Meet Eduardo Fujii

Eduardo Fujii is a self-taught fine art photographer living and working on the beautiful Monterey Peninsula in California. Early in his life, his parents introduced him to the arts and he fell in love with classical music and painting. Busy college life though distracted him from his artistic path until about twelve years ago when he chose photography to express himself as an artist. His photography offers hints of the influence music and painting had and continue to have on his artistic style. His images have an unquestionable painterly look and are full of mystery and lyricism.

He has been developing his style through a process of self-discovery and always leaves part of himself in each one of his images. Eduardo truly believes that every photograph is a self-portrait.

Shown here are the images submitted for this competition from Group Blue, and the combined Groups Green and Red, followed by Eduardo's selection for 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and Honorable Mentions. The Green and Red Groups were combined this time due to only 3 images having been submitted by the Red group.

01 - *African Dawn* byJulie Chen
STAR RATING: 4

This image delivers an abstract and poetic interpretation of nature. It would benefit from slight refinements to enhance clarity in some areas, but it already stands as a remarkable piece of fine art. The image is visually arresting, with the cheetah's intense gaze immediately drawing the viewer in. The warm hues of the sunrise and the delicate overlay of grass create a powerful sense of place and mood. The fusion of the cheetah with the landscape, layered through the texture of the grass, demonstrates an interesting approach. It transforms the image into a conceptual piece that goes beyond traditional wildlife photography. The ethereal quality and blending techniques elevate this work into fine art. It feels like a visual poem that celebrates the beauty and mystique of nature. The intent seems to be to evoke the essence of the African wilderness in a way that is emotional and symbolic rather than literal. The layered approach underscores this intent, though the exact narrative is open to interpretation. The narrative intent, while emotionally compelling, could benefit from a slightly stronger focal direction (e.g., emphasizing either the cheetah's dominance or its connection to the savanna). The cheetah, as a symbol of grace and power, paired with the serene savanna at dawn, is an evocative choice of subject matter. It highlights themes of wilderness, beauty, and fragility. The composition is balanced yet dynamic. The cheetah serves as the primary focal point, while the sun and tree provide contextual grounding and emotional depth. The eye naturally moves between the cheetah's intense stare, the texture of the grass, and the warm glow of the sunrise, creating a rich viewing experience. The interplay of textures, tones, and symbolic elements ensures the image holds the viewer's attention. There's an emotional resonance that invites prolonged contemplation. The grass overlay is well-executed, but some areas around the cheetah's edges could benefit from slight refinement to blend more seamlessly with the background. The edges of the cheetah feel slightly overlaid, which may break the illusion of integration with the scene. A smoother blending could enhance the overall cohesion. The image tells a story of coexistence, solitude, and the timeless beauty of the African savanna. It captures the mood of a quiet yet profound moment, leaving an impression of reverence and wonder.

02 - *Ballerina* by Sara Courtneidge
STAR RATING: 4

This image is an exquisite example of high-speed photography, capturing a fleeting moment with precision and artistry. The dynamic shape formed by the water droplets resembles a ballerina in motion, adding a poetic and anthropomorphic quality to the shot. The vivid blue background complements the water's clarity, creating a visually striking and harmonious composition. The image immediately grabs attention due to its technical mastery and the sculptural beauty of the water droplets. The sharp details and the vibrant blue background create a bold and engaging visual impact. The image transcends simple water-droplet photography, evoking elegance and movement. The use of high-speed photography is impeccable, freezing the motion with exceptional clarity. Lighting is well-controlled, ensuring that the water is luminous and reflective without any harsh highlights or distracting shadows. The depth of field is perfect, isolating the subject against the plain background. The central placement of the water droplet sculpture is highly effective. The ripples at the base and the upward movement of the water create a natural flow that guides the viewer's eye. The intense blue background contrasts beautifully with the translucent, silvery water droplets, creating a clean and minimalist palette that enhances the image's elegance. The choice to focus on a single water collision event highlights the beauty and complexity of a moment that is typically invisible to the naked eye. The composition is balanced and symmetrical, with the water sculpture as the clear focal point. The surrounding ripples add subtle context without competing for attention. The image evokes the elegance of dance and the fleeting nature of beauty, inviting viewers to interpret it on a personal level. While the image is technically and aesthetically excellent, it might benefit from additional elements (e.g., subtle gradients in the background or contextual hints) to evoke a stronger narrative or emotional resonance. Experimenting with slightly softer or colored lighting could add dimensionality and depth to the water droplets, enriching the sculptural quality.

03 – *Cheers!* by Sara Courtneidge
## STAR RATING: 5

This is a visually arresting image with an explosion of vibrant colors that elevates a simple subject, three glasses, into a work of art. The use of polarized light creates a rainbow-like refraction effect, imbuing the scene with energy, playfulness, and intrigue. The black background emphasizes the colors and adds a sense of drama, making the composition feel dynamic yet elegant. The bold interplay of colors and the strong contrast against the black background command immediate attention. The rainbow effect creates a unique and mesmerizing visual experience. The focus and sharpness are spot-on, capturing the intricate patterns of light within the glasses. Lighting is carefully controlled to accentuate the refractive qualities without introducing glare or unwanted reflections. The black background is perfectly even, with no visible noise or distractions. The arrangement of the glasses is well-balanced, with a slight overlap that creates depth and a sense of cohesion. The vertical symmetry of the stems adds to the elegance. The vivid spectrum of colors is beautifully rendered, with each hue distinct and well-saturated. The black background provides the perfect foil, making the colors pop. The choice of subject'a trio of glasses is both simple and effective. It allows the focus to remain on the light patterns, which are the true stars of the image. The triangular arrangement of the glasses draws the eye toward the center of the image. The composition is symmetrical yet dynamic, with the interplay of colors adding movement. However, introducing a slight variation in height or angle could enhance the depth and create more visual interest. While abstract, the image evokes a celebratory mood. The title "Cheers!" aligns well with the festive and vibrant energy of the image.

04 – *Face Off* by Chris Johnson
STAR RATING: 4
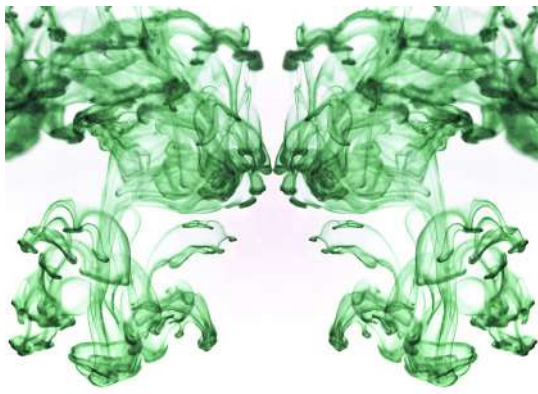
This image presents a fascinating and abstract composition using green ink swirls mirrored to create symmetry. The resemblance to two confronting figures or creatures ("Face Off") imbues the piece with both tension and curiosity. The high-key lighting and delicate textures of the ink give the image an ethereal quality. The mirrored ink patterns create a strong visual narrative, inviting viewers to interpret shapes and meanings. The concept feels deliberate and thought-provoking, evoking ideas of duality, conflict, or balance. The symmetrical arrangement is impeccably executed, drawing immediate attention to the "faces" in the center. This symmetry lends a sense of structure and order to the otherwise chaotic fluid dynamics. The use of green against a white background is refreshing and calming, while the translucency of the ink adds depth and intricacy. The high-key lighting highlights the delicate textures and layers within the ink. The transparency of the swirls is beautifully captured, showcasing the interplay between density and motion. The mirrored shapes evoke an emotional response and encourage viewers to project their own interpretations onto the forms, adding to the intrigue of the piece.

Areas for Improvement:

1. Framing and Cropping: The composition might feel even more dynamic if slightly more space were added around the edges, particularly at the top. This would give the ink forms more room to "breathe" and enhance their organic flow.
2. Variation in Symmetry: While the symmetry is compelling, introducing slight asymmetrical variations (e.g., denser patterns on one side) could add interest and a sense of natural fluidity.

This is a beautifully imaginative image that demonstrates technical skill and artistic vision. Experimenting with slight asymmetry or added contrast could elevate the image further. It is a captivating work that invites introspection and engagement.

05 – *Humming Bird in the Rain* by John Drum
STAR RATING: 2

This image captures a hummingbird perched delicately on a rain-dappled branch, showcasing its iridescent plumage and the surrounding water droplets. The placement of the hummingbird and the tight crop make it clear to me that the photographer's intent is to highlight the bird and its beautiful iridescent colors. The soft, muted background ensures it stands out as the focal point. The interplay of blues, greens, and yellows in the feathers is beautifully captured. The rain adds an evocative, serene quality to the image, while the water droplets on the branch enhance its tactile appeal. The overcast lighting is ideal for minimizing harsh shadows and maintaining the details in the plumage. The details in the feathers and the bird's eye are commendable, demonstrating technical proficiency in focusing and exposure.

Suggestion for improvement: I see this image illustrating a page of an encyclopedia on birds. The hummingbird's posture feels static, with a slightly awkward tongue extension that could detract from its natural elegance. A more dynamic pose or interaction with a fabricated or unexpected background could elevate the viewer's emotional connection.

06 – *Looking at You* by Lillie Grossman
STAR RATING: 5

This image presents a surreal and imaginative concept, blending human and floral elements in an unconventional and thought-provoking way. It successfully meets the criteria for altered reality and artistic effects, but minor refinements in blending and context could elevate it to perfection. The piece already demonstrates a strong vision and artistic intent, making it a standout example of surreal photography. The fusion of a floral bouquet with human features is highly creative, evoking themes of identity, nature, and transformation. The integration of eyes into the bouquet creates an eerie yet compelling narrative, drawing the viewer in for closer inspection. Through an imaginative execution, the photographer achieved and altered reality that blurs the boundary between the human form and natural elements, achieving a dreamlike quality. This type of conceptual work challenges traditional portraiture, leaning into surrealism. The choice of pink tones for the flowers against a neutral background provides a soft, almost playful aesthetic that contrasts intriguingly with the unsettling presence of human eyes. This duality adds depth to the image's interpretation. The sharpness of the flowers and their vibrant colors make them pop against the background. The placement of the eyes within the bouquet is carefully done, adding a sense of mystery and intentionality.

Suggestions for improvement: Blending and Realism: While surrealism allows for a degree of abstraction, the integration of the eyes into the floral elements could be refined to feel more cohesive. Currently, the eyes feel somewhat "placed" rather than naturally part of the bouquet. They should also made more prominent as it is the focal point of the image. It is too dark and gets lost in the midst of the vibrant flowers. You could also have some variations, ie, another image where the mouth is visible instead of the eyes. You could even display them side by side as a diptych.

07 – Magical Night **by** Carol Silveira
STAR RATING: 5

This is a captivating and atmospheric photograph that exudes mysticism and emotional depth. The interplay of light, shadow, and texture creates a compelling narrative that invites the viewer into a reflective and tranquil scene. The stark contrast between the bright, radiant sun and the surrounding mist immediately captures attention. The dual reflection of the sun in the water adds an extra layer of intrigue. The use of mist to veil the scene in mystery, combined with the silhouette of the figure, demonstrates a creative approach. The composition feels fresh and thought-provoking. The photograph evokes an emotional and almost spiritual response. The atmospheric lighting and minimalist design firmly place this work in the realm of fine art. The combination of strong contrasts, minimalist elements, and a moody ambiance speaks to a thoughtful and deliberate creative process. While the exact intent is open to interpretation, the mood suggests themes of solitude, introspection, or a connection to nature's ethereal beauty. The intent comes across effectively. You could consider using some of these words in the title. The composition is highly aesthetic. The curved boardwalk leads the eye naturally into the frame, while the light reflections and mist create layers of visual depth. The lone figure amidst a surreal landscape speaks to universal themes of human insignificance and awe in the face of nature. The curved boardwalk acts as a leading line, guiding the viewer's eye to the silhouetted figure and the luminous sun. The reflections anchor the composition, adding balance. The leading line of the boardwalk, the placement of the figure, and the mirrored sun effectively direct the viewer's gaze throughout the image. The droplets on the boardwalk and the soft gradients in the mist demonstrate careful attention to detail. The image feels like a quiet meditation on existence, solitude, and nature's beauty. It successfully sets a contemplative mood and allows room for individual interpretation.

08 – Mountain Pass **by** Carol Silveira
STAR RATING: 4

This image features a dramatic depiction of a rugged mountainside with snow patches and rich, warm tones that suggest an intense sunset or otherworldly lighting. It's a powerful example of how landscape photography can transcend into fine art through imagination and skillful execution. The warm, fiery tones create a striking atmosphere that elevates the natural scene into something almost mythical. The interplay between the light and the texture of the rocky cliff lends the image an emotional intensity. The added texture enhances the sense of age, mystery, and drama. This stylistic choice transforms the image into something beyond a standard landscape photograph, aligning it more with fine art. The upward diagonal line of the cliff face creates dynamic movement, drawing the eye toward the illuminated peak and the silhouetted trees. The placement of snow patches adds visual balance, breaking up the warm hues with cooler whites. The image feels like a glimpse into an altered reality, perhaps a forgotten land or a symbolic representation of resilience, withstanding the heat and cold simultaneously. It inspires viewers to interpret and project their own narrative onto the scene.

Suggestions for improvement: While the texture adds depth, it slightly overpowers the natural elements of the scene. A more subtle application of the effect could strike a better balance, allowing the rock and snow to breathe more naturally. The darker areas near the base of the cliff and in the trees could benefit from a touch more detail or lightening to maintain the image's balance and prevent them from feeling lost. The intense warmth of the top portion transitions sharply into the cooler, snow-covered lower sections. Softening this transition could enhance harmony within the image.

09 – *Riding the Clouds* by Lillie Grossman
STAR RATING: 4

This is a strong piece of conceptual fine art photography that beautifully blends motion, mysticism, and storytelling. Excellent work!

The photograph exudes a dreamlike quality with the polo player and the clouds reflected on the beach. This evokes feelings of freedom, movement, and a surreal connection between earth, sky, and sea. The blending of clouds with the sand creates a mystic, almost ethereal environment, enhancing the narrative of "riding the clouds." The image's conceptual depth invites viewers to interpret their own story, aligning perfectly with fine art photography's aim.

Suggestion: If the intent was to amplify mysticism further, consider softening the transitions between the player/horse and the clouds and ground by adding some clouds to the foreground covering parts of the horse's legs and more dramatic lighting effects for an otherworldly feel. The subject is well-positioned, slightly off-center, adhering to the rule of thirds. This positioning enhances the sense of motion. The reflection of the horse and rider in the mirrored surface adds balance and visual interest. The diagonal angle of the horse's stride and the polo stick guides the viewer's eye dynamically through the frame. The black-and-white treatment is a fantastic choice, as it emphasizes texture, contrast, and form over color distractions. Although, I would think the color version looks great too. The tonal range is pleasing, with good separation between highlights (the clouds and horse) and shadows (the rider's attire and beach reflections). The clarity and sharpness of the horse and rider contrast beautifully with the soft, diffuse nature of the clouds.

Suggestion: The water is not helping the dreamlike concept because it is bringing me back from the clouds to Earth. I suggest you blur it more. This would also eliminate the distracting breaking wave that is cutting the image horizontally. The image successfully captures a feeling of surreal escapism and grace. The motion of the horse and the poised stance of the rider convey confidence and fluidity. The interplay between the terrestrial and celestial elements makes the viewer feel like they're witnessing something out of the ordinary. Combining an equestrian sport with a dreamlike landscape is a unique and refreshing concept.

10 – *Rocky Seas* by Ken Jones
STAR RATING: 4

This is an excellent work with outstanding creativity and visual presence. This image immediately captures attention with its bold and unexpected combination of elements, a vibrant red boat appearing to plow through a textured cobblestone surface illustrating a though journey ahead. The contrast between the vivid red subject and the desaturated background amplifies the image's impact. The concept is imaginative and fresh. The visual illusion of a boat traversing cobblestones instead of water challenges reality, demonstrating a creative and surreal approach. This makes the work stand out in the realm of conceptual photography. The combination of contrasting textures, selective color use, and the surreal composition elevates this image beyond a simple photograph. It invites viewers to ponder its meaning and embrace its artistry. You might also want to try a variation of this image flipping the cobblestones upside down and find out how the new stones' pattern interacts with the boat. The bold use of selective color and surrealistic integration of water into cobblestones creates a unique style. This approach is distinctive and memorable. The intent appears to be creating a surreal scene that merges land and water, blending disparate elements into a unified, thought-provoking narrative. This is effectively communicated through the careful editing and composition. The subject, a vibrant red boat is intriguing and visually compelling. The cobblestone "sea" adds a layer of surrealism, making the subject more fascinating. The composition is well-executed, with the boat positioned prominently to command attention. The angle of the cobblestones directs the eye toward the subject, enhancing the framing and overall balance. The viewer's eye is naturally drawn to the boat due to its bright red hue and its contrast with the muted background. The implied movement of the boat through the cobblestones further guides the gaze through the frame. The editing is meticulous, particularly in blending the boat's wake with the cobblestone pattern. The image evokes a sense of adventure and defiance of norms, as if the boat is forging a new path. It could symbolize resilience or imagination breaking through constraints, leaving the story open to interpretation.

11 - *Run for your lives!* by Julie Chen
STAR RATING: 4

This image presents a surreal and imaginative concept that draws immediate attention through its unexpected juxtaposition of scale and environment. The oversized bird towering over a desert landscape populated with smaller birds creates an absurd yet captivating narrative. The title "Run for your lives!" adds humor and amplifies the whimsical tone of the image. The concept effectively alters reality, inviting viewers to interpret the scene as humorous, foreboding, or even metaphorical. The manipulation of scale is very interesting. The image has a sharp focus and rich details, particularly in the bird's feathers and the textured desert sands. The subtle hues of the desert and sky add a serene backdrop that contrasts with the playful narrative. The central placement of the oversized bird draws immediate attention, while the smaller birds create a sense of balance and movement in the frame. The wide expanse of the desert and sky enhances the surreal atmosphere.

Suggestions for improvement:

1. The lighting on the oversized bird's face could be better integrated with the soft, even lighting of the landscape which is coming from the left. Adjusting highlights and shadows on the bird would further enhance its realism within the scene.

2. Interaction Between Elements: The smaller birds and vegetation in the foreground feel slightly detached from the giant bird's presence. Subtle environmental effects, like dust stirred up or faint reflections, could enhance the sense of interaction.

3. The image is whimsical and fun, but adding more context or small, subtle details (e.g., footprints, objects hinting at why the bird is oversized) could deepen the storytelling and make the scene even more engaging.

Overall, this image demonstrates excellent creativity and humor, effectively transforming a mundane desert scene into a surreal spectacle. Minor refinements in lighting integration and environmental interaction could elevate it to a perfect score. This piece showcases strong imaginative vision and technical skill, making it a standout example of altered-reality photography.

12 - *The Forest* by Chris Johnson
STAR RATING: 4

This is a mesmerizing abstract image that uses intentional camera movement techniques to create an impressionistic view of a forest. The resulting effect immerses the viewer in a dreamlike and ethereal interpretation of nature, inviting contemplation and emotional resonance. The image's abstract nature and rich color palette immediately draw attention. The vertical lines of the trees create a rhythm that is both soothing and dynamic. The use of motion blur to transform a traditional forest scene into an abstract work of art demonstrates exceptional creativity. The color palette-cool blues and greens with earthy browns-creates a harmonious and serene aesthetic. The vertical motion complements the natural lines of the trees, enhancing the design. The forest, as a subject, is both timeless and universally resonant. Its abstract treatment adds depth, inviting the viewer to see it not just as a physical space but as an emotional or spiritual one. The composition is balanced, with the tree trunks serving as vertical anchors. While there's no defined center of interest, the overall texture and flow keep the viewer engaged. The image evokes a sense of tranquility and wonder, capturing the essence of a forest as a mystical, almost otherworldly place. It sets a meditative and reflective mood. Although the artistic style, soft, painterly, and abstract, distinguishes this image from typical landscape photography, this approach is not really fresh, however. It is still a beautiful image and pleasant to look at.

13 – Woman in Red by Ken Jones
STAR RATING: 4

This image presents a striking and abstract composition, relying heavily on high-contrast color blocking and minimal detail to convey its artistic vision. The heavy use of red and stark contrast immediately captures attention and evokes strong emotions. The abstraction and silhouette-like forms suggest a departure from realism, encouraging viewers to interpret the image on a conceptual level. The interplay of figure and shadow creates intrigue and mysticism, leaving room for personal interpretation and narrative speculation. The bold use of red as the dominant color makes a dramatic statement. This intense saturation could symbolize passion, danger, or intensity, depending on the viewer's perspective. The fragmented shapes and textures lend the piece a painterly quality, blurring the line between photography and digital art. The positioning of the figure with a clear stance and silhouette adds a sense of strength and presence. The implied secondary figure (possibly a shadow or reflection) creates depth and adds complexity to the composition.

Suggestions for your consideration:

1. While the abstraction is powerful, the lack of clear context or details might alienate some viewers. Including subtle hints or elements that connect the image to a deeper story could enhance engagement.

2. The harshness of the red could overwhelm subtler details in the image. Balancing the tonal range or incorporating slight gradations in the red areas could help guide the viewer's eye and add dimensionality. The edges of the figure and shapes are slightly rough and pixelated in places. Refining these transitions could enhance the image's polish and overall impact.

3. The dominance of red might feel one-dimensional to some viewers. Incorporating complementary or contrasting colors in small amounts could provide visual relief while enhancing the drama.

Overall, this image stands out as a daring and imaginative piece, effectively creating an altered reality through abstraction and color. Refining some of the technical aspects and providing a stronger narrative connection would elevate it further. This piece demonstrates a strong sense of artistic identity and conceptual ambition.

01-1937 Chevy Coupe, Bodie, Ca by Jeff Hobbs
STAR RATING: 5

The image presents an old, rusty car in a desolate, grassy field with a dimly lit house in the background. The lighting is dramatic, with the car's headlights and interior illuminated, creating a sense of mystery and intrigue. The concept of an abandoned vehicle in a ghostly setting is not entirely new, but the execution here is quite compelling. The use of light to highlight the car against the dark, moody landscape adds a layer of originality. The image effectively transports the viewer to a different time and place, evoking a sense of nostalgia and perhaps a hint of the supernatural. The lighting and composition suggest a story, inviting the viewer to imagine the history behind the scene. The imaginative use of light to create a surreal atmosphere is well-executed. The photographer demonstrates a strong understanding of lighting techniques and composition. The contrast between the illuminated car and the dark surroundings creates a striking visual impact. The choice of a low angle, looking up at the car, adds to the dramatic effect. The post-processing appears to be minimal but effective, enhancing the mood without overpowering the natural elements of the scene. The image is visually striking, with the car's headlights and interior lighting serving as focal points that draw the viewer in. The muted colors and the stark contrast between light and dark create a powerful and memorable visual experience.

Suggestions for your consideration:

1. Consider adding subtle stars to the sky to make the image more balanced with care not to distract from the main subject.

2. Experiment with different color grading techniques to see if they can enhance the mood even further. Sometimes a slight shift in color can dramatically change the feel of an image.

3. Composition Variations: Try different angles or perspectives to see if they can offer a fresh take on the scene. A slightly elevated angle or a closer crop might provide a different emotional impact.

Overall, this is a beautifully executed photograph that showcases a strong understanding of creative and artistic photography. Keep up the excellent work!

02-Abstract Flowers and Glass Flower by Brian Spiegel
STAR RATING: 4

This image presents a vibrant and abstract composition of flowers with what appears to be water droplets, creating a surreal and dreamlike effect. The use of multiple exposures or layering techniques adds a unique twist to a traditional floral photograph, showcasing an altered reality. The concept pushes the boundaries of conventional photography, offering a fresh perspective on a common subject. The image is highly imaginative, with the overlapping flowers and water droplets creating a sense of depth and complexity. The use of color and light adds to the ethereal quality of the photograph, inviting the viewer to explore the intricate details and textures. The image evokes a sense of wonder and curiosity, transporting the viewer to a fantastical world. The use of color is bold and striking, with the vibrant hues of the flowers contrasting beautifully against the darker background. The water droplets, which look like jewels, add a touch of whimsy and playfulness to the composition, enhancing the overall visual impact. The image is visually striking, with the complex arrangement of flowers and water droplets creating a dynamic and engaging composition. The use of color and light draws the viewer in, inviting them to explore the intricate details and textures. The abstract nature of the image adds to its visual impact, making it a memorable and captivating piece. A suggestion would be to darken the bottom left to cover the out-of-focus flower, which is a bit distracting.

Overall, this is a beautifully executed and highly imaginative photograph that showcases a strong understanding of creative and artistic photography. Keep up the excellent work, and continue to push the boundaries of conventional photography!

03-Amaryllis by Bill Shewchuk
STAR RATING: 5

This image features a beautiful flower against a textured, vintage-style background. The concept of capturing the beauty in decay is not new, but the execution here is quite evocative. The use of a distressed, aged texture overlay adds a layer of originality, transforming a simple floral photograph into a piece that evokes nostalgia and the passage of time. The use of artistic techniques to enhance the concept is well-executed. The concept, however, while beautifully presented, is not fresh. The textured background and the muted, earthy tones create a sense of history and melancholy. The flower, with its delicate petals and faded colors, invites the viewer to contemplate the transience of life and beauty. The overall effect is dreamlike and introspective. The photographer demonstrates a strong understanding of post-processing techniques to achieve an artistic effect. The texture overlay is well-integrated, adding depth and character to the image without overpowering the subject. The color palette is subtle and harmonious, enhancing the vintage feel. The image is visually striking, with the textured background and the wilted flower creating a harmonious and evocative composition. The use of light and shadow adds depth and dimension, drawing the viewer in. The overall mood is somber and reflective, making a strong emotional impact. The photograph is creative and visually impactful, with a strong sense of mood and atmosphere.

Suggestions for your consideration:

1. Color Exploration: While the muted, earthy tones work well, consider exploring different color grading techniques to see if they can add another layer of mood or contrast to the image.

2. Additional Elements: Think about incorporating subtle additional elements that could enhance the narrative. For example, a faint, complementary object in the background or a slight vignette could add depth and focus to the flower.

3. Composition variations: consider moving the camera and exploring other angles of this beautiful flower.

Overall, this is a beautifully executed and emotionally resonant photograph that showcases a strong understanding of creative and artistic photography. Keep up the excellent work, and continue to explore new ways to present familiar subjects in unique and evocative ways.

04-Cineraria Blooms ICM in BW by Jared Ikeda
STAR RATING: 5

The photograph is creative and visually impactful, with a strong sense of originality and imagination. This image presents a dynamic and abstract composition of flowers captured with motion blur, creating a sense of movement and energy. The use of black and white adds a timeless and dramatic quality to the photograph. The abstract nature of the image invites the viewer to interpret the scene in their own way, evoking a sense of curiosity and wonder. The use of long exposure or intentional camera movement (ICM) creates a striking and unconventional representation of the flowers. The composition is dynamic and engaging, with the blurred lines and shapes creating a sense of depth and movement. Although the black-and-white treatment is effective, consider exploring different color grading techniques to see if they can add another layer of mood or contrast to the image. Sometimes, a subtle hint of color can dramatically change the feel of an image. Also, consider darkening the bottom of the image or flipping the background upside down so it is darker at the bottom to "ground" the image and prevent my eyes from running out of the picture.

Overall, this is a beautifully executed and highly imaginative photograph that showcases a strong understanding of creative and artistic photography. Keep up the excellent work, and continue to push the boundaries of conventional photography!

05-*Dark Pom* by Sandie McCafferty
STAR RATING: 4

The image is creative and visually impactful, with a strong sense of altered reality and artistic flair. With a bit more context or narrative, it could achieve an even higher level of excellence. The image presents a striking and somewhat surreal depiction of what appears to be a passion fruit with an unusual, almost otherworldly texture and form. The use of black and white adds a dramatic and timeless quality, enhancing the mystery and intrigue of the subject. The lighting is well-executed, highlighting the textures and creating a sense of depth and dimension. The image successfully transports the viewer into an altered reality. The subject matter is transformed into something that feels both familiar and alien, inviting the viewer to question and explore. The choice of monochrome further emphasizes the imaginative aspect, as it removes the distraction of color and focuses on the shapes and textures. The high contrast and the play of light and shadow create a powerful visual impact. The texture of the subject is beautifully rendered, adding a tactile quality to the image.

Suggestions for improvement:

1. Context and Narrative: While the image is visually striking, it could benefit from a stronger narrative or context. Adding elements that hint at a story or a deeper meaning could enhance the viewer's engagement and interpretation.

2. Experimentation with Angles: Exploring different angles or perspectives could add more dynamism and unpredictability to the composition.

3. Post-Processing: Although the black and white treatment is effective, experimenting with different tonal ranges or selective coloring could add another layer of visual interest. Keep up the fantastic work, and continue to push the boundaries of your imagination and technical skills!

06-*Del Monte Beach* by Janet Azevedo
STAR RATING: 3

The image is creatively executed with a strong sense of tranquility and artistic flair. With a bit more contrast and a stronger focal point, it could achieve an even higher level of excellence. This image captures a serene seascape with a beautiful blend of motion blur and soft beautiful colors. The long exposure technique used here creates a dreamy, ethereal quality that transforms a familiar scene into something more abstract and contemplative. The horizontal lines and gradual transition of colors from the sky to the water add a sense of tranquility and harmony. The use of motion blur to depict the movement of the water and the sky is imaginative and effective. It invites the viewer to pause and reflect, offering a sense of calm and introspection. The choice of a minimalistic composition allows the viewer to focus on the textures and colors, enhancing the imaginative aspect of the image. The color palette is subtle yet impactful, with the soft hues of pink, purple, and blue creating a soothing and visually pleasing atmosphere. The composition is well-balanced, with the horizon line dividing the frame into two equal parts, adding to the overall harmony of the image. While the image is beautifully composed, it is not completely original and it could benefit from a stronger focal point or an element that draws the viewer's eye. This could be achieved by including a subtle yet distinct subject, such as a rock or a distant boat or even something totally unexpected, to add depth and interest.

Keep exploring and refining your techniques, and continue to create images that evoke emotion and imagination!

07-*Disintegration* by Bill Shewchuk
STAR RATING: 3

This image presents an intriguing concept by combining a straightforward portrait of a photographer with an artistic, disintegrating effect on one side. The juxtaposition of reality and altered reality is thought-provoking. The idea has the potential to have a strong sense of surrealism and artistic flair. However, the final results is not very visually engaging. With a bit more storytelling, enhanced color and contrast, and a more dynamic composition, it could achieve a higher level of excellence. The disintegration effect suggests themes of transience, transformation, or the passage of time, inviting the viewer to interpret the meaning behind the visual. The choice to apply this effect to the photographer himself adds a personal and introspective element. The transition between the intact and fragmented parts of the image could be better executed, creating a seamless and visually striking result.

Suggestions for improvement:

1. Storytelling: the image could benefit from a stronger narrative or context. The photographer's face and posing doesn't follow what is happening to him. Adding elements that hint at a story or a deeper meaning could enhance the viewer's engagement and interpretation. For example, including subtle environmental details or additional props that complement the theme could enrich the storytelling aspect.

2. Color and Contrast: The current colors are somewhat muddy and the white balance is off.

3. Composition: The placement of the subject is central, which is effective, but exploring different angles or perspectives could add more dynamism and unpredictability to the composition. For example, a slightly off-center placement or a different camera angle could create a more engaging visual experience.

Keep exploring and refining your techniques, and continue to create images that evoke emotion and imagination!

08-*Distorted Reflection of Vintage Rolls Royce* by Don Eastman
STAR RATING: 3

The choice of subject matter, a beautifully maintained vintage car, is appealing and evokes a sense of nostalgia. ike personality, making it visually engaging. The bright green car juxtaposed with the mirrored distortions creates a playful and dreamlike quality. The badges and details add layers of interest, drawing the viewer deeper into the image. While the image is well-executed, the concept itself is fairly straightforward does not transport the viewer into an altered or imaginative reality. The photograph demonstrates good technical skills, with sharp focus and clear details. The composition is well-balanced, and the lighting effectively highlights the car's features.

Suggestions for improvement:

1. Context and Narrative: While the visual effect is intriguing, the image might benefit from an additional layer of narrative or context that engages the viewer emotionally or intellectually.. Incorporating elements that hint at a story or a deeper meaning could enhance the viewer's engagement. For example, including a person interacting with the car or adding environmental details that complement the theme could enrich the narrative aspect.

2. Composition Balance: The background is too busy. It could be refined (darkened, blurred, distorted more, etc. to enhance focus on the car while minimizing distractions.

Keep exploring and refining your techniques, and continue to push the boundaries of your imagination and artistic vision!

09-Distorted Window in Sydney Opera House by Don Eastman
STAR RATING: 2

This image uses a reflective or refractive surface to distort a serene waterside scene, likely capturing the interplay of modern architecture, natural elements, and motion on the water. The wave-like effect applied to both the water and the architecture creates a visual connection between nature and human-made structures. The presence of the boats and their motion adds an element of energy and movement, contrasting with the otherwise tranquil environment. The composition appears to be a straightforward capture of a real-world scene without any altered reality or imaginative elements. The segmentation of the image with cables in the foreground adds a layer of depth but does not contribute significantly to an imaginative narrative. The photograph is well-executed in terms of technical quality, with clear focus and good exposure. However, it lacks artistic effects that would transform the scene into something more surreal or conceptual. The ropes in the foreground create an interesting visual element, but they do not alter the reality of the scene in a way that pushes the boundaries of traditional photography or provoke deep thought.

Suggestions for improvement:

1. Enhancing Visual Impact: While the distortion is intriguing, it feels somewhat subtle compared to the previous image. Experimenting with a stronger angle or more extreme distortion could heighten the imaginative quality.

2. Context or Storytelling: The image captures a moment of visual interest but lacks a narrative or emotional hook. Introducing elements that tell a story or evoke an emotional response could make the image more engaging. For example, add elephants or cows flying over the boats like they are looking for a landing spot.

3. Clutter and Simplification: The background (buildings and foliage) appears busy. Simplifying the composition or finding a cleaner perspective might focus attention on the distortion effect and the boats' dynamic motion.

4. Lighting: The lighting appears flat. Waiting for a time of day when the sunlight creates dramatic highlights and shadows might add dimension.

Overall, while the photograph is technically sound and captures a beautiful scene, it lacks the imaginative and original elements required to achieve a higher rating.

10-Extruded Bubbles by Sandie McCafferty
STAR RATING: 3
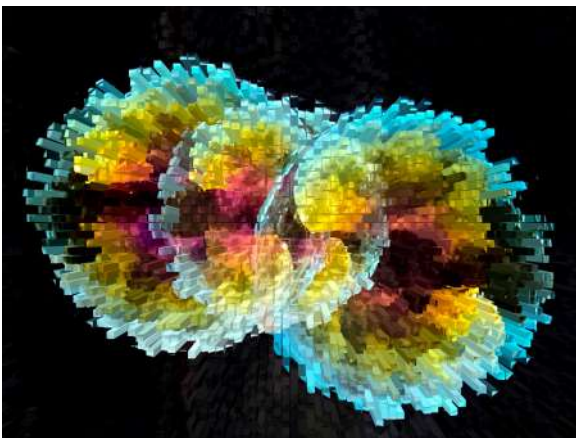
This image is an example of digital art, featuring a vibrant, pixelated flower-like form against a dark background. The concept is interesting with its almost fractal-like aesthetic. The use of color and form creates a sense of depth and complexity that is visually engaging. The pixelated effect and the choice of colors give the image an otherworldly, almost ethereal quality. The way the light seems to emanate from within the flower adds to the sense of wonder and mystery, inviting the viewer to explore the intricate details. The artistic effects in this image are impressive. The pixelation and the gradient of colors create a dynamic and visually stimulating composition. The contrast between the bright, vibrant flower and the dark background enhances the overall impact, making the flower the focal point of the image.

You might want to try some variations. For example, a smaller pixelated flower against a vast negative space would increase the visual impact. Also try rotating the flower to a vertical position.

Overall, the image is creative and visually impactful, with a good blend of digital and natural elements.

11-*General Sherman in Christmas Attire* by Brooks Leffler
STAR RATING: 4

The image features a large tree adorned with colorful, star-like lights, set against a snowy forest backdrop. The concept is whimsical and festive, blending natural and artificial elements in an imaginative way. The use of lights on the tree adds a unique and playful touch, making the image stand out. The photographer demonstrates a good level of imagination. The combination of the natural setting with the artificial lights creates a sense of wonder and magic. The snowy environment enhances the festive atmosphere, inviting the viewer to immerse themselves in the scene. The artistic effects in this image are well-executed. The lights on the tree are vibrant and eye-catching, contrasting nicely with the muted tones of the snowy forest. The composition is balanced, with the tree as the central focus, drawing the viewer's attention immediately. The visual impact of this image is strong. The image evokes a sense of joy and celebration, making it both visually and emotionally engaging.

The image is creative and visually impactful, with a unique blend of natural and artificial elements. However, to achieve a higher rating, the image could benefit from more refined execution and additional layers of conceptual depth.

Suggestions for Improvement:

1. Consider lowering the brightness of the sky to ensure it doesn't distract from the main subject.

2. Compositional Elements: Adding more compositional elements, such as people or animals interacting with the scene, could enhance the narrative and emotional resonance of the image. This would provide a sense of scale and context, making the scene more relatable.

12-*Light Painting Forground with Milkyway* by Jeff Hobbs
STAR RATING: 5

The concept is intriguing and evokes a sense of nostalgia and mystery. The juxtaposition of the man-made objects against the natural backdrop of the night sky creates a compelling narrative. The photographer demonstrates a good level of imagination and post-processing skills. The choice of black and white enhances the mood and adds a timeless quality to the scene. The starry sky provides a sense of vastness and wonder, contrasting with the earthly, abandoned objects below. The artistic effects in this image are well-executed. The black and white treatment adds a dramatic and nostalgic feel. The composition is balanced, with the truck and the structure providing strong foreground elements that draw the viewer in, while the starry sky offers a captivating background. The visual impact of this image is very strong. The contrast between the dark, abandoned objects and the luminous night sky creates a striking and memorable scene. The image evokes a sense of solitude and the passage of time, making it both visually and emotionally engaging.

Suggestions for Improvement:

1. Additional Elements: Consider adding more elements to the scene that enhance the narrative. For example, including a faint, eerie light emanating from the truck or the structure could add a layer of mystery and intrigue. This would also contribute to balance the brightness from the stars.

13–Man One Moment Before It All Went Wrong by Brian Spiegel
STAR RATING: 2

The image features three distinct elements: a lighthouse, a fisherman at the helm of a ship, and a totem pole. These elements are combined in a single frame, which, along with the title, suggests an attempt at creating a narrative or a thematic connection. However, the combination feels somewhat arbitrary and lacks a cohesive story or concept that ties them together meaningfully. The elements are visually interesting on their own, but the overall composition does not evoke a strong sense of altered reality or imaginative coherence. The lighthouse, fisherman, and totem pole are all recognizable and realistic, without any fantastical or surreal elements that would elevate the image to a higher level of creativity. The image does show some attention to detail in the rendering of the objects, particularly the fisherman and the totem pole. The textures and colors are well-executed. The lighting and composition are straightforward, without any dramatic or artistic effects that would enhance the visual impact. It lacks a compelling narrative that would draw the viewer in. The elements are evenly spaced and do not interact with each other in a way that creates tension or interest.

Suggestions for Improvement:

1. Concept Development: Spend more time developing a clear and cohesive concept that ties the elements together in a meaningful way. Consider what story or emotion you want to convey and how each element contributes to that narrative.

2. Imaginative Elements: Introduce more fantastical or surreal elements to push the boundaries of imagination. This could include unusual lighting, unexpected interactions between objects, or a more dreamlike quality to the scene. What did go wrong? How?

The overall composition lacks a cohesive concept, imaginative flair, and artistic effects that would make it stand out as a truly creative and visually impactful piece.

14–Night Snack on the Steps by Carol Fuessenich
STAR RATING: 3
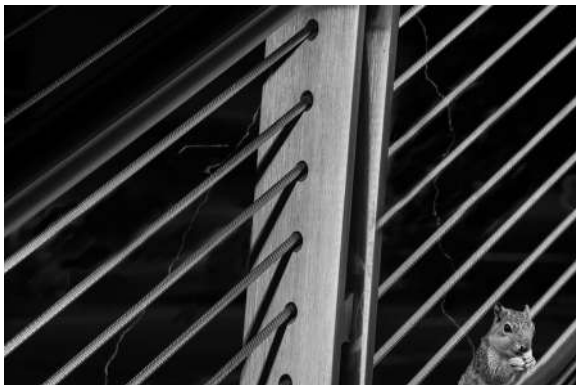
The contrast between the natural and man-made elements is intriguing and creates a sense of tension. The use of black and white enhances the dramatic effect and draws attention to the textures and patterns within the scene. The concept is original and thought-provoking, as it invites the viewer to consider the relationship between nature and human-made structures. The image demonstrates a good level of imagination by placing the squirrel in an unexpected context. The stark, geometric lines of the cables and beam contrast with the organic form of the squirrel, creating a surreal and almost dreamlike quality. The addition of lightning-like effects in the background adds an element of fantasy and heightens the imaginative aspect of the image. The use of black and white is effective in emphasizing the textures and contrasts within the scene. The squirrel's presence adds a touch of whimsy and unexpectedness, making the image memorable but unfortunately, the squirrel, being the focal point, does not draw the viewer's eye immediately.

Suggestion for improvement: Make the squirrel more prominent, either bigger or brighter than the bright structural beam that cuts the image vertically in half. The beam is not the focal point, the squirrel is. You could also move the squirrel to a lower third point instead of at the edge of the frame. Also, having the squirrel behind the cables would be more interesting.

15–Norman at Warp Speed by Janet Azevedo
STAR RATING: 3

This image attempts to capture a dynamic and energetic dog in motion, with a strong use of motion blur. The concept of capturing movement and speed is well-intentioned. The blurred effect gives the image a unique and abstract quality, making it stand out from traditional, sharply focused photographs. The originality lies in the choice to emphasize motion over static clarity, which is a creative approach. The use of motion blur to create a sense of chaos and energy is imaginative and adds a layer of intrigue. The viewer is left to interpret the details and context, which can be both a strength and a challenge. The artistic effects in this image are primarily achieved through the use of motion blur and the play of light and shadow. The blur creates a painterly quality, with streaks of light and color that add depth and texture to the scene. The composition is dynamic, with the subject's form and the surrounding environment merging into a cohesive, albeit abstract, whole. The choice of a low angle adds to the dramatic effect, making the viewer feel part of the action. The viewer's eye is drawn to the central figure, and the surrounding blur creates a sense of movement and energy. The play of light and shadow adds to the overall mood and atmosphere, making the image visually interesting.

Suggestions for Improvement:

1. Color and Lighting: The play of light and shadow is effective, but you could experiment with different color treatments or lighting conditions to see if they enhance the mood and atmosphere of the image. For example, using a more dramatic lighting setup could heighten the sense of action and urgency.

3. Compositional Refinement: The composition is dynamic, but all the leading lines direct the eyes to a point where there is nothing. Maybe adding a person's shadow our something completely unexpected could suggest what the dog is pursuing.

Overall, the image is creative and impactful, with a strong use of motion blur and dynamic composition. However, it could benefit from a clearer concept or narrative to elevate it to a higher level of artistic expression.

16–Red Maple in the Wind by Jared Ikeda
STAR RATING: 5

The concept of isolating a natural element and presenting it in an abstract, almost surreal manner is intriguing. The use of color and contrast creates a strong visual impact and draws attention to the delicate forms of the leaves. The originality lies in the choice of color and the dramatic presentation of a simple subject. The photographer demonstrates a good level of imagination by transforming an ordinary subject into something more abstract and visually engaging. The use of a vivid red color against a dark background creates a sense of drama and mystery. The textured background adds depth and complexity, making the image more visually interesting. The viewer is invited to explore the details and interpret the scene in their own way. The artistic effects in this image are primarily achieved through the use of color, contrast, and texture. The textured background adds a layer of visual interest and depth, enhancing the overall aesthetic. The composition is simple yet effective, with the branch and leaves arranged in a way that guides the viewer's eye through the image. The red leaves immediately draw the viewer's attention, and the textured background adds depth and complexity. The overall mood is mysterious and intriguing, making the image visually striking and memorable.

Suggestions for Improvement:

1. Depth of field: The composition is simple and effective, but the out-of-focus leaves at the top are distracting and have no place in an image that looks like a drawing.

17-Selfme **by** Charlie Gibson
STAR RATING: 4

The image presents a stylized, artistic interpretation of a portrait. The use of a sketch-like filter gives it a unique, hand-drawn quality that sets it apart from traditional photography. This approach effectively blurs the line between photography and illustration, creating an altered reality that is both intriguing and visually engaging. The application of the sketch filter is well-executed, adding texture and depth to the image. The monochromatic color scheme enhances the dramatic effect, drawing attention to the subject's facial features and expressions. The glasses and the slight tilt of the head add a touch of personality and character to the portrait. The image has a strong visual impact due to its unconventional style and the intense gaze of the subject. The close-up framing and the detailed rendering of the face make it a compelling piece that captures the viewer's attention.

Areas for Improvement:

1. Background: The background is somewhat distracting with its textured pattern. A simpler or more complementary background could help focus more on the subject.

2. Concept and narrative: try creating a more interesting narrative by collaging some elements that are important to the person being portrayed and/or represent important stages of his life. Maybe add a photo of a younger you to explore issues of aging and identity.

Overall, the image has good visual impact, with a few areas that could be refined to enhance its overall quality.

Keep up the excellent work, and continue exploring new techniques and styles to push the boundaries of your artistic expression!

18-Sprouting Sprouts **by** Charlie Gibson
STAR RATING: 3

This image is a delightful blend of reality and fantasy, showcasing a whimsical scene where tiny figurines appear to be interacting with oversized mushrooms. The concept is imaginative and playful, creating an altered reality that is both charming and visually engaging. The juxtaposition of the small figures with the large mushrooms adds a sense of scale and wonder, reminiscent of a fairy tale or a magical world. The composition is well-balanced, with the mushrooms forming a natural frame around the figurines. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the textures of the mushrooms and the details of the figurines. The earthy tones and the natural setting enhance the overall aesthetic, making the scene feel both realistic and fantastical. The image has a strong visual impact due to its unique and imaginative concept. The viewer is immediately drawn to the contrast between the tiny figures and the large mushrooms, creating a sense of curiosity and delight. The attention to detail in the positioning of the figurines and the natural elements adds depth and interest to the scene.

Areas for Improvement:

1. Composition: crop some of the bottom, there is too much of the same thing. That would automatically increase the focus on the children. Also, try to find another picture where the boy's hand is not covering part of his sister's face.

2. Background: The background at the top left is slightly distracting with its textured pattern. Since manipulation is the rule of the game, why not replace it with cloned mushrooms?

3. Lighting: a dramatic lighting on the children while everything else is darker would increase the visual impact.

Overall, the image demonstrates a high level of creativity and visual impact, with a few areas that could be refined to enhance its overall quality.

Keep exploring these imaginative and whimsical concepts, as they truly capture the essence of altered reality and artistic expression!

19-The Eyes Are Upon You **by** Carol Fuessenich
STAR RATING: 5

This image presents a striking and imaginative concept, featuring a multitude of glowing, eye-like shapes against a dark background. The repetition of these circular forms creates a sense of depth and pattern, evoking a surreal and somewhat eerie atmosphere. The concept is original and thought-provoking, inviting the viewer to interpret the meaning behind the numerous "eyes." The use of lighting is particularly effective, with the glowing centers of the eye-like shapes contrasting sharply against the dark background. This creates a strong visual impact and a sense of mystery, intrigue and curiosity. The symmetry and repetition of the shapes add to the artistic appeal, making the image both intriguing and aesthetically pleasing. The overall composition is balanced and well-executed, with the repetition of the shapes adding depth and interest to the scene.

Areas for Improvement:

1. Variation: Introducing some variation in the size, brightness, or color of the eye-like shapes could add more visual interest and depth to the image.

2. Composition: Considering a different framing or cropping could add more dynamism to the image, perhaps by including a focal point or a break in the pattern to draw the viewer's eye.

Overall, the image demonstrates a high level of creativity and visual impact, with a few areas that could be refined to enhance its overall quality.

Keep exploring these imaginative and surreal concepts, as they truly capture the essence of altered reality and artistic expression!

Top Three Winners - Blue Group

First Place - Looking at You
Lillie Grossman

Second Place - Cheers
Sara Courtneidge

Third Place - Magical Night
Carol Silveira

Winning Images Group Blue

Honorable Mentions

Ballerina
Sara Courtneidge

Riding the Clouds
Lillie Grossman

Rocky Seas
Ken Jones

Run For Your Lives
Julie Chen

Top Three Winners - Combined Red & Green Groups

First Place - The Eyes Are Upon You
Carol Fuessenich

Second Place - Abstract Flowers and Glass Flower
Brian Spiegel

Third Place - Amaryllis
Bill Shewchuk
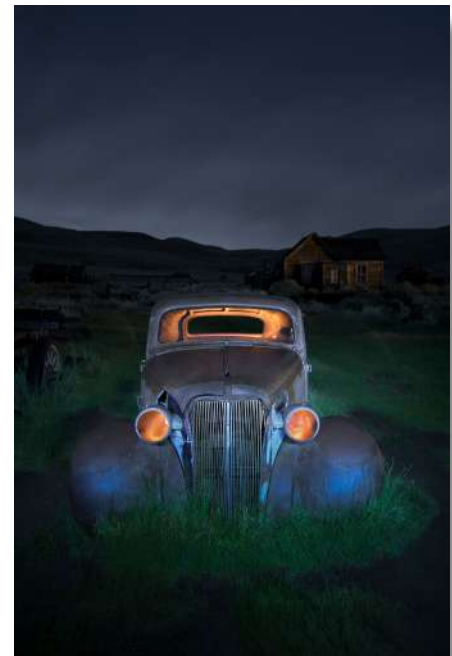
Honorable Mention - Combined Red & Green Groups

Cineraria Blooms ICM in BW
Jared Ikeda

Red Maple in the Wind
Jared Ikeda

**Light Painting Forground
with Milkyway**
Jeff Hobbs

1937 Chevy Coupe, Bodie, Ca
Jeff Hobbs