WHANGANUI CAMERA CLUB

ASSESSMENTS NOV 2022

ALBERT SWORD

PHOTOGRAPHER

I have taken no liberties when judging these 27 images. In fact, I have replaced the term: JUDGEMENT with my preferred term: ASSESSMENT, as all judgements must be, of necessity, subjective. With each image I have chosen several of my own criteria to enable my assessment and applied the same criteria to each of the 27 images. The final criterion, of course, which has to be subjective: do I like the image, and, as a collector, would I buy the image? Finally, with each image I ask myself; Why was it taken? The answer often surprises!

Some images are ‘FOUND’ photographs. Some are ‘SET-UP’ photographs. Some are ‘GRAB SHOTS.’ There is no perfect way to shoot an image, be it portrait or landscape, street scene or even photojournalism. Each photograph has to come from somewhere inside the photographer and has to prove to an audience why the image is in existence. Most photographs are not great, they are mainly snapshots, but every now and then an image, often a snapshot, will jump out from the pile and claim its existence.

To subject one’s images to viewing by others, even casual scrutiny, takes real courage which I applaud, for only in letting others view your work can you see other points of view and hear possibility. That is the best way to learn and improve your photography, to subject your precious images to the scrutiny of your peers, and sometimes to collectors; people who want to buy your image to hang on a wall as art, or people who want to buy your image to use as an illustration for books or posters or advertising. It matters not for which use the image is to be put, it must still pass the scrutiny of others.

I feel privileged to be asked to assess your photographic works and hope my few comments can be seen for exactly what they are, one person’s photographic opinion of the art of twenty-seven of my photographic peers.

Albert Sword

November 2022

1. AO: DOWNTOWN A. M. / H.C.

 A good start with great street photography. The Photographer has been attracted to the multitudinous layers of verticals and horizontals, layering and interlacing thru’ the image. Excellent printing shows all 13 shades of grey from White to Black. The image seems complicated at first but as the layers reveal, it becomes easy to view. So much is happening. This image could see life as a book illustration, Annual Report etc.

1. AO: GOSSAMER GRASS A. M.

 A good title as the grass really IS gossamer. Doesn’t quite conform to the rule of thirds, and of course, it doesn’t have to. The image stands up for itself; it’s beauty lies in the apparent simplicity of the ‘Found Scene.’ This is the sort of image you can live with, light in different ways, long lasting.

1. As: CAMERON A. M.

 For me this image works well, and best from the hand down. The hand is perfect, excellent skin tone and form. Think of Da Vinci’s hand of God but upside down. The lighting is exactly right. Facial lighting is good also, so the image works well. The communication between photographer and sitter could be improved and would result in a great portrait image. Love the choice of monochrome!

4. AS: “JUST CHILLIN’’ A. M.

 This image ticks the ‘feel good’ box first up with its lovely soft colours and good separation between the P.O.Focus face/hair and the blurred background. A well thought out portrait. Subject’s head and face would be improved by placing the head back to the right, i.e. less emphasis on the shirt, and would conform better to The Rule Of Thirds and therefore better composition.

5. AS COFFEE BREAK A. M. / H. C.

 Such a good photograph. Everyone is focussed and alive, including the dogs, who are perfect! When you see an image like this , it just has to be taken.

I would like to have uncovered the L/H woman who is almost completely obscured, but them’s the breaks in a grab shot. Maybe the setting up of another shot would have broken the magic of the moment? Lovely image.

6. AS CONTEMPLATION A. M.

 I know the photographer wants me to like the word Contemplation, but I just don’t. It’s a personal thing. This image has so much going for it that it doesn’t need the legend; the image speaks for itself. This is a lovely ‘found’ image and contains so many points of focus which Do Not fight for prominence, even the ‘God’ like painting overlooking the entire scene. Lovely colour and ambience.

7. AS FOR THE GRAM A. M.

 Don’t get the title, but this lovely 3x4 colour image ticks many boxes for me. The communication between photographer and model is excellent; the subtle shadowed background works perfectly against the highlighted sand. The colours are excellent; like Goldilocks: Just Right! (The tinkerer in me wants to straighten the foreground sand – just to see what would happen). Lovely image.

8. AS HIGH FLYER A. M.

 The legend says it all. An almost perfect ‘seen’ image, sharp-as, colours not artificially altered, totally stands on its own two wheels. I think the image would benefit from some decisive cropping within the 16x9 format; crop from the sides and let top and bottom look after themselves. I.E. Maybe crop up to the sharper earth and down to the blue background. I tried it and it worked. Lovely image.

9. AS KEITH A. M.

 When photographers start to get serious about portraiture they begin to take shots like this. This image works on many levels; no disembodied hands and arms, lovely depth of colour in the darker areas; beautiful capturing of the subject’s hands. Less highlighting on the L/H face would have improved the image, only possible if you can control the lighting by obscuring the light by shading, or - meter for the highlight, then add light to the shadow areas. A lovely portrait.

10. AS LOVE OF NATURE A. M.

 Excellent study, you don’t have to get a kid to pose, they just ‘ARE!’ I usually prefer mood or diffuse lighting in portraiture but here the specular highlight lighting works perfectly. Less light on the hand would improve the image but that amount of light is controlled by the butterfly as much as the photographer. Rule of thumb: Get the shot first, THEN improve the lighting if possible. Beautiful image.

11. AS MAKING A SPLASH A. M.

 Gorgeous image! So much interest, so much fun.

Great use of a wide aperture for selective focus, and TOTAL involvement from the subject, here the photographer didn’t have to ‘work with’ the subject to get a good portrait, all the elements were there ready and waiting. Well exposed with A1 colour, and, above all, well seen. A lovely image.

12. AS PORTRAIT OF A BIKER A. M.

 I’m guessing this was taken in a studio, or with set-up lighting? If so the face and the R/H side of the helmet are over lit, BUT – an excellent portrait showing the necessary communication between sitter and photographer - ‘Biker’ is perfectly at ease. I would love to see this image overall darker, maybe ½ stop to 1 stop, and the lighter areas burned in. Very good portrait.

13. AS SAMBA DANCER A. M.

 One proof of a good portrait is not knowing if it was posed or captured naturally. This one ticks several boxes, Rule of Thirds, exposure, colours, interest, vertical verticals, focus… In fact, the only pro’ comment I would make is of the disembodied right arm. If the arm was somehow part of the image, all would be grounded, and the portrait would grow in stature. A great shot.

14. AS SHEPHERD CHALLENGE A. M.

 What’s not to like here? TOTAL involvement between photographer and subject, excellent point of focus, and so much going on. The drama within the shot could have been shown much clearer by darkening the image – maybe as much as a stop? Maybe more? The photographer will have to experiment. But, this lovely photograph is well worth experimenting with. Terrific image.

15. AS STEAMPUNK GOES TO TOWN A. M.

 This portrait shows how true communication between photographer and subject can make or break an image. Both are enjoying themselves here, and it shows. Not sure how you would do it, but this excellent portrait would be improved by burning-in/darkening the top right of the image. Everything else works for me, interest, involvement, communication, P.O.View, P.O.Focus. Love it.

16. AS THAT’S NICE A. M. / H. C. - *(Even with the fern leaf!)*

 Wow! Beautiful portrait. Differential P.O.V from sitters and total communication with and from the photographer. The background is obviously ‘seen’ and perfectly in tune with the sitters. Skin tone is spot on, as is focus. Lovely stuff. Can it be improved? Yes, but only by the photographer seeing the distracting fern fronds in the R/H side of the image, otherwise a magical portrait.

17. AS THE JOY OF DANCE A. M.

 Colour! Colour! Colour! In this image the colour ‘works.’ The contrast between orange, white, skin tone and blue background is perfect. For me the portrait is compromised slightly by the woman in the back who in comparison to the frontal dancer, appears slightly ungainly. The P.O.Focus is fine, and the lady in front has perfect communication, couldn’t be bettered. Otherwise a stunning image.

18. AS TUTOR TOM A. M.

 “Tom’ ticks all my boxes except for one; Composition. I know this is a grabbed image, but a different crop would, in my opinion, improve the finished portrait. Crop out the distracting ponytail of the listener and the image comes to life.

A wonderful grab shot, beautifully exposed, with TONNES of drama!

19. AS TWELVE GOING ON TWENTY A. M.

 I love the background, the colours of the chair, the perfect focus, great communication between sitter and photographer, and I would like to see the main focus of the image, the portrait, metered much darker. The rest of the image is spot on therefore the girl, for my photographic taste, is a tad light. People think portraiture lighting is easy. It is not easy. The skin tone is usually non-negotiable. Get skin tone right, the rest will work out.

20. BO BLUE MOUNTAIN A. M. / H. C.

 Gorgeous image. Ticks all my boxes, especially Interest, depth and drama.

Beautifully printed. This is the sort of image that will last on the wall as a work of art. The contrast, and therefore the drama, between the mountain and the granite/lava rock is just right. The interest, depth and drama have all been added to and enhanced by good printing. Well worth its Highly Commended status,

21. BO: LAUNCH PAD A. M.

 As one who has tried, with no success, to take bird photographs, I fully appreciate the time and, patience and care taken with producing this image. The Kereru portrait conforms to the Rule of Thirds, the foliage is not distracting, even grounds the image.

I would like to see a darker image, maybe with a tad more brilliance; there are colours within this shot that could be brought out, but, altogether a lovely image.

22. BO: THE MOUNTAIN AND THE WAVE A. M. / H.C.

 Aptly named photograph, and a stunning image. Taken during that special time when sea and sky turn into the colours of enamel. Help from nature, sure, but images like this still have to be ‘seen.’ Placing the mountain in the middle of the top third of the image requires courage, but here it works perfectly. It helps, of course, to have the wave breaking at exactly the right time! Makes everything work. A beautifully realised image.

23. BS: CATCH ME IF YOU CAN A. M. / H.C.

 This is a perfect use of the RULE OF THIRDS. Everything works, and the drama of having the motorbike leap from the page at top left is ballsy and brilliant.

I would love to see the image a wee bit darker overall, maybe ½ stop? - but it still works better than well as is. This image could, and should, be in a dirt bike magazine. A selling image. Is it a portrait? Why not?!

24. BS: DIRT BIKE RIDER A. M. / H.C.

 Tickety-tick for all boxes. Stunning focus, stunning P.O.View, stunning interest. This photographer knows exactly when to press the shutter button.

The eyes of the rider are totally in the zone. The zone of concentration. They make the portrait a must to come back to for further viewing. A beautifully realised image made even better by the contrast of dark body against light background. Again, a selling image.

25. BS: HEIDI AND FRIEND A. M.

 Maybe should be re-named, Heidi and Friends? The dogs are an important part of the image. This is a complicated shot, sort-of breaks all the rules, yet, the focus is ridiculously sharp, and the skin tone is perfect. I tried cropping the image top and bottom, but couldn’t, the perspective defies further cropping, it works best as is, and I just LOVE the pink shoes. Heidi and her friend(s) just have to stay the way they are captured here.

26. BS: I SEE YOU A. M.

 Gorgeous grab shot – or was it tortuously posed time and time again? Who would know and it matters not as the image is fresh and clear.

This is a lovely portrait which takes chances. So many things can go wrong on a shot like this, there are so many variables and yet, here all the variables come together. It’s hard to think of any way to improve on this image.

27. BS KYOTO STREET A. M. / HON’s

 Kyoto Street is a square image – so difficult to make a street scene zing in square format, but here, all my boxes are ticked – with zero reservations. A wonderful photograph. I presume the onlookers are not posed, but as with all great photographs, I don’t care. They are just perfect, however they got onto the image!

The colour (reminiscent of the old Kodachrome 64) is simply stunning.

A privilege for me to view this excellent image and award it HONOURS.