

Wanganui Camera Club Portrait Print Competition

Pauline Allomes, Stuart Collins and Bev Sinclair are judges for tonight's Portrait Print competition. And we are very proud to deliberate on your impressive collection of photos. Congratulations to each and every one of you. Everyone in this room is here tonight because we're passionate about photography. More than that, we all possess a spark of genius that lights the way forward. Technique may be important, but it's vital to also follow your own unique vision. The judge's verdict may be relevant, but don't allow feedback from judges to diminish self-belief. After all, the critic is not above human error. What matters most is what YOU believe about your own work. Bev, Pauline and I all agree the portrait entries make one thing obvious. They tell us, without a doubt, that our club has what it takes to put on a good show.

B Grade Set Subject

B1 A Priceless Gift.

We assume the pencils and paper are the gift, but perhaps the real gift comes from a positive quality within the human soul. Could this be an orphan in Africa? The child is clearly glad to have drawing implements. Despite a shadowed face, more light around the eyes would tell us more about that person and allow the subject to be more engaging.
Merit.

B2 Art Deco Lady

There's a hint of fashion photography, in a portrait that captures an interesting moment. The woman has a querying expression, gazing beyond the frame. As there is more space in the direction where she looks, this offers pictorial balance. The viewer follows her line of sight, and open space is energized with an expectation of what lies beyond. Some hair and clothing are without definition, indicating perhaps too much noise reduction or a loss of detail with the Curves tool. In Photoshop highlighted areas may be selected - one at a time - so we can independent adjust them to keep them sharp.
Merit.

B3 Lavender Lad

This photograph has good skin tones, with a good natural expression on the face. Watch the angle at which the subject is observed - looking down on the child, with tight framing, creates a slightly unnatural look. And the image appears too small in proportion to the large matte. Even so, it is an engaging and appealing image of a young person.
Merit.

B4 Lost in Thought

This image reveals every detail of the subject, with all elements working well together and no extraneous detail. The tonal qualities and side lighting are effective. The woman has an intriguing expression and her eyes are well captured. This delicately introspective moment has a background that evokes a subtly evocative atmosphere. The white top she wears assists in framing the face. The green matte harmonizes with the green tunic. However, we wondered if black might work better as a matte.

Honours.

B5 Our Karl

This photo is a clear, appealing image of a man's face. He has a pleasant expression, but accentuated lighting could offer more character to the subject. Perhaps more space on the right would make allowance for the direction of his gaze. There seems to be an unnaturally dark patch in his hair, which may require additional key lighting from above.

Merit.

B6 Take Three Girls

This is an image that immediately catches the eye, and the white background offers an up-beat feeling with clear overtones of fashion photography. The postures are visually harmonious, and pictorial balance is realized with complimentary tones. However, the figures are cropped tightly at top and bottom in a constrained way, and the women's facial expressions are nonchalant, masking their emotional worlds.

Merit.

B7 The Dark Side

This photo has a good title and it takes some time to explore the image. This is an example of what is called 'ellipsis'. Ellipsis means removing superfluous words from a sentence, while retaining the meaning. But there is another definition, used in story construction - especially in cinema - that relates to the deft art of omitting details so that your imagination can fill in the gaps. And this photograph is an evocative example of it. The shallow depth of field works well, as does the white line on the matte. The highlight spot on the subject's eye adds mystique. The composition is just right.

Honours.

B8 Woman Power

The woman has a sewing machine as a way of making a living, but does not appear 'empowered' by her acquisition. Of course, the title may be ironic. Her face is soft focus with a disconcerting expression, while the sewing machine itself is the point of focus. This implies - perhaps subconsciously - that the means of production relegates the human being to a subordinate role. Background details on the right are eye-catching but draw our attention away from the woman. However a square format image could resolve this issue.

Merit.

B Grade Open

B9 The Letter

This photograph captures the theme of 'time' effectively. The title is good and we are tempted to interpret the story by reading segments of the letter, which appear sharply in focus. The choice of paper accentuates the rich ruby and silver tones along with the tactile quality of the gently illuminated surfaces. There is a subtle fog on the clock face and glasses. Although the pictorial balance is good, perhaps the lower section should be marginally cropped to heighten pictorial tension between the objects and the bottom of the frame.

Highly Commended.

A Grade Set Subject

A10 A Smile In Any Language

A very charming group photo, and the three languages work well with the title. With high contrast and vignette, the gritty atmosphere of this image has overtones of 'social documentary'. We weren't sure if the man's shoes are too dark as they enhance his personality. Perhaps the photographer didn't want footwear to draw the viewer's eye to the bottom of the image, but these faces are so engaging that perhaps this isn't an issue. The matte is a little damaged. We suggest - as a general point - all entries have mattes bound with a little tape at the base, so they don't bulge forward on the viewing ledge.

Merit.

A11 Aaliyah

There are nice tonal qualities here and an interesting expression on the child's face. There is an implicit association between that face, the owl and darkness. However the image is too large in proportion to the matte, and the window frame diverts attention away from the subject as it is so visually dominant. We would still understand the child was looking from a window if a crop revealed one corner of that window instead.

Merit.

A12 Ayden

This photo shows a cheery child, undeterred by life's knocks. His charming face is viewed from a good angle. The image conveys his personality well and the eyes are well captured. However we did agree a vignette didn't enhance the image, and looked somewhat out of place. The cropping is too constrained. There is an orange colour bias, especially noticeable in the colour shift of the blonde hair.

Merit.

A13 Chilling Out

There is much character in the man's face and the texture of his skin is conveyed in fine detail. His sunglasses reflect both the photographer and the man he converses with. When you note narrative cues like the bottle - along with the intimacy of his lean-forward posture - the end result a well-knit portrait. There is good triangular balance, tonal quality and lighting. Compelling in its immediacy, this image really tells a story.

Highly Commended.

A14 Hill Country Stockman

This is a competent but somewhat static portrait where the photograph is appealing enough, and pictorial elements are combined in an elegant form. The central position of the head is undynamic, and soft tonality is at odds with the idea of a 'rough stockman'. Furthermore an absence of wrinkles on the face, with very even lighting, appears to mask the intrinsic character of the subject.

Merit.

A15 Looking the Part

I say... This man makes superb camera fodder, revelling in the garb and demeanor of a by-gone age. The portrait is very enjoyable with a keen ironic edge. Having both pairs of glasses is a nice touch, and those bushy whiskers are apt. You can see the man's tongue curled up in speech as he holds court. Pictorial elements come together nicely- where there is interesting treatment of light with the glasses and tactile surfaces are captured in detail. But the cropping is too close, and a man who loves to exercise his lungs needs more pictorial oxygen around him to breathe freely.

Merit.

A16 Morri, Bar Manager

This photo has appealing colour and form, and presents a pleasantly relaxed moment. Apparently the street art has little to do with the man but serves as an eye-catching backdrop. This in turn makes us wonder about the title. We can only assume this is a side lane leading into the bar. The street art is so prominent that it could refer to Morri's playful personality - meanwhile the man's generic smile goes against this idea. The image invites unanswered questions, and perhaps is more 'social documentary' than a portrait as such.

Merit.

A17 Retro Model

'Retro Model' offers crisp, beautiful tones - and there are good tactile surfaces to enjoy on the subject. It appears to be illustrative photography, tailor-made for a fashion magazine. Rather even lighting dilutes the visual impact and looks unreal. Her facial expression is blank and gives little away. Again, by cropping both hands at the bottom, a strong visual tension diverts our eye away from her face. The title doesn't convey a 'retro' feeling, as we understand the word. This image showcases good technical elements but falters as a portrait photo.

Merit.

A 18 Smoko Break

This photo has a straightforward story of a woman, furtive and embarrassed with her cigarette. Her body language - boxed into that corner - shouts defensiveness. Lovely reflective light gleams off her clothing as she exhales trepidation. The image has charming immediacy. Grey, blue, red and orange tones help bind the composition together into a well-balanced whole. Honours.

A19 Spring Portrait

Here we have a pleasant face, lovely pastel tones and a well-framed image. But weird lines around the face and curled black hair suggest an artifact in JPEG file, caused by over-sharpening. And too much noise control makes the skin appear artificially smooth - even somewhat plastic. Despite these technical problems it is still an appealing photograph. Merit.

A20 The Blues Singer

This photo has a good compositional structure, integrated through the use of strong triangular lines. The story is apparent, where our subject dominates the stage with his exuberant stance. Bold diagonal lines have a kinetic energy that evokes the feeling of being at a live performance. Detail is sharply rendered and that unobtrusive vignette helps draw attention to the subject's face. Merit.

A21 The Reader

'The Reader' is literally reading, absorbed in a world of words, but the blank expression doesn't grant us admission into this internalized experience. The banner, lamp and blank sky become superfluous. The book's title is scarcely identifiable. The photographer needs to make the character of this person more accessible to the viewer. Accepted.

We could only choose one portrait, from A Grade or B Grade, for our trophy-winning entry. So we opted for the photograph that most directly struck a chord with us. And are very proud to announce that 'Smoko Break' is the winning entry for the 2017 Portrait Print Competition.

A Grade Open

A22 Budapest Market

This is a bright cheerful image with lots of colour and a pleasing textual effect. Although the people hardly interact, some mild drama can be found in the right corner. The main point of interest is perhaps the vegetables, which makes sense in a market. Their colour is rather dilute and, through a selection, could be saturated. There is a temptation to fit everything into a photo, reaching a result that doesn't specify what is important.

Accepted.

A23 High Rise

We can see vestiges of high-rise buildings in the blue textures. This is a compositionally balanced, fresh and invigorating graphic image. It begs the question how the photo was created. It seems likely this is a photograph of a modern building façade adjusted with an effects filter. A black matte with a white edge might help, as the image appears a bit lost with a white matte.

Merit.

A24 Jade

This hologram-like view of a fern leaf appears with pristine clarity on metallic paper. It has a startling three-dimensional effect. The greyish blue background resonates brilliantly with green foliage. That fern is presented like it's jade - precious greenstone - and the intrinsic value of the subject is emphasized through the use of an oval frame, which chimes well with the spiral form. This oval frame reminds us of locket and other family heirlooms - quite apt because ferns could be relegated to a remote memory if we clear the forests. Such an inference may not be intentional, but proceeds all the same from the artifact's gestalt (or overall configuration of meaning).

Honours.

A25 Salisbury Cathedral

Gold metallic paper creates a gorgeous luminosity, conveying brilliant interior light in the cathedral. The photograph has beautifully sharp geometric patterning and an emphatic sense of perspective. The blue at the bottom offers a rich resonance, in contrast with the orange, and a pictorial anchor point - while the image conveys voluminous space that echoes the internal environment of a cathedral.

Honours.

A26 Waihohonu Valley

The narrow tonal range lends a somewhat monotonous quality to what would otherwise be an inspiring photograph, well balanced and taken from a good position. The blue colour bias dampens our sense of distance and diminishes the evocative power of the scene. More dramatic lighting - observed after dawn or before sunset - would be an improvement. Slightly adjusting colour balance to individually selected areas, in Photoshop, may also work around this problem.

Merit.