

PADRE TRAILS CAMERA CLUB

Black & White Portrait Competition December 28, 2015

A Category

01. Axel

What a beautifully peaceful baby. Think I would crop a bit more from the top and left sides, and perhaps deepen the image tones. I know the whole idea is for it to be light-feeling, but this seems too bright.

02. Burmese Man

This is a beautifully made image of a spiritually peaceful-feeling human being. Love the texture of his hair, and his knowledgeable eyes. It's really enjoyable. Again I dislike distracting spots, and would darken the white goo under the right eye and one bright white little spot on his chin. Also think I would crop down from the top some, just slightly cropping into his head.

03. Chimpanzee

A nice action portrait! This has it all - technical quality, strong composition, flow, texture and light. The nice textures all over this print are great. In this case the 'leading line' is mostly invisible -- it's the line of sight between the chimp and the stick he's eating. Looks like you've accidentally duplicated the chimp's hair in the upper background of the image, and those areas are visually confusing. And of course, the 4-5 dust spots bother me and could be easily taken care of.

04. David

This is so flattering a portrait of this man. Who was it who loved to capture the "decisive moment"? Henri Cartier Bresson, I think, in about the 1940's. That's what this feels like ... that I've just stepped into this moment. And the horizontal ocean background is so, so flattering as well. All that background softness balances well with the much sharper foreground. Attention was paid to every part of the frame. Nice!

05. Dia de los Muertos - **Honorable Mention**

I'm not usually so keen on the starkness of a direct flash in the dark such as this appears to be, but it worked well here. There's great tonal beauty and even some background detail on the right was preserved. You've maintained detail in the boy, and his somber expression adds to the mood. And I like that the leading line of the lighter railing coming in from the right keeps my attention coming to his face. Imagine the image without that, and it wouldn't be as strong. Nicely done!

06. Father and Child

This is soft, flat lighting and really lovely. The mood and emotion of this image make it successful, I feel. The man's protective, possessive hand and expression tell me that it's HIS child. No doubt about it. A very nice portrait.

07. Fernando

LOL! Don't you just LOVE a man/woman who knows how to have fun? Great job on a "traditional" photograph. Here, the image is a concept. It brings to bear what every studio photographer traditionally learns. Why? Our eyes go to the "hottest" or lightest part of the image -- his face. The main light off to the left side gave the face directional lighting, giving one side of the face more light and one side less. There's good detail in his/her hair, shirt, feathers, and even the background. The edges are vignetted down to help direct our attention to the center of the image. The face alone is sharp - other areas begin to fall off in sharpness. This keeps our attention on the sharpest features. Care was successfully given to the main light so that glare didn't hit "her" glasses. Looks like a second and third light was used -- one to keep detail in the hair, and a separation light placed behind the subject to give light to the background. You did a great job on that background light - not too much but not too little. And, last but not least - the nose. Looks to me like the maker also took into account a crooked nose, pointing it directly into the camera even though the face was turned slightly. This was a great study, and with such a gorgeous model!

08. Fisherman Jim Moodenbaugh

You did a passable job technically on this image, given what you started with. And your composition is OK. I'm going to be a little hard on you here, however, because you submitted this to the "A" category. Such a great beard and eyebrows, but the image isn't sharp! His eyes are dull and sad, and that's too bad as well. In a portrait photograph, the eyes convey a lot about the person, and are usually the single most important feature in the image. ESPECIALLY if they're looking right at the camera. So be careful when you snap the shutter!

09. Grammy & Papa

Their expressions are lovely, and I really get a sense for who they are. High key requires an intentionally overexposed background while still properly exposing your subject. Sounds easy, but it can be very tricky, and I always found that you just have to test and test and angle strobes in different directions until you get the density in your subjects you want, without getting flare from the background lights. The photographer did a nice job here keeping glare off the glasses, so congrats! Compositionally, however, I find this very weak. A lot more could be done with leaning them together at their heads, or seating them so she can nuzzle into him more ... or so many other things. Heck, they've been together a million years, why not show how emotionally close they are?

10. Gretchen at 36

Nice character study, and I like the slightly unconventional composition. Lines in the clothing are interesting, too. I don't know which photographer produced this image, and I'm just guessing here, but I think I see some of the same elements of this person's photographic eye that are also present in his later images. It's interesting that no matter how much we learn, we still (if we're lucky) work from gut instinct. And that's a great thing!

11. Hannah

This is sweet, and overall very pleasing. I like the little "angel's kiss" below her nose that the strong side-light gave you. As a snapshot, it's really nice. If you were making an attempt at creating more of a portrait, although I like the composition of her to the far right of the frame, I would not have cut off her hair. And I would've tried to get a little more light into the shadows on the right side of her face. Also, I would take out the distracting little glob along the left edge.

12. Iranian Woman in Traditional Dress - **Honorable Mention**

I adore this. Whether captured on purpose or by instinct, the shadows on her face are wonderful, especially the eyelash. Her eyes being in the shadows isn't typical, and we might traditionally frown upon it. But here it's wonderful. Here the friendly, clear, but almost hidden eyes add to the allure of this "low-key" portrait, especially as women are "in the shadows" in Iran. Who is it that said a photograph is worth a thousand words?? This one definitely is.

13. Jimay

Technically wonderful! Lighting ratio is great, and textures are clear and crisp. It's not a pure white background, and you may not have wanted one. The mid-tone background works well. Even his black hair has adequate detail. I would crop it tighter from the left and below, taking more of his torso away. Also, I'd like to see it a bit brighter/lighter overall. But that's just me!

14. Kari

This is technically very good. Background isn't pure white, but that may not have been the intent. There's a twinkle in the eye and a very pleasant expression. And great balance of foreground and background tones. I'm sorry but as a woman, I'm feeling that the lower 1/4th or so of the image is a bit too much to show. If this is a PR-type photo, I would DEFINITELY crop it in tighter all around, but especially from below, showing just a little bit of cleavage. But that's just me -- I think it's more attractive to keep them guessing!

15. Lily - **First Place**

This is drop dead gorgeous. Such impact! Love, love, love the interesting background, interesting dress, and interesting ringlets of her hat. The fact that the hat isn't on her head perfectly straight makes it all the better. But what REALLY makes this one sing is her innocent eyes peering up while her chin is down, and her little impish smile. Side lighting coming in from the right sets the details off beautifully. Great example of putting the subject in the center effectively. This is the kind of shot usually taken purely by gut instinct - always the best way when possible! The more experienced you are, the more you'll be able to compose your photographs by your gut feeling of what works and what doesn't, not by what's "right" or "wrong".

16. Lucinda

Nice portrait of this woman, and a technically good job. Turning the broad side of the face to the camera doesn't always work, but it looks OK here. Chair in the background is perfectly centered, with the turn of her head taking us into off-centeredness, and it works. You kept the glare out of her glasses, which can be a real trick. Also, the warmer face and cooler background allows her face to be a bit more separate from the background.

17. Mandrill - **Honorable Mention**

Beautiful portrait of this animal. I can feel his "soul", so to speak. The flat, soft light worked really well. The light whiskers, beard and nose draw my attention right into his eyes. Great job.

18. Marie, Young at 94

What spirit in this older woman! Your cropping is very forthright, and she's looking at you very forthright as well. It's too bad the image isn't sharp. If you were to do this again, I recommend using a tripod or higher shutter speed. Also, the maker should move left toward the light more, and have her turn her face into the light more. Despite all that, it's still a nice remembrance of a lovely woman!

19. Mother and Daughter Watching Parade

Another subtle story. Love the cropping on this - the scarf as a leading line into the photo, and the squareness of the composition. This is a great example of invisible leading lines, too -- each woman is looking in a different direction out of the photo, one to the left and one to the right. The shallow depth of field throws the younger woman out of focus and looking softer -- looking not as hard as the older woman. The symbolism doesn't escape the viewer. Nicely subtle and technically wonderful!

20. Mother and Child

A touching silhouette, and the background detail is interesting. I think good silhouettes are tricky, because they're 2-dimensional and the viewer's attention is harder to maintain. With attention mainly on her face and tummy, I think you could've cropped in more, leaving out her legs.

21. Mountain Lion

It's a beautiful face. Like the shallow depth of field. A harmonious arrangement of shapes, forms and textures. Nice whiskers. Pretty kitty.

22. Nicole

A very nice portrait of an attractive girl. Lighting really snaps. Another example of a textbook studio lighting setup. The whites of her eyes are quite bright, and pull us right in. I also like that she's off-balance, leaning back, which gives it a keener interest. Think I would darken her raised arm and hand, but that's just me getting kinda picky!

23. Old Miner - **Third Place**

There's a lot of insight in this emotional character study. It has a lot of harmony, with an altogether pleasing arrangement of lines, shapes, tones, etc. Visual gymnastics. I love this kind of shot. Even when photographers are not conscious about their choices, their broad experiences nudge them into selecting revealing examples that help people comprehend their purposes and give their pictures relevance.

24. Portland Painter Charles Voorhies and Son

I love the beautifully casual comfort between this man and his son, and I especially like the boy's tilted foot. Although I do like the overall movement of the composition, the somewhat anal Hercule Poirot in me is bothered by the straggly cord in the background. Image also appears grainy.

25. Portrait of an American Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Great technical quality, and very interesting composition and flow. Absolutely nothing detracts. Less is more. If you like it this flat, that's great, but think I might try to get a little snap into it.

26. Raelynn

She's a very cute girl. In this image I'm going to point out that if something doesn't add to the subject, it detracts from it. Unfortunately her nose is the perfect example of that. It detracts because light is splashing across it. Turning her head just a bit would probably have taken care of that. Cropping a bit more from the left side of shot would be helpful, too.

27. Renaissance Faire Child

This is technically quite nice. I felt instantly, however, that the thing in back of her head and the umbrella in her mouth just don't make visual sense.

28. Ron, a Homeless Man, in a Mood

His enthusiasm entirely makes this image. I like that this is a "decisive moment" - a concept made famous by French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson. He said "To me, photography is a simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression." Along those lines, most of what's in this image is great, but the form in back of his head is confusing at first glance. Here, it looks like the hat is painted on the wall. Or is it really on his head? Beware of "false attachments" - background objects that merge with the subject.

29. Shan Fisherman on Inle Lake

Lovely in every respect. I love the lines. Lines in front of him and then others in back give this image great depth, and strength, made even stronger by his serious expression. Generally, vertical lines lend a sense of movement; they also convey dignity, strength, and power. A subject surrounded by lines and shapes often does well when centered, as this was. Symmetrical or circular subjects - like his roundish face and hat - also do well when centered.

30. Silhouette

This is interesting, but unfortunately doesn't hold my attention for long at all. There isn't enough detail for me to look at.

31. Steve

Wow, beautiful, beautiful tonal range. Love the shimmering details in the metal and glass. Fingers in front of his mouth are a bit distracting, but otherwise I love it!

32. The Dancer and her Dad

Great lighting here. I think our brains and hearts seek relationships and stories as we go about our days. We're attracted to stories, like this one! It has strong lighting, and strong emotions. When we look at a photograph, we're sensitive to the photographer's intentional, and our imagined, narrative. She's wearing a crown and her make-up is quite done up. Did she just win a contest? Dad looks really proud of her ... and on and on my mind will go with my imagined story.

33. The Incredible Hulk

Well again, I think of this kind of thing as being in the wrong category ... as being a still life rather than a portrait. That said, I do like the angle of the shot, from above, and of course the lighting is terrific. Grrrrrrrr.

34. The Biker

Nice studio lighting once again. I especially like the wrinkles in his jacket sleeve. But I'm not too keen on the composition or the background, and it feels staged. Thumbs up to what? Would love to see this guy in his own environment ... draped over his "hog" with thumbs up, perhaps, truly being part of his own world. Motorcycle dude in front of studio lighting seems ... ummmmm ... counter intuitive? And yes, I do realize that this was just an exercise in studio lighting. :))

35. The Piercing - **Second Place**

Great visual impact. Nothing detracts. Less is more. Love the stud in the lip - on him, anyway. And such interesting composition. If all the elements that attract the eye are on one side of the photograph, the image may seem that it's about to tip over. It won't if you balance it with a

secondary element on the other side -- in this image a subtle ear ring and braided hair details. Light blotch in the upper lefthand corner has to go, however.

36. Urban Cowboy

I really like this composition, and you got some nice soft light into the shadow side of his face and hat. The leading lines in the background take us into him as well, which is a plus. Emotionally, I keep wanting to connect with his eyes, and wish he wasn't looking down! If you didn't want him looking at the camera, perhaps he could have been looking over the photographer's shoulder, or off to the side. But hey, he's a kid. He's going to look wherever he wants!

38. Mary

Mary herself looks great here, and I like the texture and character of the hat! Also, I like that you put her to the left side. Some people would have centered her, but I'm glad you didn't! However, with this background, you're fighting an uphill battle!! Your background is too focused, too busy, and too light. Altogether distracting from the face. Next time, try finding a much less busy background, use a smaller depth of field, and keep her physically further away from it. Also, as we get older and find we have more than one chin, it's very much more flattering to hide that by leaning the subject forward, so that the chin comes up and stretches that area out.

39. Stephanie

Mmmm. I applaud the maker for making this fine effort, and thank you. As an indoor studio portrait photographer for many years, this image reminds me of all the reasons why I QUIT working with artificial light and embraced working primarily outdoors "on location". I felt like my studio images had become just roadmaps of people's faces -- too simple, and with not enough information in them for me to grasp who they really were. But alas ... I'll try to be kind. However I'll be instructional, which may NOT be particularly kind! And since you entered the "A" category here, I think that's fair. Composition, lighting, expression, background, skin texture ... all of these things could use improvement. The harsh lighting of just one light (and perhaps a reflector) simply isn't flattering to a woman of her years. Unlike the character study of an old man outdoors, the intent of this studio portrait is to flatter her. Although the texture and detail of her hair is nice, look at all the other features that this lighting setup wasn't able to minimize -- i.e. heavy jowl, aging skin, heavy wrinkles, nose not in a flattering position, missing detail in one eye, etc. Things that would have helped this image, in my opinion, are the following:

- Lighting the narrower side of her face that's showing rather than the broad side
- Using a more interesting background, which would probably require another light source
- Using a reflector or additional light source to bring detail into the second eye
- Consider turning her face more into the camera, which would flatter her nose more
- Leaning her towards the camera to help stretch out her neck & jowls
- We're so dedicated now to having super-sharp images. But consider using LESS clarity and more softness, maybe even something soft-like around her shoulders
- Serious is OK, but this looks downright stern to me. Try for something pensive but not stern, with more life /warmth in her eyes and very slight smile on her lips.
- Instead of having eyes dead centered in a square image, give her some space to look into
- Either include the necklace or not, but don't crop into the middle of it

40. Wyatt

What a beautiful little boy, and I LOVE his expression, and eyes, and eyelashes, and that he's off-

centered a little. And the details in his shirt are great. Again, diagonal lines can be really wonderful and strong elements in a picture. I do like the direction of these background lines, that take our eyes from lower left to upper right, right into his beautiful eyes! However, had those background elements been less distracting, this good shot would have been a fantastic one. A smaller aperture or having the boy further from the grasses would have achieved that. Also, there's some strange murky coloring going on in his hair and part of his face. All that said, I still LOVE his expression!