

## Whanganui Camera Club - Projected Images March 2018 - set subject : Urban Jungle

Hello Whanganui Camera Club members this is Don Pittham from Nelson. Thank you for asking me to critique your February projected image entries for the set subject "Urban Jungle".

I have mentioned to you on a previous occasion that I am not a PSNZ accredited judge so if you wish to provide any feedback on any of my remarks, and for good or ill I hope that you will, please direct them to me rather than bleating to the powers that be in PSNZ "Head Office". Of course you may, with justification, question why, if I haven't even taken, let alone passed, my PSNZ accredited judges' "driving test", I have any right to pass comments on your work. Well firstly because I was asked to do so and secondly, and more importantly, because of the experience I have gained from some thirty years of making, exhibiting and judging photographs at club, regional and national level. Side tracking, I'll mention that I've gained numerous awards including gold medals from PSNZ's National Exhibition, the North Shore Salon and the Laurie Thomas Landscape Salon; this is only blatant skiting on my part but does go to show that with a little cunning and a dose of ingenuity you can fool quite a few of the people quite a bit of the time!

My judging is based on consideration of the four C's. Compliance, Competence, Creativity and Communication: -

**Compliance** means the photographer has obeyed the rules and regulations of the competition including submitting work that is consistent with the set subject title.

**Competence** means the photographer has demonstrated their ability to use focusing and exposure appropriate to their subject matter, to compose the subject matter in an agreeable manner and to employ post-production techniques to good effect.

**Creativity** means the photographer has made an image that is either original in its treatment of well known subject matter or of significance because of its depiction of unusual subject matter.

**Communication** is the most important of the four C's and means that the photographer has produced an image that has a strong emotional effect on the viewer.

The set subject for this competition, Urban Jungle, is not the easiest of topics but the entries indicate that members took note of the brief given and gave it their best shot. Just to remind you the task was to **'hunt for images which exist within the urban jungle environment developed by humans. The jungle is sometimes referred to as 'the street' or as 'the concrete jungle'. Look deep within city life especially lesser known parts of it. Consider elements which make it adventurous or challenging in which to exist.**

To me the term "jungle" implies something that is chaotic, out of control - in the natural world I think of vines growing a metre a minute, entangling everything within their grasp; the jungle offers occasional beauty - in the natural world exotic orchids and vibrantly coloured birds abound; the jungle is a rather dangerous and sinister place - in the natural world huge trees keep out the light, snakes and other deadly animals hide in wait for us; the jungle atmosphere is debilitating and unhealthy - in the natural world hot and humid air is alive with biting insects.

Incidentally, in comparison our own natural areas, dominated by trees and plants, although sometimes chaotic - I'm visualising supplejack and bush lawyer - have no dangerous animals, have small subtly flowered plants, are usually pleasant and peaceful places with a refreshing and enjoyable atmosphere. Perhaps that's

why we call them "bush" rather than jungle. I digress, we are hunting out the urban jungle - the chaotic, out of control, beautiful, dangerous, sinister, debilitating and unhealthy world, not of the tropical forest, but of the city streets.

I'll critique your entries in the order they were presented in the image folder.

In the **A Grade Open Category** we have two images that are not concerned with the urban jungle but rather with the world of birds.

**Greenfinches** depicts a bush with seven of the birds in various attitudes. As the Greenfinch is a flock bird it's not unusual to see such a grouping in fact I read that flocks of several thousand birds can form and woe betide any farmer whose seed crop such a flock takes a liking to. The image is competent and interesting, informing us as it does about the appearance of the bird. However I suspect that we are being given too much information. Rather than showing all the birds we might derive more detail of the Greenfinch and enjoy a more exciting picture were just two or three of the birds to be featured. The image has the appearance of over-sharpening in some areas but viewed as a Natural History picture it is worthy of a **Merit**.

**White-faced Heron** is another competently made image. Feather detail is well shown and the bird is neatly isolated within its typical environment. Again some areas have the appearance of over-sharpening and it would improve the image if the bird's eye had more light on it. What would really make the shot though is for the Heron to be doing something more dramatic. Pictures such as this are not uncommon and the top images feature the bird either catching its prey or with an eel or such in its bill. The shot is totally adequate but with further patient heron observation a more exciting image will result. **Merit**.

The first of the **A Grade Set Subjects** is

**A Little Bar in Texas** I once photographed a tattoo competition. This wasn't a competition to see who could create the best tattoo on some poor, mindless volunteer but rather a judging of the best tattoo on the people who had entered the competition. It took place in a bar in town and began at about eleven-o'clock on a Saturday night. In between each competitor displaying the graphics on the various bits of their body and after I had photographed the bits there were brief interludes of heavy-metal, head-banging music (and I use the term "music" in the loosest manner) which gave those in attendance a chance to re-visit the bar for another jug and to light up and have a drag on some more "substance". The competition finished about 1.30 am. and I'm pleased to say I made it back to the safety of my car without being robbed of my camera gear or being assaulted. For somebody like me, whose real enjoyment of photography is in portraying New Zealand native flowers, you will understand that the evening I have described was somewhat of an eye-opener; interesting but a definite an eye-opener. Why do I mention this? Because I imagine that the atmosphere in the Little Bar in Texas might be exactly the same as in the establishment where I made the tattoo photographs. The phrase "sleeze joint" comes to mind. The whiskey- drinking, boot-wearing, bar-dancing, tattoo-loving, not to mention holey-tight-wearing girl is some mother's daughter. If mum could see her now! She's strutting her stuff but nobody seems overly interested. The man at the bar appears to be concerned more with the photographer ... perhaps I should say the *brave* photographer for this might not be the sort of place where people appreciate their photographs being taken by strangers. Meanwhile in the background on the right something's going on between two men and a woman; perhaps a couple dancing and a bystander; it's hard to tell. The image is dark and gritty (probably due to a high ISO) but this emphasises the nature of

the scene most appropriately. I find this a great interpretation of the Urban Jungle and worthy of an **Honours**.

**Blind Windows** Here's a completely different take on Urban Jungle. A literal interpretation because there on the wall of the building is a mural of what we might imagine a jungle in nature might be made up of. Well done to the photographer for sourcing out this scene and putting a different spin on the set subject title. I like the view point that's been chosen. Rather than looking straight at the wall and merely capturing someone else's art we see the building in the context of the street. The woman walking into the scene adds scale and human interest though I would prefer to see her further away from the edge of the image. That might stop me thinking that she is carrying a ladybird motified surf board. I confess that I'm not keen on the title. It draws attention away from the real subject matter. Never the less this is a creative entry earning a **Highly Commended**.

**Bus Safari** in this case the image title is being used to emphasise the subject matter. I can imagine a safari into a real jungle and also accept the idea of a bus as a mode of transport for making a safari into our Urban Jungle. However I find the image as presented makes only a very tenuous link to the set subject title. Perhaps a picture of a crowd of people waiting by a bus stop with the bus approaching in the distance would have provided a stronger message about this method of moving people in the city environment. On the positive side I do enjoy the manner in which the blurred background emphasises the movement of the vehicle and including the word "Bus" on the road is a neat bonus both in adding compositional balance and humour to the image.

**Doorstep Detritus** What really intrigues me about this collection of discarded trainers, screwed-up newspapers and decaying plant material is the playing card. What is the significance of the seven of spades in amongst all the other items? In fact what led to any of these seemingly unconnected articles sharing some luckless person's doorstep? The footwear appears to be in not unreasonable condition but one of the shoes is still laced up. Was the wearer in a hurry to go somewhere without their footwear? And all those leaves and newspaper; are they part of some sort of discarded bouquet from a cheap flower shop? (Cheap because most respectable flower shops would surely use cellophane to wrap the flowers). Perhaps a potential admirer was about to visit the object of his admiration. As he knocked on her door, holding in his hand his gift of flowers, and began removing his shoes in readiness to enter her house the door was opened. But not by the girl of his dreams but instead by her father who scared off the potential lover by telling him in no uncertain terms what he could do with his passion and posies. It all fits ... except for the seven of spades. Although this is neither a pretty nor an exciting picture I enjoy the close-up nature of the shot, the use of black and white works well in concentrating our attention on the elements of the image and the depicted mess certainly imparts a pretty good message about our Urban Jungle. **Merit**

**Fremont St. Las Vegas** In this image we have moved up-market from our Little Bar in Texas to the bright lights and totally over-the top razzmatazz of Las Vegas. This is certainly a step up from Texas; there are more people, more extravagant lighting displays and this time the girl doesn't have a hole in her tights! But the message is the same - we are all punters in the big, bad city and we are being offered plenty of opportunities to lose our money, our morals and possibly both. Colour adds to the vibrancy of this scene and the photographer has also imparted dynamism to the already strong composition by angling their camera to the horizontal. In so doing the dancer is emphasised by being positioned against a dark background. The

grittiness of the image is in keeping with the scene depicted which is totally consistent with the set subject.

### **Honours.**

**Glass and Steel Jungle** People get lost in a real jungle. Be they Japanese soldiers who still believe World War II is still going on or intrepid explorers determined to discover the fabulous treasures of some forgotten, ancient tribal kingdom. Trust me, they all get lost. People also get lost in the *urban* jungle. We've done it ourselves and we have probably all been approached by strangers asking us to direct them to a street in the town which, embarrassingly, we have never ever heard of. Here is an image which definitely says "what a jumble of buildings how do we ever find our way through that lot?" The clever diagonally-strengthened composition of reality and reflections gives us two main views - the actual building and the images provided by the reflecting panels. These panels are themselves divided by the vertical framing making our brains work just a bit harder to piece all the bits together. The overall effect on the viewer is similar to the feeling we may experience when we find ourselves lost in the Urban Jungle. A good interpretation of the set subject

### **Highly Commended**

**Macau** We humans are a very successful species. So much so that there really are far too many of us. If you don't believe me just ask any other species. We swarm over the surface of the Earth like the proverbial ants in a disturbed ant hill. Here are some of the "human ants" of Macau. Like the animals in a real jungle they all have their needs that must be met. Be it the need for food, clothes or other domestic items. Be it the need to meet friends, take a walk outside or simply see a man about a dog. However if anyone depicted here has the need to swing a cat they may be disappointed. The seemingly higgledy-piggledy arranged shops, selling things only guessable at, unless you are fluent in Chinese, seem to press into the crowd as the individuals go about their specific tasks, apparently indifferent to the crowds around them. One might be unkind and suggest that, photographically, this is just a record, snapshot. Be that as it may it still succeeds well in showing a very real aspect of the heavily populated Urban Jungle. **Merit.**

**New York Sidewalk** An earlier image in this competition showed a woman walking past a wall painted like a real jungle. I might be cynical and suggest that what we see here is what happened to the lovely painted jungle after we humans have "developed" it. Gone are the trees, plants, birds and animals all painted in beautiful natural colours and in their place are grotesque forms, indecipherable writings and crude humour all painted in depressing colour tones. Sad maybe but this photograph is very valid interpretation of the set subject and as I mentioned in the previous entry the angle of view and the inclusion of the human figure raise the entry above that of a record shot of someone else's art work. A well seen **Merit.**

**Only in Las Vegas** Once upon a time advertising was gentle in its encouragement of people to buy a certain product - "We would like to take this opportunity to advise you that Granny Smith is currently selling her delicious home-made apple pies. We do hope that you will enjoy one." Nowadays sales subtlety seems to have gone down the drain. Every media device that possibly can shouts at us to spend our money at a place where "everyone gets a bargain" and then, a few minutes later just as we are recovering from the first aural onslaught, blasts out the same message again. Here is an image which seems to say that it's difficult to see the shops for the advertising; it's America and surely America must be the home of crass advertising. The people seem to be dwarfed and lost in amongst the adverting displays. Perhaps that's a message about how we all feel at times; how much more of this junk mail from every supermarket and appliance store in town must we endure? I like the composition of a dominant foreground with the advertising continuing into the

fore-shortened distance. The image appears rather oversaturated on my screen but maybe that is consistent with the subject matter. This entry imparts a strong and valid message about the Urban Jungle. **Merit.**

**Reflections of Auckland** There are certainly reflections in this shot and seeing the coffee cup and the high-rise building going up in the background we can take the photographers word that it's Auckland. However I confess to not being able to read the message "Urban Jungle" in the image. The picture seems to be more about the individual man rather than the city and its collective habitants. The shot is competent and is creative in its use of reflections but it's lack of a strongly communicated message forces me to think that it is not fully compliant with the set-subject title.

**Shanghai** There's good news, bad news and more bad news depending on your viewpoints. The good news - the population of Shanghai *declined* by 0.4% in 2016. The bad news - the population is still at over 24 million people. The more bad news - by 2050 the population is likely to exceed 50 million. This picture shows just a few people out of the millions but it sets the imagination working as to what it must feel like to be living in a city with that many inhabitants. Those inhabitants need to travel around and from the photograph we might suppose that the once ubiquitous pedal bicycle is under fierce competition from the motor bike and scooter as the favourite mode of transport. The foreground with the back of a woman and part of a scooter could have been stronger if a different viewpoint had been chosen avoiding particularly the bike. This is another image that might be denigrated for being simply a record shot but by showing all those people and all that congestion it meets the requirements of the urban jungle set-subject. **Merit.**

**They walk among us - Ghosts in Trafalgar Square** I found this a very difficult image to critique. I must begin by admitting a strong connection with the square. If my orientation is correct this shot was made from the steps of the National Gallery; a gallery where I spent, or perhaps that should be misspent, many pleasant hours of viewing on many pleasant days, when I really should have been studying back at my university hall of residence. So beware, past memories may be influencing my judgement of this entry. Secondly I found the title confusing; what ghosts? But look closely, perhaps by enlarging the image on screen, and you will see them. After-figures closely shadowing the mortals that walk in advance of them. I don't pretend to understand why they are there although I suspect a technical hiccup in the making of the picture. Thirdly after seeing images of the congested streets of Macau and Shanghai and the somewhat sleazy sights of a Texas bar and Las Vegas city this picture provided me with a crisp, clean place where people have plenty of personal space to enjoy their quiet perambulations. Does this fit in with our Urban Jungle title? But there is so much happening in this scene from the bubble-blower and the spooky yellow figure in the bottom right-hand corner to the "Golden Man" and the cycle-tour group near the image centre, from the sleeping figure (who everyone is carefully avoiding) on the left hand side to the fountain viewers and classic London buses near the top right side ... oh and don't forget the aeroplane! Since I have to admit that some real jungles are quite pleasant places maybe I have to accept that this place, full of people and buildings as it is, is a correspondingly pleasant Urban Jungle and award this is beautifully presented image an **Honours.**

**Tinakori** This straight forward record shot complies with the set subject title and depicts the view across the harbour. I think lightening the shadows would enhance the image. Compositionally the lines of houses provide a "Z" shaped leading-line that encourages us to appreciate the breathing spaces provided by the avenues of trees and the harbour. Although I don't find the image overly creative it has good potential for a stock shot.

**Tree Foil** Maybe the title of this image is a subtle way of explaining what is being depicted. Alas dear photographer you are dealing with a judge of little brain who really does not understand either what is going on or what message is being communicated here. I suspect that we are looking from underneath a sculpture of some kind of tree or plant up towards a skylight. The sculpture is effectively silhouetted against the light so we are unable to distinguish any of its detail. Further there are no other features in the image to provide an indication of the size of the object we are viewing. As an abstract picture it's intriguing but more than that I cannot say except, I give in, you win, game set and match to Photographer.

**Urban Jungle** Here is a different take on the set subject title. "Urban" we have in the form of the buildings and "jungle" we have as presented by the Nikau sculptured columns. The shot appears to have been made in quite contrasty light; gentler light might have provided a more pleasing result. I can accept that the line of cars adds to the urban jungle message but they are not attractive then again most urban jungle scenes are lacking in attractiveness! An interesting interpretation of the set topic which earns a **Merit**.

**Urban Triffids** That's a title that brings back memories of reading John Wyndham's sci-fi book "The Day of the Triffids". As I recall, it all ended badly for the poor old Triffids. I think there is enough of a jungle here without calling on the aid of alien creatures but I accept that the fence line posts may resemble a line of marching extra-terrestrials, though to be honest I'm not overly familiar with exactly what a line of marching extra--terrestrials actually looks like. On my screen the shot has a green colour cast - perhaps a further Triffid effect. A change to a black and white image might be more agreeable or if you wanted to be really weirdly out of this world perhaps a negative of the black and white would do the trick. The crooked fence-line, the wire mesh, the barbed wire, the pallets, the weeds and the rubbish are all elements of the urban jungle. The addition of a human element - perhaps a scruffy cigarette-smoking type - would have added that extra "something" to the shot. This is a competent image that complies with the set subject and gains a **Merit**.

**Voir cour en Pezenas** This is a gentle scene with just a few people enjoying what might be an early morning visit to the local cafe and gift shop. It's all very civilised, all very relaxed, there are no crowds, there's no hustle and bustle. Which is all very pleasant but I fear it's not what comes to mind when I think of an Urban Jungle. We do have the buildings but even they look very benign, remnants from an age when builders took a real pride in their work. The shop fronts seem to be happy to sit next to one another, enjoying one another's company as it were. We don't have today's modern architectural steel, glass and concrete monstrosities vying with one another to see which can be the tallest, most crass creation on the block. This is a most appealing image that portrays a setting that seems to be just waiting for us to pay a visit for a coffee, a croissant and a browse in the gift shop but it seems a far cry from the Urban Jungle.

On now to the **B Grade entries**.

**10 Storey High** That is one very big mural. It's very impressive, almost filling the screen. Alas that causes me concern. The mural is depicted without context. Without sufficient information about the surrounding area. I can imagine the photographer coming upon the painting and thinking "that's incredible, I must get a shot" but *lots of shots* should have been the order of the day. Verticals, horizontals, close ups and contextual shots; those that tell us how the main subject fits in with the elements around it. Is this a building set in some isolation on the green spaces of a student campus or is it one of many similar high-rise apartments in a densely built-up residential area? That's the sort of information that will tell me if we are viewing an urban jungle picture. A well seen and competent image that needs just a bit more to be fully successful.

**Hosier Lane** From the depiction of a single, significant artwork we go to a picture of mass graffiti gone mad. I hope that the two individuals standing at the end of the lane don't remain stationary in that position for too long or they will find themselves daubed to the same degree as everything else around them. There appears to be not a single square centimetre that has not been visited by the street artists' spray can. From the foreground rubbish bin the angle of view leads us down the lane past the painted walls and roadway to the people and the green tree at the end. To reinforce the story I would have preferred to see an artist at work rather than, as is the case here, another photographer but I'm getting picky now. The colours are saturated and gaudy but that's the urban jungle for you. A well spotted and well depicted urban jungle scene gaining a well deserved **Honours**.

**Sea** Here is another well spotted scene. It looks like the jungle, in the form of driftwood tree trunks, has come to visit. We don't have people in this image (incidentally I do hope that you made an environmental portrait of the owner) but we do have plenty of faces. Look closely to see the stone eyes in some of the woodwork. I especially enjoy the reindeer-looking piece of wood to the right of the right-hand window, the sea bird with an extraordinary long bill on the roof and of course the sea-serpent on the ridge-line tops the whole effect off beautifully. Mind you I'm not too sure that I would enjoy living in this house; imagine being told by your better half that it's "time to tidy up the garden"! This is a different take on our urban jungle theme but one that is compliant, competent, creative and communicates a neat touch of humour. Well done this is an **Honours**.

**Stairway** This almost falls into the category of a pattern shot. To be successful pattern shots need to have a break in the pattern. We don't have that here and nor do we have many of the components of the Urban Jungle subject that I mentioned at the beginning of this critique. However this image has great potential. I wonder if with your camera on a tripod you could arrange to compose the same image again but this time take multiple long exposure shots showing the legs and feet of people treading the stairs. Perhaps I'm being too adventurous with my visualisation of what the resulting image would look like but I imagine the somewhat grim, gritty, solid stairway with lots of blurred feet. The whole encapsulating the frenzied activity of life in the almost literal concrete jungle. The image as presented might be improved by increasing the contrast a tad but it already works really well in the black and white medium and has some great lines and textures.

**Urban Jungle (1)** Yes the jungle does have insects and here is one of them ... apparently quite a large one at that. Well hunted down and well photographed in the environment in which it has come to rest. This outside-the-square approach to the set subject could be improved by a bit of sharpening and by cropping off the distracting white margin on the left-hand edge of the image. Well done on a compliant, competent and creative image. **Merit**.

**Urban Jungle (2)** We are back in graffiti land with this shot and it looks like the sort of alley-way that you would not venture down after dark. It's grimy, grotty and altogether too ghastly my dears. All that is needed for perfection are a few drug sniffers and an alcoholic or two which, dare I say it, for the purpose of this competition the photographer could set up with the help of some of his or her appropriately disguised friends. Look there is an upturned milk crate just waiting for some pretend "unfortunate down-and-out" friend to be positioned on! Well seen and competently photographed this is a **Merit**.

**Urban Warfare** The title of this image indicates the thinking behind the entry the photographer has submitted. Technically the shot is competent though an increase in exposure and contrast would enhance

the picture and providing a more symmetrical composition (I'm looking at where the soldiers are positioned with respect to the hand rails and door frame) would be more in keeping with the formal nature of the image. Even with that "urban" in the title I'm afraid that I'm not convinced that this picture falls into the category of an Urban Jungle image. Well done for making the shot it's not so easy being behind the camera with a group of people in front of you, especially if they are not known to you.

**What do you think right move** It's difficult to answer to that question without studying the chess board properly! These interesting, subjects have been photographed in quite contrasty lighting conditions which have led to dark shadowing over the players. Also the right-hand man is wearing sun glasses. These two factors stop us seeing the men's faces in full which causes us to lose a significant part of the image's message. Cropping off the greenery above the fence would make the men more dominant in the frame. Although the title is some justification for the man looking into the camera his interaction with the photographer takes our attention away from the game. This subject matter has potential for some good image-making particularly of candid close-up shots of the players' faces as they study the game. Revisit the site and take your time to make a variety of images. Alas I can't reconcile this image with the set subject Urban Jungle title.

Well that's the end of the B-Grade entries and of my critiquing. Thank you for letting me view and comment on your images Whanganui members. My apologies for this rather extended commentary but all of your images have provided me with interest and given me plenty of food for thought and comment. Well done to everyone who entered the competition and congratulations to those who gained awards. To those who didn't gain an award please remember that a different judge on a different occasion might take a quite different view of your entries. From Don Pittham in Nelson, goodbye.