

Wanganui Camera Club – End of Year Print Competition | Judge: Mark Brimblecombe

Date: 22 November 2017

The standard of work

This is an end of year competition, so I would expect to see your best work. This may be the reason why I cannot really see a clear difference between A grade and B grade entries. In fact there are a number of entries in B grade which without knowing I thought would be A grade, and some A grade entries which I thought would be B grade. Anyway, many of you know my opinion about grading photographers in camera clubs. Whether you are a camera novice or experienced, you can make great photos. The emphasis needs to be on the photograph itself... not who made it and how.

I've given most of the photos a fairly high award... as you would expect in seeing your best work from the year. Again, I don't believe in spreading out the awards... so many acceptances, merits, HCs, and honours. If I think a photo is worthy of 'honours', then that's what I've given it.

Cliché Photos

One of the real challenges with Camera Club competition photos is producing work which is distinctively yours, yet at the same time producing images which the judge will appreciate as being creative and communicative of a distinctive perspective. This is where I bring in a caution about what some call cliché photos. For me, most sunset photos are cliché... and my first response may be "oh... it's just another sunset photo... one of millions made every year by photographers around the world... all of which look pretty much the same." That's a rather negative response, and fails to appreciate the fact that every sunset is beautiful... and many sunset photos are great... despite them looking the same as millions of others. This poses a potential prejudice for the judge. But at the end of the day... the judge must evaluate the photo itself and how successful it is, despite what might be their aversion to clichés.

	Title	Result	Comments
B1	BS What Lies Beneath	Highly Commended	An intriguing abstract image with a lovely limited palette of colours, and composition of repeating shapes forming a diagonal. The title 'what lies beneath' may indicate the surface water. If so, it also begs the question, what lies above. There is then this lovely combination of what is reflected and what is transparent... what is above and what is below.
B2	BS Welcome to Twin Peaks	Merit	The sign in the bottom left is from the American TV series and film <i>Twin Peaks</i> , a crime drama in the early 1990s. This may be a clue as to how the photographer wants us to view this image... or may it is simply mirroring the two mountain peaks which feature in the photo. This is an excellent night photo with stars and moonlight. The road and yellow line are great in drawing us into the journey.
B3	BS Victorian Fruit Bowl	Honours EOY Champion B grade	This is a magnificent photograph for the intentional use of low light, the softness of the light, and for the corresponding subtle and subdued colours. This demonstrates a very competent photographer. The still life arrangement is also superb. I assume the photographer has also carefully composed the image and presented it this way because it works best this way for them. My personal preference would be to compose it in a square frame. In regard to the presentation, the uneven white border in the matt is quite distracting.
B4	BS Strength	Highly Commended	The face looks familiar! The photo gives us an 'up close' and intimate look at our Prime Minister's face. Fantastic detail in the lines/wrinkles and in the sweeping away hair. But more than this, the success of any portrait is in what it portrays about the person. Strength maybe. For me it is more the tightness of the lines on her forehead and the concentration on what is before her. This person is focused. Beautiful monochrome presentation. Perhaps just a tad more brightness on her left eye.
B5	BS Still Water	Merit	This appears to be the same location as the first print judged. I really like the transition from sharp at the top to blurred and distorted at the bottom which is clearly a matter of water reflection rather than camera focus and DOF. Nice natural green colours. I think the slightly over-exposed look in the bush could be compensated for by reducing the luminance of the yellows a little.
B6	BS Plum Blossom at Sunset	Merit	A lovely image with the distinctive photographic effect of shallow depth of field. This has totally blurred the background to make the subject 'pop out'. It may be just a tad too shallow, as I think the large white petals are so eye catching and should be sharper. Perfect colour balance for the warm lighting. Lovely composition.
B7	BS Night Crawler	Accepted	The title for the image provides a great clue as to what the photographer wants us to see in this image (and how to interpret it). So I now see a luminous spider with its legs in the lower half, and its laser-like vision penetrating the darkness in the top half. I feel the image just needs a bit more to give credibility to this interpretation.
B8	BS Gumtree at Sunrise	Merit	A beautiful tranquil misty silhouetted scene, with great detail in the fence and foliage. For me the real beauty and mystery in the photo is within a square crop with edge at the left and up from the bottom to almost the base of the left tree.
B9	BS From the Bund	Merit	This is a magnificent waterfront view in central Shanghai, China. I've spent about 5 days here, and know well the extraordinary colours of these huge buildings at night. This is an exceptionally clear night with the dark sky (no light reflection off clouds or smog). As a documentary or travel photo it is superb. I would personally like to see some people in the photo, or a boat in the foreground. There is no shortage of people on the Bund!

A10	AS Valley of Mists	Highly Commended	Fantastic low angled light in this image, and a perfect exposure for this very high contrast scene. It is the wonderful different effects caused by the mist which are so interesting. I personally curse power lines and power poles in most landscape photos, and would have cloned them out in this photo. But the photographer has chosen them to be included... because they were there after all!
A11	AS Tina on State Street	Merit	Okay Jack... I've done some research. This is street-performer Dorothy Roberson who regularly performs here in Chicago. She certainly sounds and looks like Tina Turner, apart from 'private dancer' legs! This is a great B&W photo, high contrast with lots of detail. The musical mannequins in the background really add lots to the image. While I recognise this as your style, it is nevertheless just a little over-cooked in my opinion.
A12	AS Taking the Plunge!	Honours EOY Champion A grade	What a superb image! The jumper's pose and position is perfect, and I love the boy in the foreground and the other people all looking at him. There is a thrilling anticipation... will the boy actually reach the water below? And then there is the next boy poised to take the plunge. This is a great composition, with the near absence of visible water giving the impression of real danger. Excellent exposure and colour.
A13	AS Serenity	Merit	A wonderful image for the water and reflections, as it is for the bird itself. I love the way the feather pattern on its back are replicated in the ripples to the left. A minor issue for me that the birds head is not quite as sharp as it should be. I'm also not sure about the choice of title.
A14	AS Scruff	Merit	I don't like dogs, but I love this picture. I'm wondering if there's a connection between very wet and scruffy and now being restrained! Those beautiful brown eyes beg the question as to what this dog is thinking. The detail in the face and hair is amazing. Apart from the retention of a very red and dominant collar, I think the colour treatment of the photo is very well done.
A15	AS Salisbury Cathedral	Honours	This photo just glows with beautiful luminosity when viewed in good lighting... something to do with the metallic paper it's printed on. I really love the composition... firstly the colour composition, but also the composition in regard to the choice of having outward projected lines on the left and right. There is then this very strange effect of leaning outwards at the edges in contrast to leaning inwards near the middle, even though the photo has been carefully crafted so that all vertical lines are truly vertical. For me this creates a kind of vertigo effect.
A16	AS Morning Walk	Highly Commended	What a superb composition with a Henri Cartier-Bresson moment. Love the colours and the way they form the composition too. I have a feeling for some reason, that the ocean might be to the right of the walker... whether that's true or not, the picture does beg the question. It seems like this is a very bright sunny day, yet the image is not bright. I understand the exposure difficulties, and underexposing slightly is best in the camera. But for me I would like to see this brightened on the computer. A tad more 'exposure' without blowing out highlights, lightening the shadows and midtones, etc.
A17	AS Monarch Butterfly	Highly Commended	A magnificent macro / close-up photograph with so much detail. Great colour. Amazingly sharp for such a small DOF. Strong composition.
A18	AS Living Alone	Merit	Good title. Great texture contrast between the hard rocks and the soft clouds. I feel the tree is getting a little lost in the environment, and this is perhaps how we sometimes feel when living alone. So, while I would personally like to see the tree stand out more, the message is strong when it doesn't.
A19	AS Kaimanawa Trail	Honours	A superb NZ bush photo. Great light and lovely colours. The path with surrounding moss is just beautiful, and invites the viewer into the same journey.
A20	AS Head Shot	Merit	I have to admit that I'm confused at what I'm looking at here. Is it a photograph of someone's art installation, or have the objects in the photo been placed there by the photographer? There seems to be a pane of glass between the camera and the objects, which has created some lovely little refraction distortion.

A21	AS Foreboding	Honours	This is a really fabulous photograph in my opinion... and because of the wonderful lighting, the shadow lines, the contrasting textures, the mix of straight and curved lines, and the very subtle and lifeless colours which suit the subject and create that foreboding feeling. I love the single little light casting a warmer light on the floor, and perhaps the elevator door on the right. The main light seems to be sunlight... but nothing can be seen through the window. Again... foreboding of what?
A22	AS Fire Wire	Honours	A magical image in so many ways, and a great example of effective and powerful image manipulation on the computer. A spider's silk has a strength-to-density ratio exceeding that of steel... and that's what I love about this picture. A little spider has bound up a human made barbed wire with its super strength silk. The fragile little water droplets cling to it, and not the artificial object. Interesting.
A23	AS Double Rainbow	Accepted	This picture is all about being at the right place at the right time. It's all about the rainbow and not the landscape... or for me the vain quest to locate the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The foreground is actually very interesting too. Cliché? Maybe for some it is. But I see through that.
A24	AS Brothers	Honours	Another one of Jack's marvellous Chicago images. The mirroring repetition is fantastic, and so is the dynamism created by the 'dutch tilt' camera angle. The success of the image can also be attributed to the low camera perspective, and the strong but subdued building lines in the background. Wonderful range of skin tones. I wish hair styles like this were allowable when I was this age!
A25	AS Blue Streak	Merit	A lovely 'frozen' shot... to excuse the pun. That blue streak in the snow is very interesting, and I'm wondering if it's natural or not. I don't know how you would do it... but I want to see the snow much whiter to produce a really high key effect, with no brightness fall-off on the edges (which may have been intentional vignetting). A great sports photo.
A26	AS Blackmount School	Honours	One little old school house out in the middle of nowhere, with a big old tree alongside that has memories of many children. My first thought when I saw this photograph was... oh... Grahame Sydney, the famous NZ painter and photographer... has joined the WCC. This is a composition like some of his paintings in the 70s. The composition is great, with the open space in the sky. My personal preference would be to brighten the image without brightening the blue sky. The 'end of day' lighting does suit the subject very well.