

Judging at the Club Level



Bspectacted Man by J. C. Roy

Contributed by J.C. Roy

Image appreciation, like for all other art, is subjective. It is only the opinion of the one making the critique. True, the more experienced the critique maker is in a particular photographic genre, the more valuable the comments. When judging at club level, the main objective of the critique should be to help the maker improve his art.

As Jon Fishback said in a recent article that appeared in the February issue of the *PSA Journal*: “Analysis is not designed to find something wrong. It is designed to see something right and then see things that can be improved upon.”

To me, the first approach to the analysis should be: Is the image an eye catcher? How does it move you? Do you like it or not? What is its first impact on you, the viewer? Then, the critique maker should try to explain his/her feelings technically to the best of his/her ability. Be honest, say why you like it or don't like it and if you have an expertise in the area, please do provide advice as to how you think the work could be improved.

Ask yourself the questions: Has the maker presented the work in the strongest and most effective way possible? Has he contributed to the picture? Is there some creativity, some efforts on his/her part to produce art, or is the image a mere recording of a scene in front of him/her?

Is the image telling a story? Does it have a message? Does it trigger emotions? Can you put these into words?

In answering these questions, review these technical aspects: On composition, PLEASE DO NOT RECITE THE RULE OF THIRDS. Instead, in your own perception, is the spatial placement of the main subject contributing to the image success or not? Can it be improved by eliminating non-essential dead spaces, or to the contrary, by giving it more breathing room? Does the intended main subject pop out to the viewer, or must some investigative work be done to find a main subject? However, the main subject may be the colors, the texture, the use of geometric shapes and forms, the grand view. Don't be obsessed with finding one main subject.

On atmosphere, mood, feelings – are the colors pleasant, harmonious or contrasting? Would it improve the image if it were presented in B&W instead of color and vice versa? Was it the best time of day? Has the photographer chosen the best angle; has he made good use of depth of field? Is the picture noisy, are there distracting elements?

Would the choice of another format improve the picture—panoramic, vertical, horizontal, square? Most often photographers un-necessarily limit themselves to the standard available print formats.

Those are general comments that can explain your constructive criticism of the image. But, above all, avoid all offending comments. Remember the objective is to help and not discourage. Remember also, that club members and staff members too are judging you. Rudeness certainly will not get you invited a second time.

And for those whose work has been criticized, DO NOT, DO NOT TAKE IT PERSONAL. Remember, it is only one judge's opinion of your work and not necessarily the correct one. Best proof of that is the result you may get when entering an image in a multiple judging competition, like the Georgia Southern Exhibition Circuit (GASO). The same image may be rejected by one judge and receive awards by other judges. Had the rejection occurred at the first presentation of your work, you might have been discouraged and shoved the image in a dark corner of your house. Lesson here is to enter your art to the review of at least 3 different judges. Second tip here is to enter your work in similar circuits like the GASO. Where you work can be judged by 4, 5 or 6 different judges at one time!

Finally to the clubs, for a themed contest, invite judges that have expertise in the area. And, for all contests, avoid judges whose only comments are: “IN” or “OUT” to images that are presented to them.

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