

Welcome to the first Judges Newsletter.

November 2016

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Judges as Educators **Stan Bowles** A different way of looking at our Contribution.

What Makes a Good Judge **John Blessas** To promote discussion

Judging Competition Photographs" by Lister C. Clark AFIAP. ASTC.

Contributed by Robert Cullen (I suggest printing this and taking it to a club meeting for discussion, Thanks JB)

IMPORTANT DATES;

Judges Forum and PSQ BBQ.

Brisbane venue at "Urban Edge", 63 Blamey Street, Kelvin Grove.

Brisbane Forum is on Sunday 27th November only, starting at 10.00 am.

Mackay venue at Boomerang Hotel, at City Gates on Nebo Road.

Mackay will be on both Saturday, 26th and Sunday 27th, starting both days at 10.00 am.

More info will be on the PSQ website.

So, do we need a newsletter?

Since a lot of Judges do not have contact with each other as a large group where discussion can flow and ideas can be batted back and forth this is possibly the best way to cause discussion.

Who can/should contribute to this?

Anyone with an opinion or valid point for discussion.

There is a lot of knowledge in our group and how else can we share it?

Contributions should not contain pointed personal criticism however.

If you have a contribution after looking at this, please send it in.

This is meant to generate discussion and feedback.

When will this come out.

Hopefully, every three to four months.

If there is a lot of feedback, that may be sooner.

Help.

We need a name for this sheet.

If you do not wish to receive this, please advise me at jb@mky.net.au and you will be taken off the list.

Thanks

John Blessas

Judges as Educators

Stan Bowles

My thoughts about judging in the photography club area come a lot of from my many years of teaching and working as a photographer.

I believe that when you are asked to do a judging for a club, you should consider the club's constitution. Every club's constitution I have ever read has always had that the aim of the club is to promote the enjoyment of photography. You should remember that well.

I believe that the most important facet of the judge's role as a judge is to be an educator. I have heard some people argue that the judge is not an educator. If a print is handed to me and I feel that the print needs more contrast for example, I can take two courses of action. I can say absolutely nothing about the need for more contrast. I can talk about the print and talk about the need for more contrast. Immediately I start to talk about the need for more contrast, I am an educator. I ask any person to tell me if they have ever been to a judging where the judge doesn't talk.

I remember very well my first year of teaching at Salisbury Primary School. My mum and dad were away on holidays and one of my mates was teaching the year 6 class. I was teaching a year 4 class. My mate was Gavin Bird who continued on to be a most respected principal for many years. He was teaching a year 6 class where the kids did the copy book. This, for people who don't know, is where a page is set out with an example of good writing and there are two lines for the kids to copy.

One night, Birdie came round for tea and after tea we both had quite a few cold beers. About nine pm, he realised he had to mark the copy books. When he awoke next morning he looked through the copy books. In that class was a young lad named John Rice. John was a good little kid, absolutely not a genius and to the lower end of the class. He was a left hander and had particular problems with writing with a nibbed pen in a copy book.

Birdie looked at John Rice's book. "Holy hell, I've given John 9 out of 10 for his work. What can I do?"

My advice to him was not to change the mark as he would look a dill. He should, in fact give John really special praise for the effort he had put in to this particular exercise.

The outcome was very interesting. This kid who rarely got any praise changed very much. He got really excited and his attitude changed dramatically. He worked very hard and his work very much improved.

You may well ask what this has to do with judging photography. Just think that if you are a judge who makes negative comments, what affect do your negative comments have on the person who submits the photograph? If the photographer is an A Grader, the only affect may be that the photographer thinks the judge is unwise. The other affect may be that beginner may wish to not compete any more. And, unfortunately, this does happen. Sadly, I remember this happening one night at Aspley. Four photographers left the club. The worst part of this was two of the people who left were in my son's shop talking about how rotten camera clubs are.

One night I entered a portrait into the club competition. The judge told me how poor my photo was. At half time, I asked him why de he make such derogatory statements about my photo. He told me that as a judge he had every right to make the statements he did. I reminded him that at the start of his comments on mine, he had said he knew nothing about portraits

I ask you to think are the comments you make rational.

Going back to my boyhood years, I remember reading a story by Samuel Taylor Clemens - Mark Twain. The story was How Tom Sawyer white washed the fence. As a punishment by Aunt Polly , Tom had to whitewash the fence. Many boys who were going fishing and rubbishing Tom for his punishment, ended up staying and paying Tom to have a go.

The fence was whitewashed, Tom did none of the work.

This was because of his ability to talk and make something so special that everybody wants it. Think about this when next time you are doing your next judging.

What Makes A Good Judge? John Blessas

At my first exposure to the principals of judging I was given the **10 Commandments of Judging**.

Looking back, these are some of the best guidelines that define the technical aspects of how you judge images.

However, although they give you the guidelines to work with, they do not define how you should see an image as art.

So, what makes a good judge?

My thoughts are wrapped up in these simple concepts;

"Is this image ART?"

(The concept of what is art changes over time.)

Is there EMOTION?

Is there a "WOW" factor?

What was the composer of the image is thinking?

Have they succeeded in letting you see/tell what they are trying to show/tell you?

Can you comment on (and possibly suggest improvements to) the emotion in the image?

So, I think a good judge should keep the "Commandments" in the back of their mind, BUT use the above concepts to find and comment on the emotion in the image.

Consider, each of us is influencing and hopefully improving, in our own way, the standard of photography for camera club members throughout Queensland.

The 10 COmmandments.

(With my personal thoughts in Italic.)

1. You will not be a fault finder.
Unless it obviously detracts from the quality of the image.
2. You will not be a rules obsessive.
(Rules are guidelines.

They make for "harmonic" images.
Do not use them to stifle creativity.)

3. Your comments should reflect / match the award.
4. You will not show prejudice against the subject matter of the image.
5. You will be consistent.
6. You will say something nice.
(A sandwich comment - something nice, then if necessary criticism / advice, then finish with positive.)
7. Let your feelings respond to the image.
(Emotion!)
8. You will reward creativity.
See rule # 2.
9. If possible, you will speak / comment / record a comment on all images.
10. You will run on time.



One of my favourite cartoons.

What The Duck or W.T.Duck by Aaron Johnston.



Following is an extract from a book titled "Judging Competition Photographs" by Lister C. Clark AFIAP. ASTC. First published by the Australian Photographic Society Inc. in 1967.

The extract is of interest and worth reading to compare with current ideas on club judging. And has anything really changed?
Robert Cullen.

JUDGING PROCEDURE

Introduction:

In recent years there has been a great increase in the number of camera clubs in Australia. Most of these clubs hold a competition once a month and prefer to have a judge from outside their club to judge these competitions. These judges are usually advanced amateurs who have achieved some reputation with their photography and the occasional professional photographer who is interested in exhibition photography. The great number of club competitions has created a need for more people to join the ranks of the existing judges. The judging of photographs from country clubs is another growing need, the photographs being sent down to be judged by city judges. A taped commentary is usually made and sent back with the prints or slides. A number of clubs have asked for information on how to train their members to become judges and this book has been written with this need in mind.

Lectures on judging are useful in giving information on how judges go about their task. Some years ago the N.S.W. Federation of Camera Clubs arranged a series of lectures in which several well-known judges gave their views and such lectures could be held with advantage more often. There is one aspect about such lectures, however, that may cause confusion. Different judges sometimes present conflicting points of view and these are not always easy to reconcile. It was felt that a more detailed treatment might prove helpful and this will also allow a more integrated point of view to be presented.

When International Exhibitions started to be held regularly in this country, from 1955 onwards, contemporary work from overseas was seen to be markedly different to the style of work that had been followed in clubs for many years. Prior to this club work tended to follow a rather set pattern, with subjects such as landscapes, formal portraits and still life being treated in a traditional and academic manner. One of the main reasons for this was that the relatively few judges, who had themselves been brought up on this style of photography, tended to discourage anything that was not "classically pictorial." Yet here was work—including documentary photographs that would have been rejected in club competitions—being accepted in international exhibitions. The more spontaneous and freely composed work represented in internationals came as something of a shock, and many club members have not quite been able to reconcile this work with the traditional work of the past. Even the most unusual of modern styles, if successful, are based on sound artistic principles, and by discussing the different styles of photography it is hoped that we may gain a more liberal outlook—one that will enable us to appreciate the best in many different styles.

It is true, that no book or series of lectures can teach a person to judge. This ability will depend very much on the background, sensitivity and abilities of the person involved. Many photographers do, however, come to the stage where they feel that they are competent to judge the entries in their own club competitions at least, having gained this confidence by success in competitions, which they feel must indicate they have learnt to apply the principles of making a good picture. They may also have read widely, and having listened to the remarks of visiting judges, may have found that their own thoughts were in general agreement with the remarks passed by these judges. What they then need is a measure of confidence, which they might gain if they can be sure there are no basic concepts of picture appreciation they have overlooked. The main purpose

of this book is to help fill this need, by outlining what are felt to be the most important elements of judging and by suggesting how the student might gain experience in picture evaluation.

It is also hoped that this might lead to a more uniform approach to certain aspects of judging. It is not desirable that all judges should conform to a set mould, since this would stifle originality of thought. Judges on the same panel should certainly allot marks on the same basis, so that their results can be combined, and so that the point scores will have a uniform basis.

This book is intended not only for photographic judges but for all photographers who wish to improve their picture making ability. A photographer should be able to critically evaluate his own work so that he can learn the reason for his successes and failures. He should also be able to detect any faults of composition in his pictures. If he can do this, his work should continue to improve. There is an undeniable fascination in trying to find out what makes a picture successful. Trying to analyse the basic appeal of a picture leads us to a study of the "Psychology of Aesthetics"—a difficult but most fascinating subject.

The central insert of reproductions should prove useful in illustrating some of the principles discussed, but it is admitted that a great many more illustrations than this would be desirable. It would be difficult, however, to obtain an ideal set of illustrations and ones which would not become dated. Quite apart from this, it is felt that collecting illustrations appropriate to the various principles discussed is a basic part of the judge's training. It is also likely that he will find better illustrations as time goes on, and recognising the factors discussed, in photographs that he selects himself, should give the judge a great deal of confidence.

The Qualifications of a Judge:

In painting and in other arts it is not always the practitioner who is valued as a critic, but in photography it is an almost invariable rule that the judge shall be a photographer who has gained some success with his work. In theory there is no reason why a person who is not a photographer should not act as a judge, but in practice it is found that few people other than photographers are sufficiently interested in the finer points of photography to gain the insight necessary to give a considered judgment.

It would be thought that painters would be worthwhile critics, but in most cases they have proved to be disappointing, perhaps regarding photography as an inferior medium of expression to their own. Whilst there are many principles common to all the graphic arts, it must be recognised that there are basic differences in outlook between the painter and the photographer.

In one respect the photographic judge is different to all others, since when judging club competitions he is expected not only to comment on the qualities of the pictures, but also on their technical quality and from his own experience should be able to tell competitors how to improve their technique. Most club members have not had any formal training in photographic technique and it is here that they hope to pick up the finer points of their craft, in addition to learning how to make a good picture.

It follows that in addition to being a good judge, the club judge should be able to give an interesting and helpful commentary on the photos he has judged. There will probably be a little of the extrovert in him, in that he will like talking in front of an audience. But if he has not done any public speaking before, this should not deter him since he will soon gain confidence after judging once or twice, losing any self consciousness in his desire to communicate his knowledge to his audience. It is a great boost to one's confidence if you tell yourself that you have something of value to impart to your audience. Not all successful photographers are good judges since some lack the ability to impart their knowledge and many do not have the temperament to face an audience.

Again, some photographers are readily able to analyse the reason for the success or failure of their pictures, whilst others, perhaps even better photographers, obtain their results intuitively, without fully being able to explain why.

The writer has sometimes noticed that photographers of only moderate ability, who have a pleasing personality and are good talkers, prove to be popular judges. Beware, however, the judge who sides too much with his audience. The easiest way to popularity is to make any art form sound easy and to decry those things that the average person does not understand. A good judge will not lower his standards by bringing topics down to the lowest level of comprehension of his audience, but will try to impart his feelings about aspects of art that are at best difficult to explain and must be felt rather than understood. The average club members will have had little background in art appreciation and the judge will be doing them a service if he can inspire them to look sympathetically at various art forms—perhaps the first step in them developing a sensitivity to the various things that a work of art has to offer.

Since it is within the reach of everyone to achieve a mastery of photographic technique, a sense of pride will prevent the person who aspires to judge black and white prints from judging the work of others until he has achieved a mastery of his own technique. It is doubtful if the critic can fully appreciate the beauty and tonal richness of the perfect print unless he has striven in the darkroom to obtain the same thing for himself. The same argument does not apply to the person who confines his judging to colour slides, since this medium is based on standardised processing and most slides exhibited will have been trade processed. He will, however, be a person who takes colour photographs, since only in this way can he learn about the various faults and colour biases to be expected.

A person's reputation as a judge will depend to a large degree on his success as a photographer and his integrity will not allow him to judge unless he has had some success with his own pictures. Acceptances in international salons will be a good proof of his ability and most judges will be current exhibitors, this showing their ability to hold their own amongst work of currently accepted standards. This is not to say that people who have made their reputation in the past should be excluded as judges. Their experience will certainly be valued, but their views on modern styles might be suspect unless they show themselves to be sympathetic to this work as well as to the traditional work of the past.

Another reason why a judge should have a collection of his own work which is of high standard is that he is frequently asked to give a "one-man show" of his work as an adjunct to his judging a club competition. It would be embarrassing if his work was lacking in quality and it is not likely that his judgment would be respected. One of the most important attributes of a judge should be his impartiality. He may specialise in one field of photography but should be able to evaluate all types of subjects when judging. Beware the judge who deprecates the work of the past or of the present. Some styles in retrospect will prove to have had little value, but the best work of the past, as well as that of the present, is destined to always be valued. The judge will be inspired no less by current masters than by those in the past. He will certainly have his own ideas about the various schools and styles of photography and be able to discuss them, but his opinions will be based on his own observations and will not merely echo the remarks of others.

No person should judge photographs unless he is intensely interested in photography as a means of expression and has a love for the photographic medium and for the distinctive qualities that it possesses. But in addition to his love for photography, the writer feels that the judge should have some acquaintance at least with the "space arts" (painting and the other graphic arts, sculpture, architecture and decoration), both to broaden his background and so that he can appreciate the place of photography as a means of expression as compared to

the graphic arts. Each of these art forms has things in common with the others and each is of value in broadening our experience.

“All arts are brothers, each one a light to the others.” (Voltaire.)

The writer feels that a judge is not complete unless he has an interest in art in general. In the person predisposed to acquire a cultural background, such a widening of interests is inevitable. In his own case, an interest in photography gradually led to an interest, as a viewer, in a variety of art media, this interest deepening over the years. Not only have these art forms given intense pleasure in themselves but they have also led to a greater appreciation of the distinctive qualities of the photographic medium, as well as an awareness of its limitations. Some may disagree with this, saying that their interest in photography leaves them little time for such diversions. This has certainly applied to some of the best practitioners of photography but here we are talking about the critic and surely his value can only be a function of his sensitivity and the wideness of his experience.

It would be no burden for the judge to have a broad cultural background— indeed there are many who would hold this to be essential. This would imply an interest in the “time arts,” as well as the space arts mentioned above. By these are meant music, literature, poetry, ballet and drama. Photographs occasionally have as their subject an allusion to some character from literature or the arts, express some philosophy of these arts, or portray scenes from the ballet or the theatre. But it is far less for this reason, than the fact that a genuine interest in these arts will develop a sensitivity in a person, an awareness of beauty, and an ennoblement of his manner of living to which is given the broad name of “culture.” Jack Cato expressed this very well some years ago when he said:

“As you add the great works of the giants of the past to your own experience, as you incorporate them into your own minds and make them part of you, not only will they elevate the spirit and enlarge the mind, but when you next stand in the presence of beauty it will have a new meaning for you; a power to thrill and exalt and inspire you to creative work of your own.”

A judge should be without question a person of sensitivity, yet at the same time have a degree of worldliness that will allow him to detect anything that is trite or overly sentimental. He should have the sensitivity to react to the tender moment, the sensitive statement, or to any message in the picture. Whilst he should have the skill of an engineer to detect anything faulty in the structure of a picture, he can only test its soundness by his sensitivity as a critic.

The artist in any field works to satisfy his own aesthetic ideals. He does not necessarily expect that his work will be appreciated by the average person, and it probably would not worry him if it was not. But he does hope that the sensitive few will see something in his work. perhaps even tune in to his very elusive wave length. The work of the artist sometimes can only be appreciated by the cultured few, and the critic should be one of these. In the words of the old Greek quotation: “There are those that look into the eyes of the Gods and those that look into the eyes of those.”

Surely this is a little beyond the scope of the average club entries, you might say, and this is no doubt true. But there will be occasions when a photograph of great sensitivity will be shown, which is at the same time very subtle and easily passed by. It would be inexcusable if the judge should overlook such a picture through his own lack of response.

All these thoughts on what the qualifications of a judge should be, might appear to be an ideal to which no person could aspire. Perhaps all we are saying is that the critic should be a person of sensitivity and taste. Given this, he might find that he will follow these paths instinctively. A critic will never cease learning, and it might well be, after a period of some years, that the successful judge will find that he has satisfied many of these ideals.

