

Whanganui Camera Club Triptych Competition

Judged by Don Pittham FPSNZ ANPSNZ

Introduction

Hello Whanganui Camera Club members this is Don Pittham from Nelson. Thank you for letting me view and critique your entries in this competition, a competition in which all the entries need to be in the form of a triptych.

I should to tell you that **I am not a PSNZ accredited judge** and don't intend becoming one. So if you have complaints about the quality of my judging please do not moan to the PSNZ. They will only say it's your own fault for not using one of their officially "certified OK" models. Please do address your concerns or compliments to me. It's a lonely life out here in judgement land and it's gratifying to receive messages from the outside world to let me know what you think of my comments.

Judges tend to have their own systems for evaluating images. I am no exception. My system is based on the Four C's. My C's stand **for Compliance, Competence, Creativity and Communication.**

Compliance - simply means "Does the entry conform to the rules and regulations of the competition?" This includes such things as being within the size limits, being of the correct medium - don't expect to get far with a print in a digitally projected image competition and submitting an image that falls within the specified subject matter for the competition - don't waste your time putting a photo of the most beautiful baby in the world into a landscape salon. For this particular competition the subject matter was open but the entries had to be triptychs. I'm pleased to say that all the entries conformed so that gets Compliance out of the way.

The second C is for **Competence** - this really refers to the technical competence of the photographer. Is the image appropriately focused, appropriately exposed, well composed, well presented and so on. Please note that I am not looking for every image to be pin sharp and exposed to an 18% grey parameter. The operative term is "appropriately". What is an appropriate approach for the portrait of a coal miner after he has finished his shift will probably be quite different to what is an appropriate approach for capturing a delicate portrait of a classical ballet dancer.

My third C is for **Creativity** - with the technology inherent in today's camera gear anyone who can press a button should be capable of producing a good record shot photograph. As photography enthusiasts we should be aiming to rise above the level of record shots. We can do this by taking a creative approach to our image making. Demonstrate your creativity either by showing me something I have never seen before or in a way that I have never seen before.

My fourth and final C is for **Communication** - what story does your image tell? What emotion does it engender in me as a viewer? It might be the emotion of joy as in the sight of a mother with a new born child, sorrow as in the depiction of a distressed civilian in a war torn country, wonder as experienced by viewing a beautiful landscape or intrigue as generated by a close-up image of something not usually visible to the naked eye, the list goes on. But if an image generates some form of emotional response in me, the viewer, no matter if it be a pleasant response or an unpleasant response, then that image is succeeding. Assuming your image is compliant then communication is the most important of the Four C's as far as I am concerned.

Before I forget I must congratulate you all on the presentation of your entries. The prints in particular, with their clean, neat matting, were a pleasure to view and a credit to your club.

B Grade Prints

Golden afternoon at Kai Iwi beach

Although quite contrasty the top and bottom pictures of the cliffs above the beach have some pleasing lines and depict the scene well. The centre shot succeeds in communicating the sense of freedom and fun experienced by the bathers. However the compositional link between this centre image and the other two images is weak. The only connection appears to be that the centre image was taken at the same location as the other two pictures. A stronger triptych might result from carefully studying the middle image and making two vertical cuts to produce three images that in total reinforce the message of swimmers having a great time. Beware of using strongly coloured mats with your prints. Although this mat is cleanly cut its gold colouring tends to draw the viewers' attention away from the real stars of the show - the actual images. **Accepted.**

Low Key

A very creative triptych. The linkage between the three images is strong. The positioning of the piano keys, the music and the piano strings in the triptych matches the relative positioning of these items in a real grand piano. The photographer's choice to take close-up shots for the three images works well in simplifying and thus strengthening both the individual pictures and the overall result. The stark monochrome nature of the centre image is somewhat at odds with the warm colour of the other two images. I wonder if either converting all the shots to black and white or alternatively applying a sepia type toning to the centre picture would produce a triptych with greater harmony between the three images. Then again perhaps I'm sounding too harsh a note! The creativity and communication exhibited by this B Grade image gain it an **Honours.**

Rainbow Sunset

A well titled entry that certainly exhibits some strong colours. However that maybe its downfall as those colours are saturated and offer no subtlety for the enjoyment of the viewer. The images also appear very pixelated. I like the detail of the trees and grasses along the skyline but a more gentle approach to the colour rendition is needed before the entry can be given more than an Acceptance. Be prepared for the next dramatic sunset and make another attempt. **Accepted.**

A Grade Prints

Adele Wannabe

Coining a somewhat hackneyed judging phrase, but which in this case is certainly true, this entry grew on me. At first I thought that the three pictures did not sit well together but then I came to understand the overall message about the Adele concert. The shots, which depict the venue, the Adele wannabe and the actual concert, are specific with no superfluous, no extraneous information. I enjoy the subtle (some might say tenuous) links between the images. The framework in the left-hand picture matches with the chain link fencing in the centre image and that in turn connects with the patterning on the screen in the right-hand shot. The blue and pink highlights also act as a linkage. I particularly like the pink of the wannabe's drink and lipstick matching the colour of Adele's dress. Technically the images could be sharper but the expression on the wannabe's face which seems to say "it's a big effort but worth it" helps to carry the day and earn this entry a **Highly Commended**.

Catch

I believe it was the economist E. F. Schumacher who coined the phrase "small is beautiful" and this entry certainly lives up to that adage. The connecting elements in this triptych are obviously the action of the game of cricket but also the lines of the horizon, the breaking wave and the shore. The division of the total scene into three identifies the three most significant components of the beach game :- the batswoman, the bowler and the somewhat laid-back spectator. I'm so glad that the ball was captured in the photograph. Whether it was caught in real life is another matter. I'll forgive the overcutting in the matting because this is such an appropriate and delightful use of the triptych form that it deserves an **Honours**.

Gun Fight at the Bella Salon

Be careful when entering your titles. On the back of this print the title says "Salon" but in the absence of any hair-dressing establishments and seeing the proper name in all three images I suspect we should be talking about a saloon. Though there is a little inconsistency in some aspects of the printing (I'm looking at the texture of the grass in the shots) these otherwise very competent, contrasty, sharp images seem to work well in telling this sharp-shooting story. I read the sequence as the gun-fighter seeking out his enemy, shooting him but then being shot himself. It's the action in that last image that causes me concern. (It probably caused the gun-fighter some concern as well!) The gun-fighter seems to have been mortally wounded but the other figure in the scene seems not to be the killer but rather he has all the appearance of a by-stander walking past and taking little notice of the drama. It leaves me un-convinced that this is a real scene ... I suspect that they may be acting! Excellent presentation, good printing, exciting action but an anticlimactic ending gains this western a **Merit**.

Meanwhile - Back at the Rodeo

Clever title; I confess it took me a minute to twig the meaning! I was most impressed by the high standard of presentation of this entry. The prints are all technically excellent with the individual subjects sharply focused against none-intrusive dark backgrounds. The use of drop-shadows has the effect of further pushing the actual images to the forefront of the viewers' attention. So much for the good news. The bad news? The centre and right-hand images show people readily identifiable as rodeo-style characters. They have cowboy hats, long sleeved shirts and Levi jeans. However the man

in the left-hand image has none of these stereo-type characteristics. He is probably a spectator at the rodeo but he might just as easily be a spectator at a summer music festival or a sports fixture. Replace him with a third matching rodeo character and this triptych could be a real winner. Never the less the high technical quality of the images and the first rate presentation of Back at the Rodeo gains it a **Merit**.

Tokyo Labyrinth

Another extremely well presented and appropriately titled print. I've been in seemingly deserted, modern buildings such as this and felt panic coming on at the thought that I might be lost or even trapped with no hope of being rescued. One of the first things judges are likely to do with a triptych such as this is to see if the entrant has used an image twice by, for example, flipping it and using it as both the left-hand and right-hand components of the composite. That doesn't seem to be the case here. However once I started looking closely I spent a long time trying to correlate where each bit of the building fitted into the puzzle that is the whole. I failed wonderfully and that is a major strength of this triptych - it makes you keep looking. I really appreciate the composition that puts the higher lights in the left-hand picture and right-hand picture in the corners of the image space, that keeps the vertical columns in line with the edges of the mat and that uses the leading lines of the central floor tiling and the ceiling panels to lead our eyes to that vital, solitary, lonely, unidentified figure who no doubt is trying to find their way out of the labyrinth. Excellent work in all respects and an **Honours**.

Vigilant Heron

Some very well-captured Heron shots showing excellent feather detail. This is a neatly presented symmetrical triptych arranged so that the outer shots of the bird lead our eyes back into the total composition. (And no, those outer images are not derived from an original and a flipped copy). It's a pity that the line of the tree in the left-hand image flows through into the centre image but is then abruptly broken by a repositioning of the tree in the right-hand image. I would prefer that the tree line be repeated but that it avoid creating a leading line linking just two the images. All is well with the world, what is shown is compliant, competent and tells us something of the Heron. We have a good set of Natural History record shots. Unfortunately, in this open competition, this entry does not rise above that record-shot level. The lighting is good but not magical, the images are interesting but not exciting, the composition is acceptable without being innovative. I suspect that a triptych made up of three shots of the Heron's head might just do the trick of sending a more powerful message and gaining a higher award. As submitted Vigilant Heron is **Accepted**.

Water Wings

These competently cropped images tell a story, albeit a simple one, of a duck flapping his wings back. I have a problem. Europeans read from left to right. This includes things like sequenced triptychs such as this one. So to follow the story we look at the left-hand image, then the centre image and finally the right-hand image. "So what's your problem?" you may ask. My problem is that the duck's wings are moving in the opposite direction - from in front of the duck to behind. I dearly want the photographer to swop the left-hand and right-hand images. Then the flow of the action (ducks wings from behind moving forward to be in front) is the same as the natural flow that we follow in reading the images. (And no, I'm not worried that the new sequence might direct our eyes out of the triptych.) A good attempt, compliant and competent but with a story line that this pedantic judge considers would work better if re-sequenced. **Accepted**.

B Grade DPI

Hereford Screen

A competent and informative triptych. We can see from the left-hand image what the whole screen looks like. However this comes at a cost because that shot is at a different scale to the other two images. This makes the overall composition somewhat unbalanced. Either having three relatively close-up shots (like the centre and right-hand pictures) in line or alternatively a larger picture of the whole screen with two close-ups positioned side by side above it might produce a more compositionally pleasing combination. The entry as submitted earns a **Merit**.

Idolisation

Well done to the photographer on being a bit different with the shape of your triptych panels. They do look as if the outer panels would fold over to neatly cover the central panel as was the case with some of the early painted religious triptychs. I like the rays of light that seem to originate from the camera screen and beam through the three images to the beverage cup. They help to link the images. I confess to being a little unsure of the message that this triptych is communicating. Is it that the woman idolises her cell phone and Mc Donald's drinks? If so she needs to get out more. Although I like the clouds, the background to all three images is also rather confusing. Perhaps we are looking at fifty dollar notes which may indicate that money is also idolised. A creative idea but not as well realised as it might have been. **Merit**.

Melbourne Laneway

This triptych looks to have originated from a single large image. The district depicted seems like a place where it all happens; we have al-fresco meals, music and sight-seers. With the street-art, posters and people there is plenty to look at. The original picture has been cut so that the resulting three panels each display a different aspect of the scene - the diners, the busker and the tourists. But perhaps the photographer arrived too early in the evening because, although the foodies are into their al-fresco, the cello player appears as if he is only just setting up and the sight-seers don't look as if they are going to wait around for him to begin playing. Sadly it seems as if the photographer has taken this shot before the street really starts humming. Because of this I feel that the resulting triptych falls short of realising the full potential of the scene. **Accepted**.

New Plymouth vistas at sunrise from Marsland Hill

This entry reminds me of a style of British post-card that used to be sold in seaside holiday resorts. Each card would show four significant sites in the resort - the pier, the town hall, the municipal gardens and so on. Each of the site images on the card would appear in its own oval frame. The big differences between those cards and this triptych are - Firstly four images filled up the post-card very nicely whereas with the triptych having only three images we have large areas of unfilled space. Secondly, the cards had a white background while the triptych has a heavy black background which bleeds into the individual images. The black seems to diminish the importance of the images and almost seems to threaten them in some way. My advice is to make the surrounding background a light colour and invert the composition so that one image is at the top (probably the mountain view) and the other two images are at the bottom. This arrangement will give a greater feeling of stability. The actual images are competent but the design of the triptych needs re-thinking. **Accepted**.

Old Car

I find this a very successful triptych. Using close-up shots to show just parts of the car keeps the viewers' interest and their imagination alive. Removing colour and employing a sepia tone throughout unifies the images and is consistent with the look of the inevitable rust that will eventually lay waste to the vehicle. The lines implied by the two outer panels direct our attention back into the triptych where the inside panel appropriately shows the inside of the car. The white border tends to grab our attention away from the actual images; I would prefer a more muted colouring. However this is a small negative for an entry that has so many positives. Congratulations this is an **Honours**.

Reflections Len Lye Centre

To look or not to look. That is the question. I want to look to satisfy my curiosity about which bit of architecture in this triptych fits in where. I don't want to look in case I am overcome by some ghastly form of vertigo or travel sickness. It's a fascinating presentation that on the one hand makes me want to shout "simplify!" but on the other hand causes me to be engrossed with all its distorted lines and patterns. Since I have spent so much time mulling over the composition it must be successful though I still have thoughts that a simpler rendition might be even more successful. I wonder what Len Lye would say. **Highly Commended**.

Spinning

I like the idea here but I don't think that it has been successfully followed through. Showing some uncarded wool, then the wool being spun and finally some knitting next to a part-finished woollen garment would make a good sequence story triptych. However in this version the spinning wheel dominates all three images without telling a good tale and even though in the right-hand panel the wool has been spun and knitting is the name of the game. There is also a clash of scales between the left-hand close-up and the more-distant views in the other two images. The three images in this triptych are technically competent - nicely sharp with a clean background. The photographer has demonstrated that they can make a good photograph! May I suggest that they spend a bit of time drawing up a story-board with rough sketches of what will be photographed for each of the three images and then re-shoot the triptych according to that story-board plan. I'm confident that the new triptych will be a winner. As submitted this entry is **Accepted**.

Stone Faces

These rather intimidating faces remind me of death masks. They certainly don't look happy chappies. The faces are all the same size thanks to appropriate cropping of the pictures, though I would prefer not to see the background that shows in the centre image. However the similarity between the faces suffers a set-back when it comes to colour. There are similar colours in all the images but not quite the same colours and not in the corresponding places. This does not make the images sit well together. I think that a stronger triptych would result if all the photographs were modified to the same monochrome. A colour such as a sand yellow or a stone grey would be in harmony with the fact that the faces are of stone. **Accepted**.

The Way of the Cross

I found this a difficult entry to critique. The three images are uniform in their rendition being silhouettes in strictly black and white. I believe that the images represent the second, fifth and twelfth stations of the cross and certainly tell a well known story. The silhouetting makes it difficult to determine exactly which of the characters is which in the left-hand and centre panels.

Compositionally the crosses in the left and centre panels act as leading lines directing our view towards the bottom of the triptych rather than, as is desirable, towards the right-hand image. In this respect although the triptych tells a sequential story, compositionally that story does not run smoothly. Although I'm not overly keen on titles on images I think that in this case their inclusion adds to the triptych. **Accepted.**

W(h)anganui Blue

A brave division of the scene in this entry works well in grabbing the judge's attention as it's a different presentation to the "three ducks in a row" format of the run-of-the-mill, story triptychs. The Waimarie paddle steamer in the top right-hand panel is the main focus of interest while the left-hand panel depicts no action and little of significant interest. Apart from the fact that the three panels appear to have come from a single photograph only the water links the three of them together. I think that this can be rectified by a duck, or if you wish to be more up-market, a swan. The duck, or the swan, needs to be positioned in the lower right third of the left-hand panel and most importantly must be swimming strongly towards the top, left-hand side of the image. This will mean that the bird's wake spreads small waves into the other two panels thus acting a gentle link between the three images! Now tell me you haven't had a judge who provided constructive comments! A competent attempt but lacking in links. **Accepted.**

A Grade DPI

Glass in Motion

An excellent application of the triptych form. Each of the three images is compositionally strong in its own right and when combined that compositional strength is accentuated. The images are linked by colour and by those wonderful leading lines that swirl our attention (if one's attention can be swirled) in a most pleasing manner from the top to the bottom of the triptych. Outstanding work and an **Honours**.

High Priest & People of Thessaly

We may be into Greek Tragedy here. By the look on the actors' faces it's certainly not a laugh-a-minute production that's for sure. The triptych appears to have been created by carefully cutting a full image into three parts. Cutting is a perfectly acceptable way to make a triptych but it needs to be done so that the resulting triptych has more of a message, more of an impact, than the original image. I don't think that this is the case here. Be brave cut through some of the actors, show some of the actors twice. Give us a triptych that makes us work to deduce the total scene and in so doing makes us spend more time and look closer at the scene you have photographed. This triptych is compliant and competent but lacks creativity. **Not Accepted.**

Leaf fall

I understand the message here but I don't feel that the images gel together as they should. This is not a sequential story triptych. We don't, for example, have leaf fall described by a green leaf on a branch followed by a brown leaf on a branch followed by no leaf on a branch. Because of this there is a greater need for the three images to connect, to match, in some way. The two outer panels here are to a similar scale and tone and the lines of their branches direct our attention to the centre panel. However the centre image has technical weaknesses in terms of the lighting and composition and, more significantly, it is in strict contrast, as far as scale and colouring are concerned, to the outside images. I suggest that it might be better to either have complete trees in all the panels or close-ups of individual leaves in all the panels but don't mix the two approaches. **Not Accepted.**

My Kitchen Draw

What wonderful possibilities this title conjures up! My perverse mind imagines what might be found inside the draw of a devoted weight watcher - a tape measure, three nuts and a lettuce leaf. What about the drawer of a vampire hunter - a cross, some garlic and a small stake or perhaps more realistically a gardener - a pair of secateurs, a packet of seeds and a Yates catalogue. All of these silly ideas would make amusing triptychs. The contents of this kitchen draw are, I'm afraid to say, sadly predictable and, in all honesty, pretty boring. The triptych appears to be made from a single image divided into three but with no great consideration for creative cutting. Maybe the image was made in a hurry. Open the draw, take a flash photo and get cracking in photoshop before the competition deadline is past. I'm sorry if I'm being very hard on the photographer but, with a great idea such as this one, I'm sure they are capable of greater things. **Not Accepted.**

Sylvia Park Impressionism

Beware of titles that have local meaning but are unknown to a judge. In this case it might have been better to stick to something generic such as "Shopping Mall Impressionism". Don't worry that's the end of my moaning; the rest of this critique is very positive. The impressionistic style is consistent through the three images and succeeds in conveying a sense of dynamism, of movement, of hustle

and bustle which is what one associates with popular shopping centres. It also acts as a strong link between the images. The multiple figures in the outside panels set the scene and our attention is directed to the figure in the centre panel who is quite evidently set on a bit of retail therapy. Everything in this triptych comes together extremely well and provides a simple but very well told story. First class work and an **Honours**.

The fire inside

Although the centre panel has some merit the outer panels do not contribute significantly to this triptych. On a winter's evening if we want to sit by the fire we want it to be bright and welcoming. That is not how this fire looks on my computer screen. Perhaps the dull side panels are subduing the look of the centre panel. Increasing the contrast levels of the images might rectify this shortcoming. Be careful to size and position your images accurately; the base of the right-hand panel does not line up with the other panels. **Not Accepted**.

The Pain of War

A sad communication. Is it her fiancé, her brother or a close friend that has been killed? What about the possibility that it was someone she was nursing who has just died? But no, a close look at the letter indicates that it has been returned. So she has written to someone dear to her and by the return of the letter learns that he has been killed. This is a well titled triptych with a well thought out story line, employing good props and a most convincing model. I was a little unsure about the use of the repeated images on the right-hand side. However they do serve to accentuate the narrative and provide detailed imagery to the story. Good work. **Highly Commended**.

Tongariro National Park

This compliant, competent entry has images of the national park arranged in manner that most people will find pleasing. This is not surprising because applying the rule of thirds either to the individual images or to the triptych as a whole will show that significant elements such as mountains and lakes fall neatly on the thirds. The images depict similar subject matter to the same scale and with matching colours and so successfully link together. The positioning of the smaller images side-by-side above the larger image adds stability to the composition. Although not overly exciting, this triptych illustrates the nature of the park well and looks well-fitted for the post-card market. **Merit**.

Grade Winners.

Selecting the winners for each of the grades was not easy.

Grade B entries had two Honours awards. "Old Car" in the DPI's and "Low Key" in the prints.

The overall winner for Grade B is "Old Car"

Grade A entries had four Honours. "Glass in Motion" and "Sylvia Park" in the DPI's, "Catch!" and "Tokyo Labyrinth" in the prints.

The overall winner for Grade A is "Tokyo Labyrinth"

Final Comments

To everyone who entered this competition well done! If you are someone whose triptych fared well, congratulations. I hope to see your triptych again in the **Nelson National Triptych Salon**. If however your entry was not to the judge's liking, take heart. Either your triptych was near the mark but lost out because perhaps one of the images or the image sequencing did not quite work or - the judge got it wrong! Remember my opinions are just that - opinions, based on my past experience of entering and judging photo competitions but in the end still just opinions. Another judge another time might provide a quite different result. Thank you once again for letting me view and critique your triptychs. From Don Pittham in Nelson goodbye.