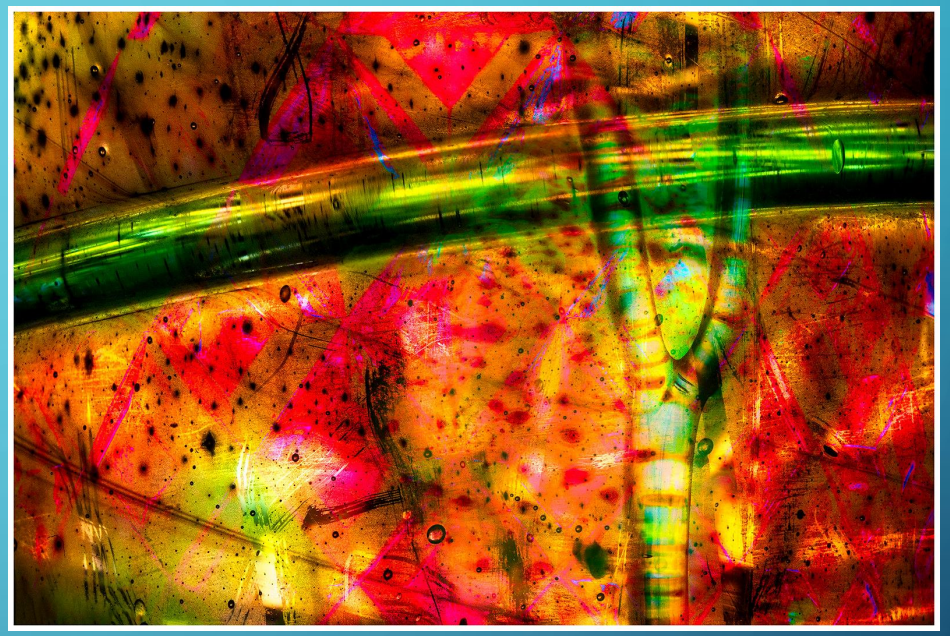
- How well does the image communicate the concept – Aesthetics **(A)** (Cont)
  - **Perspective and Lens Choice**
    - Camera height and orientation changes the narrative
    - Telephoto compresses space and distance
    - Wide angle exaggerates space and distance
  - **Timing**
    - Street and sport photography
    - The "decisive moment" separates the ordinary from the extraordinary

Good Aesthetic choices made by the photographer can take a good concept and make it engaging and/or dramatic, or, as Ansel Adam said "There is nothing worse than a perfectly sharp but boring photo"

AESTHETICS (A)

Here, the aesthetic choices create a strong mood which is heightened by the time of day and light, and the contrasting colours

Shooting position and lens choice produce a good composition



In this abstract, the concept is not obvious, but choice of shapes and strong complementary colours create drama and impact and a sense of mystery

TECHNICAL (C A T)

- **Technical Quality (T) – is the image executed well**

  Should support the Concept not detract from it

  - Correct focus where it matters
  - Tonal range and contrast
  - Colour balance
  - Sharpness v intentional blur
  - Horizons and vertical – where it matters
  - Distracting elements or clutter

Technical perfection alone does not make a great photograph, but poor technique can ruin one!

TECHNICAL (T)

- Exposure – good
- Focus - good
- White Balance – good
- Distractions - none

PUTTING THE C A T APPROACH TO THE TEST…

At the 2024 convention these images were used in a workshop where an audience of 70 – 80 attendees were divided into groups and asked to evaluate the images using the C A T criteria.

The workshop was also conducted at a camera club meeting, the results were remarkably similar….

APPLYING THE CAT APPROACH IMAGE 1

Concept	7 out of 7
Aesthetic	3 out of 4
Technical	3 out of 4

TOTAL 13 out of 15

Indicated scores are the average of 3 workshops and allocated by participants

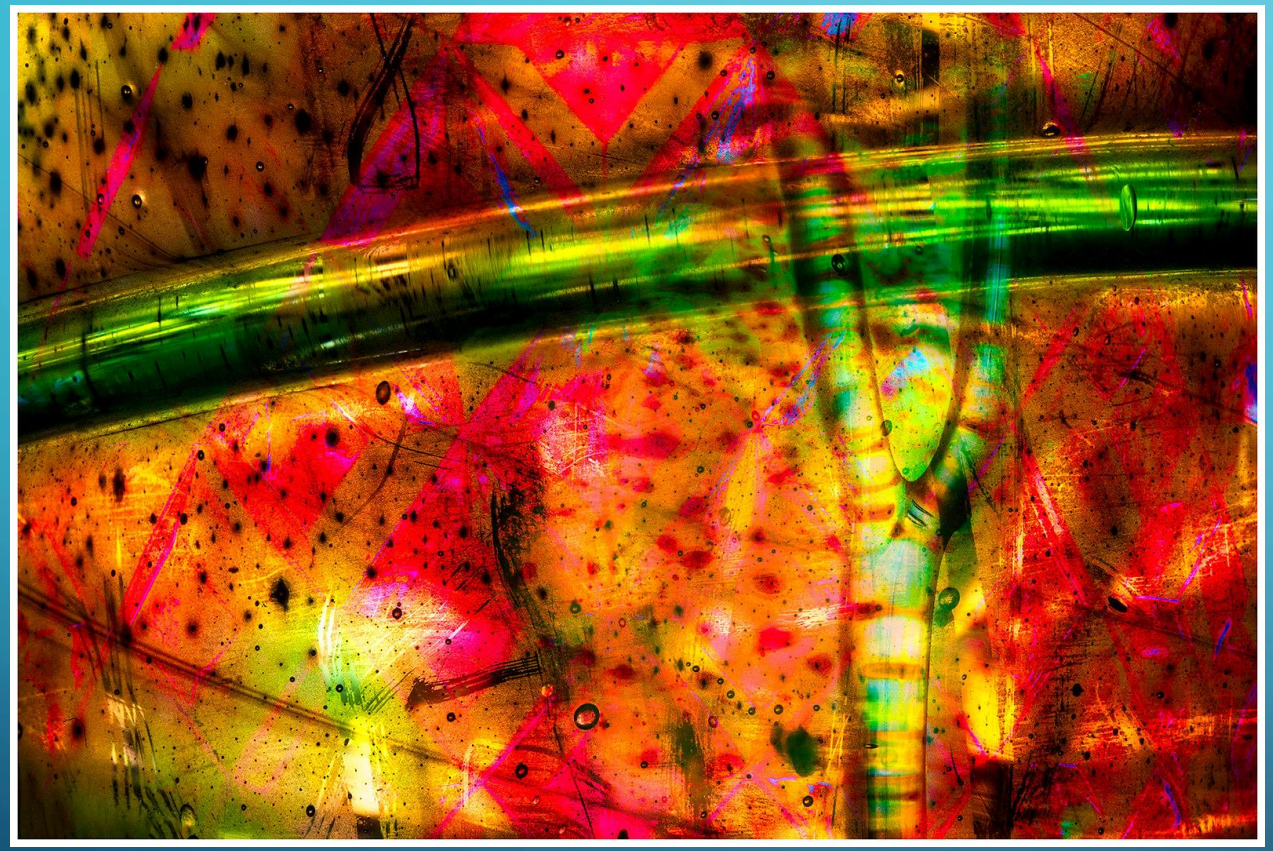
APPLYING THE CAT APPROACH IMAGE 2

Concept	5 out of 7
Aesthetic	3 out of 4
Technical	4 out of 4

TOTAL 12 out of 15

Indicated scores are the average of 3 workshops and allocated by participants

APPLYING THE CAT APPROACH IMAGE 3



Concept	6 out of 7
Aesthetic	4 out of 4
Technical	4 out of 4

TOTAL 14 out of 15

Indicated scores are the average of 3 workshops and allocated by participants

APPLYING THE CAT APPROACH IMAGE 4

Concept	7 out of 7
Aesthetic	4 out of 4
Technical	4 out of 4

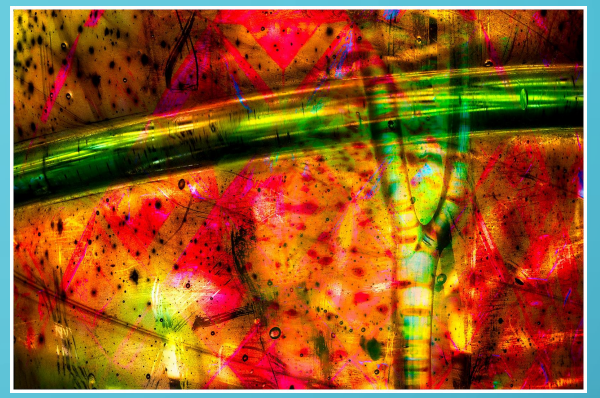
TOTAL 15 out of 15

Indicated scores are the average of 3 workshops and allocated by participants

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Beautiful – standout feature is the expressions of the people. Cultural content adds a rich storytelling component.

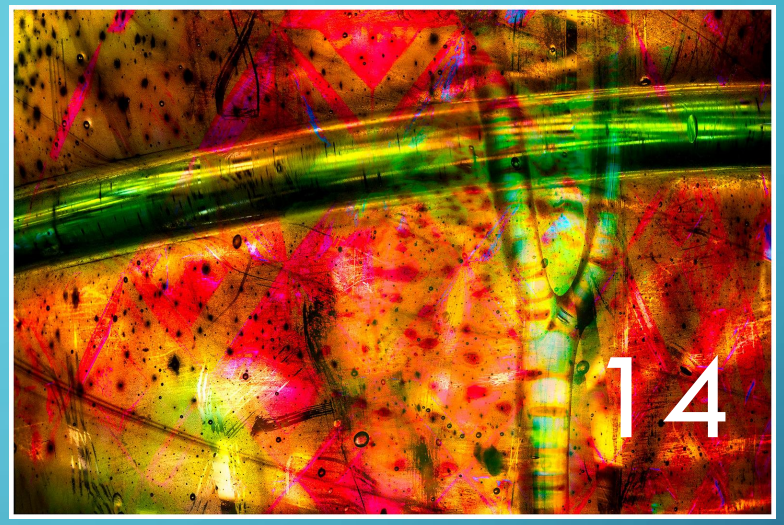
Dynamic wild life moment. Initial impact is strong, but it lacks environmental context. Technically well executed.



Impact is intense, chaotic and energetic. Colour harmony is incredibly rich juxtaposing warm glowing golds with fiery magentas with cool blues and greens.

Visual impact is serene and highly inviting. Stark, freezing environment contrasts with the warm glow from the cabin. Tricky dynamic range managed well.

SO…..WHAT MAKES A ‘GOOD’ PHOTO?



HOW APPLYING THIS APPROACH WILL IMPROVE YOUR OWN PHOTOGRAPHY (CONT)

Concept

What do you want the viewer to experience

- Surprise
- Excitement
- Involvement

Aesthetic

- Right light
- Right shoot position
- Right lens
- Right timing

Technical

- Well exposed
- Sharp where needed
- Good tonal range
- Good colours
- No distractions

Steve McCurry

HOW APPLYING THIS APPROACH WILL IMPROVE YOUR OWN PHOTOGRAPHY

- Developing the skill to comprehensively and objectively analyse your own images is key to becoming a better photographer
- A structured approach to image evaluation will highlight opportunities for improvement
- Understanding this approach will enable you to gain a better understanding of the comments made by judges on competition photos

WHAT APJA OFFERS
AND HOW IT CAN IMPROVE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY

- Primary role – teach prospective judges the knowledge and the skills to evaluate photographic images in a structured, comprehensive and objective manner
- For photographers – the same knowledge and skills can be applied:
  - When planning and visualizing an image
  - When selecting camera, lens, location, environmental conditions to execute the vision
  - When selecting and post processing images

Great photography training even for non-judges

ROLE OF APJA IN TRAINING JUDGES
(AND PHOTOGRAPHERS)

The APJA Training Syllabus comprises the following units:

1. **Introduction to photographic judging and image evaluation**
   - Six hour course, over three nights, delivered on-line
2. **Core Training**
   - Six hour course, over three nights, delivered on-line
   - Aimed at teaching you to evaluate images and provide feedback to photographers
3. **Advanced Training**
   - Aim is to continue the professional development of judges
   - Four hour course, over two nights, delivered on-line

ROLE OF APJA IN TRAINING JUDGES

The APJA Training Syllabus comprises the following units (cont):

4 Mentor Program

- For those wishing to become judges
  - Provides opportunities for 'novice' judges to work along an experienced judge
- Working with a mentor may include:
  - Assistance with the evaluation of images
  - Attending club events alongside an experienced judge
  - Encourage novices to take on judging assignments and to provide assistance and feedback

ACCREDITATION FOR JUDGES

- **AAPJA – Associate Accreditation**
  - Completed APJA Training
- **JAPJA – Judge Accreditation**
  - Qualified as an Associate
  - Contactable via the VAPS Judges directory
  - Have judged 8 club competitions
- **FAPJA – Fellow Accreditation**
  - Judged at club level for a minimum of 5 years
  - Training and/or mentoring prospective judges
  - Presentations at clubs and general contribution to photography community

CONCLUSION

A great image results when it communicates something of value to the viewer.

Viewers respond to an image which demonstrates:

- A clear concept
- Good aesthetic choices
- Attention to technical aspects, absence of technical faults
- Our aim is to promote this view of image quality to photographers and photo judges

PHOTOGRAPHER CHECKLIST

CONCEPT

- What is my image about – does it communicate something?

AESTHETIC

- Have I chosen the right equipment, shooting position, lighting conditions and composition to make the message compelling?

TECHNICAL

- Does my exposure, focus and colour balance support the intent of the image and is it free of distracting elements

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Two Sides of the Same Coin

Better Intent. Better Evaluation. Better Images.

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Mindful of the Approach

Clear Intent
Know the story, mood or message

Thoughtful Execution
Use composition, light, and timing with purpose

Emotional Impact
Create connection and evoke feeling

Authenticity
Be honest to the scene and the moment

Excellence in Craft
Technical skill supports the vision

JUDGES

Applying the Criteria

Recognize Intent
Understand the story, mood or message

Evaluate Execution
Assess composition, light, timing and control

Measure Impact
Consider emotional response and connection

Value Authenticity
Look for honesty and integrity

Reward Excellence
Technical quality in service of the vision

BETTER IMAGES. STRONGER COMPETITIONS.

When photographers create with purpose and judges evaluate with understanding, everyone wins.

★ ONE APPROACH. TWO ROLES. ONE GOAL: ELEVATE THE ART OF PHOTOGRAPHY. ★

QUESTIONS?

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