

Judges Comments - Group AAA

Awards:

1st Place: Antelope Canyon.

I gave this image first place because of the striking use of outlined forms, particularly the lighter one in the center of the image. Because there are so many slot canyon photographs, all of which are dramatic, I'm almost surprised that I picked such an image for first place. However, the striking white flame like form in the center and particularly as it continues into the sand make this a stunning example of such an image. Well done.

2nd Place: BMW – 4 cylinder.

Not only is this image well framed that well composed and the tones and textures are exactly right. This is a strong dramatic image which might serve well as the cover for a corporate annual report. The diagonal from the center of the image proceeds exactly to the lower right, and everything works to move the eye directly to the building.

3rd Place: Palo Corona trail.

This very well executed photograph seems flush with detail without being overly sharp and the lines of the trees bend to the left as the trail does. This draws the viewer into the image. Here again, the line of the trail leads exactly into the corner of the image. Very nicely done.

HM: Wheelbarrow.

I must admit, I think I like this for the feeling it conveys more than the actual image itself. Technically, the image is fine with a good range of tones and some interesting texture, but I find the left-hand upper two thirds the trashcan and pipes a bit distracting. Overall however, the image successfully conveys the feeling of work and age and thrift.

HM: Traversing the Valley

For me this image succeeds for several reasons: the photographer did not stand directly on the centerline; the image is divided dramatically 10/2 with a dark foreground and a misty light background; and the remaining road seems to rise almost vertically into the air. I think the vignetting could have been a little more subtle, however.

HM: MontereyBayAquarium

This extreme wide angle of the Monterey Bay aquarium is very well corrected in terms of distortion as well as in terms of tone and light. It is obvious that the photographer spent some time working on this image. And, while the viewer may think this image is about the buildings, it is at least equally about the smokestacks, which anchor the whole image.

Comments:

Professional building door.

There is for me, a pomposity and humor in this image. Is it Tammany Hall? The building reeks of old money. The image is almost completely symmetrical along the vertical, but some of the humor, at least for a photographer, comes from the curved line of the entranceway. Experienced viewers would tend to think this was taken with a wide angle lens because of that line, but then looking at the paving stones one sees it was not. It's hard not to smile when looking at this image.

Nieman Marcus Union Square

I can see what the photographer was doing in taking this average, but I find it overly complex. There is just too much going on for my taste, and I find it hard to discern the photographer's intent. I understand the tip of the Christmas tree; and the curve of what appears to be the rotunda; the carved face in the upper right fights for my attention with the star and the light bulbs stretched across the top. I spent some time looking at this image hoping that there would be a way I could crop it to make it stronger, but if there is I could not find it. I'd suggest that the photographer consider simplifying his or her images.

Monterey Fish market.

This is a well composed image with good tonality, but I find it to be only documentary; there is nothing in the image that involves me personally. The image can be made stronger by cropping the left very tightly to the edge of the boat.

Haleakala Flower

This is an example of a repeating pattern in nature, and while I find repeating patterns interesting, they are difficult to make involving to the viewer. Photographs of flowers are among the best sellers, and millions of such images exist. Taking a unique and interesting photo of a plant requires a lot of thought and time and skill. I personally find close-ups extremely interesting, and would encourage this photographer to continue, and to search out new angles and perspectives.

Fort Ross Bottles

I collect and photograph old bottles with some frequency and so I understand the interest and appeal. In my opinion, this image would be stronger if the half bottle on the left were removed by cropping as well as the sliver of bottle on the right. Here the issue is not so much the subject matter, old bottles, but the age implied by the cobwebs. The focus here seems just slightly off, and I believe the image would be improved by critical sharpness from the bottles through to the window.

Fog over Golden Gate Bridge

Personally, I would have cropped off the right edge to the end of the traffic on the bridge, and would have used Photoshop to straighten the left tower. While I understand this image was taken at night with a long exposure it suffers from sharpness problems. While

it is an interesting and slightly unique documentary image there is nothing in particular that pulls at me. It is a photograph of a place.

Flamingo, African Greater-Drinking

The interest of this image of course, is the flamingo seeing his own reflection. I'm not sure that flamingos are self aware, but the photograph poses the question. Therefore, I find this to be an interesting image. I'm pleased with the cropping and that the image is critically sharp.

Circus tent.

Here is another image of repeating patterns and lines which are interesting photographically, but that alone does not make a photograph. If the entire right half of this image were cropped off, so that no sky was showing in the image became vertical, it would be a more interesting photo, because of the mystery and uncertainty as to the subject.

Abandoned Long Ago.

This image is well exposed and sharp, but looking at the vast expanse of sky, I cannot help but wonder if there is not an equally vast expanse of prairie surrounding the house. The issue is that because the sky and prairie have equal weight in the image, neither one is predominant. Of course I was not there, but I cannot help but wish to have seen this house all alone in a vast expanse of Prairie or beneath an even vaster expanse of sky. In either of those cases, as a viewer, I would be left to ponder size and life and death. As it stands now this is a photograph of the place.

Yosemite Valley Dressed in Clouds.

This image is too dark. When I viewing an image of a sweeping vista I want to be able to make out all the details. It would be hard to know, for example, that bridal veil Falls is in this image.

Yosemite fire damage.

I like the contrasting tones in this image but it almost feels over sharpened although I don't see any direct indications of that. Normally one would expect the hazy trees in the background to be in fact, hazy. I think the reason this image does not work for me is that the three trees in the front divide the image into approximate thirds and don't give my eye any place to rest. While it is an interesting documentary image from the standpoint of photographic art, hanging on my wall, I would rather quickly grow tired of it. I don't see any way to remain involved with this image after I've seen it once.

Wharf tchotchke.

I understand what the photographer was trying to do here and interestingly it doesn't work because it is not enough chaotic. For example, look at the top row of skulls. All by itself is a long horizontal that might be more interesting than it is as an upper third of this image. If the second row and the remaining items on the bottom row were doubled or tripled in quantity so that there were no blank space on the shelves, then the "chaos of death masks" would have worked.

Washboard.

One doesn't often see wash boards and ringers these days, but this is still obviously in use since the wash basin is new. Here the photographer was apparently playing with lines and shapes, and reasonably successfully, I might add. Unfortunately it doesn't result in a meaningful image, but is more an image of experimentation. I would encourage the photographer to keep experimenting, as he or she has a good basic understanding of how lines and forms work.

Thinking large at Christmas.

Obviously the humor in this image and its title is more for women than it is for men. There is some repeating pattern broken by the leopard spot bra, which indicates an awareness of photographic tension. Other than that, I'm not sure what else to say about it. I'm afraid it's over my head.

Shack.

Way too much contrast. I'm also not so sure about the palm trees in the center of the image, apparently growing out of the roof, like the Eiffel Tower often grows out of tourists' heads. I do like the leading of the eye along the fence and gate to the shack behind. I also happen to have an affinity for old buildings and human detritus, and I find this image somewhat involving, but not strong enough.

MOMA Moment.

Technically, the issue is pixelation and JPEG artifacts. The lines and shapes are very busy, and a very sterile, and the addition of the person greatly enhances the image. However I'm afraid I don't understand the "moment." Yes, it's a moment, but to what end? How does it tie together into a cohesive image? If there is a larger meaning here, I'm afraid I fail to understand it.

San Andreas fault near Coalinga.

Despite the fact I am not a big fan of cyano type, this is a nicely done image. The sense of space is palpable. I would be interested in seeing this with the highlights of the intermediate range or ridge of mountains slightly brighter. The image might be a bit stronger if the bottom were cropped so that the road touched the bottom of the image or the lower right corner.

Rocks.

Yep: rocks.... Perhaps the photographer was taken by the number or arrangement, but to me this is simply a photo of rocks. The texture and tonality is nicely done, and the clouds look good. As to suggestions, I'd say that perhaps getting closer to look for patterns or other abstracts in the rocks as one possibility. Perhaps backing out and placing the group in a larger context?

Quiet morning at the Wharf.

Unfortunately, black and white is not well suited to depicting sunrises. The image is sharp and well exposed, but fails to involve me as a viewer. Perhaps that's because I live

here and have seen this image so many times. This photograph could be made stronger by cropping off the left-hand 25%, but that merely makes it more interesting graphically not anymore involving.

Porsche at Quail Lodge.

As it stands it's the photograph of the headlight of a Porsche, however I see several interesting abstracts within the. Here I would suggest to the photographer that he or she get much closer and look to make an image more abstract and less documentary.

Patas Monkey.

This image suffers from focus problems. The look in the monkey's eyes shows a level of intelligence, but for me that's pretty much it for this photo.

Lifeguard chair.

This is apparently an exercise in line and form and I would suggest that the photographer get a bit closer and more thoroughly examine the subject to and up achieving what I think here she was after. As it stands now it is exactly what it says it is a photograph of a lifeguard chair.

Kitty cat.

Cute cat. You'd be surprised how many snapshots I have of our 23 year old cat. Animals are best shown doing their common traits. (No that doesn't mean sleeping, in the case of cats.) For dogs, protecting or running; for cats, curiosity or play.

Just about full moon over Pinnacles.

Yep: moon. And out of focus, too. Titling it with a location does not enhance the image. Shadowy outlines of the Pinnacles rocks along the bottom edge would have made it more interesting. Raise the ISO; open the aperture; use a tripod; lock the mirror up if you can; and you'll end up with a sharp image.

Hassan II, Casa Blanca

Basically a good photograph that cries out for sharp focus to capture the intricate details of the building. The position of the man is excellent, right below the quite vertical line. I am distracted by the white vertical line at the extreme left edge. I would suggest cropping that just barely out, even though it leaves some of the white at the top. Such a change would emphasize the light coming in from the top and the depth of the cathedral.

Half Dome cable climb

This is a well-done documentary photograph with a wonderful sense of scale and size and nice tonal range from the light to the dark. I can see into the shadows I want to see into, and that makes halftone that much more real.

Grants Zebra Baby

This is a cute photograph of a zebra. While I do get some sense of youth and bewilderment, it is a difficult image to see because of the conflicting lines. The point of

the young colts age might have been more visibly made with some reference to the youngsters mother. If, on the other hand, the photographer's intent was the natural confusion of the multiple lines, then he or she succeeded.

Fort Ross apples.

This is a documentary photograph of a botanical subject. I'm not sure I agree with centering the apples in the image, and given the way the lower branch is falling to the right I think I would prefer to see the fruit more towards the left side of the photograph and perhaps slightly higher.

Far from home.

While the shoreline may be receding to the left, I would have adjusted it so that the shoreline was level. This strikes me as a documentary image of a vacation, and as such might bring up our own memories of "being there." it is well composed.

Egg in space.

Well, this is interesting. The completely blown out quite on the majority of the egg versus the texture visible in the reflection of the egg is "interesting." The two town background drawn along the diagonal adds a certain modern elegance to it although I'm put off a bit by the large lighter area in the upper right and the apparent bit of dust on the lower left. This indicates to me a photographer with a strong graphic sense, which I would encourage him or her to pursue. Simplicity is one of the hallmarks of good photography.

December Afternoon Light

A strong sense of time and place, however there is no need for the entire tree to be in the image, and I might suggest cropping in from the left hand side about 20% (where the light pole is against the library) to make a stronger image.

Cliffs in the distance.

This image would be stronger if the solid white the top were cropped out so that the most distant cliff ended at the upper right-hand corner. I would like to see the blacks opened up a bit, and the image suffers from excess sharpening.

Chinatown.

I believe I understand the intended clash between old and new but for me this image does not completely succeed at that. I find the splitting of the Transamerica Tower completely by the paper lantern disconcerting as I find the apparent hanging of the paper lantern from the top of the tower. I would suggest reframing this image, walking around and looking for a better representation of the clash between the traditional and the modern period and, while silhouettes have a place, I'm not sure that this image is best served by the excessively dark tones, and some detail in those blacks would have helped the image substantially.

Camo Butterfly.

I appreciate that some of the butterfly is sharp, that the image would have been better served if the entire butterfly were in focus. Further, butterflies are not the best subject for black and white. (This poor old guy looks like he's been through the mill.)

B&W Squirrel 2.

The apparent sharpening in this image causes the loss of all mid tones in the forward part of the squirrel's coat. This is an interesting stylistic technique which enhances the sense of rough fur. This is also in stark contrast to the squirrel's breast fur. I might suggest that if the artist is trying to turn this into a line etching that he or she go all the way and not just the head and shoulder of the animal.

Aspen sleeping.

I'm distracted by the fact that it's the dog's nose that is in focus, instead of the more traditional eyes (even if closed.) Just not completely sure why I would be interested as a viewer in the dog's nose.

Arlington National Cemetery.

Unlike many photographs of Arlington, in this one the engravings on the headstones are quite sharp and readable, providing even more impact than just the row after row of headstones. This too seems to be slightly over sharpened, but to good effect. I would be tempted to remove the leaves at the upper left, and perhaps to make the image stronger by cropping out the trees along the upper right, leaving nothing but headstones.

A Single Zinfandel Grape Bunch.

I particularly like the weight of this photograph, as the bunch pulls down on the vine. Additionally, the lines in the soft background seemed to radiate from a central point above the cluster simplifying the image, and making it stronger. Personally, I would lose the cobweb in Photoshop as well as do some subtle playing with the tones on each grape to add a sense of depth and dimension and roundness.