

Judge's Comments - Group AA

Awards

1st Place: Aloe.

This is an elegant and simple looking photograph, it enhanced by the symmetry of the subject matter. It is well suited to black and white. Because I can see into the blacks this image invites investigation, and is a pleasure to the eye.

2nd Place : Waiting for the Storm.

Technically this image is exactly what should be submitted for a contest: it's sharp and the tonal range is correct and the idea behind it is simple. Based on the title however, I'm curious how this would have looked if there were a one plank wide area of the background on either the left or right. I also find the vignetting a little strong or perhaps abrupt. Overall the nicely done photograph.

3rd Place: Stainless spiral.

Again, here is an image well-suited for submission, although I would have hoped the sculpture could have been dusted before being photographed. Here the photographer has chosen an excellent vantage point which highlights the dimensionality of the sculpture. The lines created by the edge of the sculpture flow nicely, as do the lines within the sculpture against one another. The lighting enhances the sense of depth.

HM. When is the train coming?.

This image nicely captures some of the anticipation of youth, and would succeed even if it were not so named. I think the image would be much stronger if the two bodies on the left were simply cropped out resulting in a long tall image, and the child leaning out to the edge of the image.

HM. Hispanic Lady in a Straw Hat

Nothing much to comment on here; this is a nice portrait.

Comments:

Weston Beach Pt Lobos.

This image has a good range of tones and is suitably sharp. I can see into the blacks which enhances the quality of the foreground rocks. However, it should be leveled because the water is slanting down towards the left.

Waterfall at CHOMP.

This is a nice capture of a intentionally idyllic scene. I believe the image could have been enhanced by using a high dynamic range to bring out more detail in the blacks in the foreground. Additionally I might consider, or at least try, cropping down from the top just a bit so that the very tops of the blocks extend beyond the frame of the image.

Walt Disney & Mickey view Disney Animation Studios at night

This is a very satisfactory photograph of exactly what the architect intended us to experience when visiting the building at the studios. In that sense, the idea behind the photograph actually belongs to the architect, rather than the photographer. There's nothing inherently wrong with that, but it might have been interesting to approach the subject matter differently. Perhaps photographing Mickey and Walt from the front, and low, leaving the viewer to wonder what Walt is showing to Mickey.

Stage light stage.

Nice portrait of a guitarist apparently waiting to go on stage. I find his smile a bit disconcerting, however. I tend to think of a rugged fellow like that holding a guitar with perhaps a more reflective or even anguished look. This is almost an environmental portrait, but the smile results in it looking posed. The strong lighting is well suited to the subject matter. Ideally I might also have allowed either a little more room on the right in front of his hands or a little less room behind him so that he seems as if he is entering the photograph rather than leaving it.

Morning walk through walled city, La Guardia, Spain

The lines and direction in this image carry the viewer into it. An image such as this requires the person, but would have been enhanced had the woman been carrying something, suggesting she was on a daily trip of some kind, and not merely walking down the street. Perhaps a basket, a loaf of bread? It would answer the question in the viewer's mind "what is she doing there?" and establish her as a local.

Kizhi Cathedral

By leaning the image backwards off to the right, the photographer has emphasized the height and size of the subject. A good range of tones and sharp focus enhance this image. I am only sorry I can't see the rest of the top. Perhaps taking two images and stitching them together would have made this good photo even better.

Dropping in.

Very cute. It's sharp and well composed: resting the bottom edge of the feeding container on the very bottom of the photograph enhances the precarious balance. Nice shot.

Anyone home?

The single biggest issue with this image for me is the writing "Pacific Grove" on the stone, which continually distracts my eye. While its inclusion may of course have been the photographer's intent, I think the image would be stronger if the flowers and the rock were cropped out, and the left edge of the photo was in the door so.

Whale of a tale.

I spent several months in Alaska quite some time ago photographing whales for a government research project. This is a particularly nice capture because of the even spacing of the streaming water coming off the tail. In this case however I would have cropped the image in, and tried to make the resulting print perfectly square. Here is a case where symmetry would enhance the photograph, and make it stronger.

Plant life.

I love the idea and concept behind this image, but unfortunately the image is not sharp. There is therefore, no real resting place for the viewers eye. I would encourage the photographer to take this image again and pay critical attention to the focus and depth of field. What makes this image strong however, is the extremely nice tonality, ranging from the lighter tones in the center and working outward to the darker tones. If this image were critically sharp that light would have shown the texture in the plant. I think this image is worth trying again.

Ghost tree.

There is an old saw in photography that "if your images aren't strong enough, get closer." In this case, however, I think the photographer should have backed up a bit and caught more of the old tree. Conversely he or she could have moved in closer and concentrated on the abstracts. I commend the photographer for keeping this image sharp because the texture in the tree is critical.

Winery.

This image is essentially about texture, and to that end, I would think a bit more contrast would help. As to the composition, the position of the door seems unsure to me. I would suggest it

ought to be a little further to the left or centered. The photographer might also want to consider cropping down from the top to eliminate the top of the wall. I'm not saying that's needs to be done, but it might make the image stronger.

Waiting.

I think this image would benefit from being cropped in from the bottom and from the right so that the boat and its reflection on those edges match the cropping on the top and the left.

Pt Lobos to Point Sur.

I'm pleased to see that the ocean is level in this image. It might be a bit stronger if it were cropped up some from the bottom. The other thing I noticed is that there was some editing done in eight-bit mode in Photoshop, which is made apparent by the banding in the sky. I would suggest editing in Photoshop in 16 bit mode and/or a larger color space.

Osage song.

As a snapshot this is just fine, although I am a bit distracted by what appears to be the dog in the lower right-hand corner. I believe this image might have been well served had the photographer backed up a bit and included the dog and provided little more room between the sleeve and the edge of the frame on the left.

Mt. Dana and lake reflection, Tuolumne, Yosemite

Very nice capturing of the sense of place. I would think with a bit more contrast, this image would be improved. It might also work well with a much darker or even black sky (but do not mirror the black sky in the lake.) This would help the mountains stand out.

Mina - Pensive.

A nice job of capturing the expression, however this image suffers from focus problems. Even a soft feminine portrait, needs to be sharp around the eyes and lips, as well as the hair.

Mate of the tall ship The Lady Washington

This image is indeed nice and sharp and I congratulate the photographer on, however I believe the shutter was pressed at the wrong time, since I can put no meaning to the expression on her face. Judging by the title, the photographer thought her position as mate on a ship was of interest, but as an environmental portrayed, there are not enough clues to point at the ship or her occupation. In bright sunlight, one also needs to be careful about getting the eyesockets into shadow.

Last year's vine.

Extreme close-ups are extremely difficult to shoot. I happen to be a fan of macro work and the biggest issue is the depth of field. This image probably calls for focus stacking, as it would be much more interesting if the entire vine bit were in focus.

Iron bridge detail.

I appreciate the photographer's sense of line and structure in this image however I think it would be enhanced by cropping out the horizontal bit of the bridge at the top so that the upper edge of the photograph was the black underside of the bridge. I realize this crops into the circle, but I think it's worth the sacrifice. Alternately this would be an easy image to fix a Photoshop and simply blackout that light horizontal at the top and extend the curves and images, if one feels the circle needs to be maintained. The reason for removing it is that the image structurally consists of three parts: the vertical, the curves, and the circles and adding the fourth part of the top takes away from that simplicity. I also appreciate the dichotomy between the organic trees in the background and the steelwork of the bridge.

Heron-on-the-rise.

The biggest issue with this image is the unfortunate positioning of the herons head directly behind its wing. The image could be enhanced by cropping out approximately half of the light toned field at the bottom.

Guitar strum.

Here the central subject is the hand, and to emphasize it I would reduce the sharpness of the shirt and the sleeve in particular. Perhaps ever so slightly increase the sharpness of the hand to help center the attention on hand as well.

Guitar man.

My issue with this image is that the pose looks so contrived. While there is nothing essentially wrong with contrived images, the symmetry in this one, which is the conceit of this image, is not perfect, and I would think for this image to succeed it would have to be perfectly symmetrical. I also find myself distracted by the stool.

Gray whale diving off Pebble Beach.

The main problem with this image is the focus and camera shake. Additionally, without the title, there is no way to identify this as part of a whale's anatomy. The framing however is fine, as it leaves room for the diving animal on the right-hand side of the image.

Feeling pretty.

Cute kid. I might crop in the right-hand side of bit and the tiniest amount off of the top to get rid of that light distracting band in the upper left-hand corner. I would also Photoshop out the labels on her right shoulder.

Dos Vaqueros Salinas

This image becomes stronger the more it is cropped. I would suggest cropping it into a square with the lower right-hand corner containing the foreground Vaqueros stirrup.

Coastal drum beats.

I am completely distracted by the left most drummer staring directly into the camera. One of the most impressive things about Taiko drummers is their synchronicity, and that is almost, but not quite, captured in this image. Should a similar opportunity arise, I would concentrate on trying to capture an image or all of the drumsticks are in perfect alignment. This is most easily done with digital cameras on continuous frame shooting.

Cactus blossoms.

This image can be made much stronger by cropping tighter on all four sides, so that the cactus blossoms sweep from the upper right to the lower left.

Beach reflections.

This image includes too much, and too much white space in the middle. For me the point can be made by cropping out most of the image and leaving only the mother and child.

Adoration of the Crucifix

I would suggest removing the plant in front of the statue's face. Perhaps a little tighter cropping on the right would not hurt.