

Whanganui End of Year Salon

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After the Rain

This realistic capture of a rain speckled *Strelitzia Reginae*, commonly, and very aptly known as a *Bird of Paradise* bloom has appeal. Set against a dark and featureless background the colours of this seemingly unlikely shaped flower are the hero of the story. I wonder if the photographer would consider selecting the bloom in post-production and lifting the shadows, which within the deeper purple colours have melded into the background.

Celebrating Spring

A riot of brightly coloured daffodils, their leaves, and some unrelated ferns are seen here arranged on what I presume is a light box. In my opinion, tableaus such as this depend on the careful balance of perfection and imperfection. I find that the earwig nibbles on the petals and the small black spots are items that spoil the perfect part of this scene. The imperfect part, the way the various items touch overlap, and jockey for position made me smile. I can almost hear them chattering to each other about who should be in front! The addition of a cut out butterfly, complete with an unnatural drop shadow and the heavy green border are for me akin to too much icing on this particular cake.

Cornucopia

From the title I take this image to be speaking to the concept of abundance – fertile fields, vibrant grasses, a small flock of sheep and a blue sky – a little bit of paradise. I enjoy the shapes and patterns of the yet to be harvested maize which once traversed, I take a visual stroll along the sheep tracks and wonder at what the view might be from the hilltop in the distance. Photographically, I find the fall off in focus sits in no man's land – that is not sharp enough nor soft enough. My eyes hurt as I tried to pick up the details of grazing sheep, the tussock grasses and the fence and I am left to wonder if this scene would have been better captured with a smaller aperture (larger number) or even using a small focus stack. Alternately, photographed with a very shallow depth of field that made the story only about the harvested maize, the rest of the scene a very quiet backdrop.

Final Touches

A scene that has at first glance, more questions than it does answers! Who is painting, and what are they painting? In relation to the latter, I settled on a boat whose hull is being protected and renewed by a coat of sky-blue (or should I say marine-blue) paint. Mystery aside, I enjoyed the multiple textures found on the hull itself, on the white overalls of the person and on the handle of the pain roller.

Floral Fizz

A near literal floral explosion has rendered what appears to be a formal style floral arrangement in something well, less formal. My photographers' eye is anchored in the centre with the lovely gold coloured flower, but from there my dream of a slow meander amidst carefully arranged flowers is shattered literally to all the edges of this frame. I applaud the photographer's experimentation.

Freesia Buds in the Rain

A quiet image that speaks to the potential that is a flower about to bloom. The delicate positioning of the fragile waterdrops allows me to imagine a still day, those moments of peace that sometime come after a shower of rain – moments when one can still smell the petrichor of rain, that particular smell that is caused by the water from the rain, mixing with ozone, geosmin, and plant oils and soil. As ever, a capture such as this has its challenges photographically. I can applaud the sharpness of the waterdrops, however the slight softness of the third and fifth bud, which are on a different focal plane, are small distractions within a very enjoyable image. I would like to suggest to the photographer that this is a case where a smaller aperture (larger F Stop) or a focus stack would have alleviated this distraction.

Freesia Flower at Night

I have never thought to photograph a flower at night! Both the delicate whites and the near-translucent stamen have been well exposed. Whilst I enjoyed the inclusion of the one petal that is a little past its best, there are a few spots of pollen that could be 'spotted' away in post-production for a more perfect render. I was of two minds about the lack of a flower stem, generally I don't like a floating flower. In this case however, the delicate ghosts of colour from other blooms within the flower bed alleviate this by adding just the right touch of context.

Genie in a Bottle

I won't begin to wonder how this image came about however I see its potential. The patterns that make up this Genie are little wonders of abstract shapes and patterns that I enjoyed exploring. The bottle is very dominant in the frame, as is the foreground of what appears to be an old wood grained countertop. A clever idea, that regrettably left me wishing for more Genie, and less bottle. I wonder if the photographer would like to consider a crop that removes the bottom third of the image thereby increasing the surreal nature of the story.

Gone to Seed

These seed heads appear to be part of the Allium genus, and the details in them is wonderful; I particularly enjoy the way they are all in differing states of plant chaos. As a still life tableau, I found that the container competes with the seed heads – I can understand why it was chosen in terms of colour, texture, and shape, however it has become for me, the dominant player on this stage with the lovely seed heads, reduced to mere corps-de-ballet. The harsh side light has cast on one side of the arrangement, a strong over exposed white strip, and a heavy, and an overly weighty shadow on the other. I find the still life genre particularly challenging as even though it seems we have all of the control, there remains a lot to control when you are building something from just disparate elements, and then attempting to bring them together to create a new perfectly lit whole.

Goodbye World

With the feel of molten lead hitting a cold liquid surface and a colour palette that includes shades of toxic blue and a danger-warning orange, this image is imbued with a sense of nihilism; a world where everything is shattered apart, and from which no hope remains. The choice of a near square crop has allowed me to view this image as something of a series of radiations – madness working its way outwards? As my eye reaches the top left, I find my imaginary molten creature is incomplete... In strict, supposed photographic terms of correctness, this image lacks critical sharpness, has nowhere for the eye to rest, and is near unidentifiable in terms of a real subject– and yet a story was in there, and it didn't take all that imagination to see it!

Hung out to Dry

I didn't notice at first that there are legs, and even more surprisingly a bottom inside these jeans! I think I didn't notice as I know that jeans are not see through, that is a fact, and consequently I failed to even look. This is a clever idea, and like most composites the detail of the composite is where belief can really be suspended. In this instance, the feet are clearly cut out and the edges of the cut outs are not as perfect as they might be. The lighting between the elements is too disparate – the feet are photographed in white light, and the jeans are in the shade. Composite work allows a photographer much scope for the imagination – the final production of these imaginings is the challenge. I am still not sure that I feel comfortable with the concept of see through denim... I did think about it a lot though!

I Love Nature

The colour palette of lively green and the golden bronze of the ponga fronds is arresting. The mirrored warp that forms the heart easily confirms the title. In this instance, the lack of sharpness of elements that I view as critical, in particular the Fleur de Lis at the centre, considerably lessen the effect.

Ian

I have a hat identical to the one Ian is wearing – I think I was given it as a thank you by a visiting Asian (Indian, Bangladesh, Sri Lankan?) cricketer! Ian, with his dread locks, stubbly beard looks to be quite a character. Photographed straight on – he comes across as a take-me-as-I-am sort of chap, but one who appears kind and gentle....

Juvenile Night Heron

One of the rewards of assessing images is that you have the chance to see and learn new things. I didn't know of a Night Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) and I have taken the chance to read about it whilst forming my opinion of this capture. This image is pin sharp, and I have enjoyed looking at the truly wonderful patterns on the wings. In my opinion it is a touch over saturated and over processed giving it an unnatural feel.

Kai Iwi

Captured in soft morning light this image speaks to the promise of a new day. The surfer, making his way along the beach, gazing out to sea in anticipation of the perfect wave, is clearly the subject of the image, and it is to him and his reflection, that my eye keeps returning. The considered aspect ratio allows the subject to sit within the curve of the landscape, just at the intersection of the line of golden rocks; visually wrapping my contemplation of the scene. The image is quite dark, and I wonder if the photographer might consider a small lift in the shadows and the whites, just to enhance the texture on the cliff face.

Kelp with Copper Kettle

I cannot imagine why this kettle is nested within this kelp; however, it is at once totally out of place, and perfectly in place. I had never really noticed the lush metallic shades of kelp until I explored this image. I am not sure that the green border adds to the totality of the image. Whilst matched to a colour in the scene, in my opinion it adds an unnecessary layer to what is already a complex visual story.

Lake Wairarapa

Quiet, simple, and quite compelling, this is a scene that I simply sat and enjoyed. The central placement of the redundant jetty supports draw my eye into this landscape. Their reflection, together with the reflection of the sky are anchors to reality and yet, I find myself imagining that this entire scene is in fact floating; a space that is only able to be conceived within a heavenly realm.

Land of Fog

I enjoyed a gentle visual meander through this valley and over the fingered recession of the middle ground pastures. The band of white fog just before the blue hills, whilst near devoid of detail, still has interest with the ghostlike presence of the large trees. I wonder if the photographer had considered a black and white conversion and/or some further selective post-production to 'tame' that very white band of fog.

Meal-time

With a nicely sharp eye and good feather detail this is a fine capture of this wee fantail about to enjoy this hapless insect. To be able to make out a leg and the face of the insect, a bonus. Having frequently tried and nearly always failed at capturing these small birds I applaud the photographer for this capture.

Ollie

This soulful portrait has preserved a teen aged Ollie in a moment of quiet reflection. The lighting has been managed beautifully. Just the right amount of light, angled in such a way that the skin on the right-hand side of the face is perfectly toned and textured, whilst still subtly revealing a nuanced version within the shadowed left-hand side. The sharpest of eyes complete with natural looking catch lights, fabulous hair detail and perfectly etched lips complete a very lovely portrait.

Outer Self

This multi layered image is quite confronting. The tree feels cramped, its bared branches clipped on the edge of frame; a space that is just too small? I felt a certain conflict with the light wood grained background; unsure if it was an in-camera multiple exposure or a layering of two images in post-production, but regardless of its inception, I struggled with its purpose. The title is also perplexing – is the tree ‘self’ is it outer or inner? An image that left me with many more questions than it gave answers.

Pink Dahlia

I have a particular penchant for dahlias. In my botanical word they are more photographically appealing than a rose and would reach perfection if only they also had the scent of a rose! The render of this dahlia, residing in its environment feels slightly over saturated to me. The dahlia bloom is also incomplete, the petals on the right of the frame are damaged and tucked away – giving me a sense of a scene slightly askew. I wonder if the photographer would consider a tight crop that focus on the centre of the dahlia and features the radiating petals, without the distractions of the damaged petals and the busy surrounds.

Poppy Pods

Photographed against a black background and with the monochrome conversion these poppy pods have become near abstractions. Their peculiar round hats, sitting over an oval body attached to a thin stem they become almost unworldly. For greater impact can I suggest that the photographer tighten the crop to an 8 x 10 and make an adjustment in the shadows to bring out the stems and create some more texture on the pods themselves, whilst easing back the highlights to give a more even lighting across the composition.

Santoft Fungi

I was slightly thrown by the title as I didn’t know of, nor could I find, a species of fungi called Santoft. I then discovered that there is a forest by this name in Whanganui! The three fungi are nicely in focus and the detail of the view under their caps is appreciated. I find the artificial light has however, somewhat overwhelmed the scene; and I suggest that the photographer might like to consider a less-is-more approach in the future.

Surf and Sun

The tonality and colour of this ICM image is lovely. From the deep burnished bronze at the base through varied shades of blue, green, and aqua and then the golden light of the reflected sun, it is altogether a visual feast! Compositionally, the not quite complete wave on the right and the beginning of a new wave top left are irritants, and I wonder if some slightly different crops might be considered. Within this image there are a number of the ubiquitous sensor spots that rare their little heads when using this particular technique.

The Blacksmith

Whilst I can’t see what this gentleman is forging, there is still a story to be read within this capture. From the glint of the red flame seen reflected in his spectacles, to the very worn, frayed hat, the heavy leather apron to hands that we know must be able to tolerate large amounts of heat; it is from these observations that we determine passion and experience. The photographic capture is a touch on the soft side, but some very difficult exposure challenges have been well handled.

Tulips

Set against a black background these red, rain sprinkled tulips are lovely. It doesn't take too much imagination to be able to see them as having a tulip conversation, with the one on the right leaning across so as to be able to talk privately with the one on the end.... The single frame capture has not quite rendered all of the tulips pin sharp, but that is only noticeable with what could be termed 'unreasonable scrutiny'. The white bar at the base of the tulips is a distraction for me and I wonder if the photographer would consider removing it in post-production.

Wellington Shelter

I don't know Wellington particularly well, but I do recognise the sculptures in the background as belonging to the City to Sea Bridge. Street photography is about a time within a space. In this capture there are things we know – we can recognise in part the place, we know that it is raining, and we can surmise that these people are likely waiting for something, perhaps a bus? Was it during COVID, or is this the lady under the umbrella someone who still needs the safety that is a face mask? This is a capture that I lingered over; it is a quiet everyday moment, but one that has been preserved by the magic of someone's noticing.

Autumn Colours in Cromwell

A beautiful autumnal landscape has been observed and captured in this image. A heavy oil paint style filter has been overlaid, giving the image a surreal look. The filter has become what I notice the most, in this instance, lessening my enjoyment of the photograph that is within. I love exploring the possibilities within photoshop and I too have played with this and similar filters. My preference is to use these additions or distortions carefully and generally on the less-is-more basis, and I wonder if the photographer might like to look at this image again and soften the opacity of the layer that has the filter on it leaving more of the natural beauty to shine through.

Dr JP

Dr JP looks relaxed, and his ever-so-faint smile indicates that he is comfortable having his photo taken. His frayed cap and plain black tee shirt speak to a man who perhaps enjoys simple things. The portrait is well lit, although I wondered if the skin tone is slightly unnatural and may benefit from an adjustment in post-production.

King Country Hawk

Sitting very tightly in the frame this hawk has been captured with an abundance of feather detail. I wonder if the camera's focus point was on the body of the hawk, rather than on the eye; the latter being just ever-so-slightly less sharp. I do hope that there is a little more room in the capture just to allow some space, and an element of greater context around this handsome bird.

Mt Taranaki

I enjoyed the honesty of this image, in that the photographer has chosen to leave in the wing of the plane, thereby filling in the how, and making me determined to keep on attempting to take such a capture when I have so frequently been disappointed by my own efforts! I enjoyed the sense of a leading line from the inclusion of what appears to be a road leading straight to the apex of Mt Taranaki – seen here in its snow-topped glory.

Napier on a Good Day

I am sure that locals think that there are in fact many good days in Napier! Whilst it is lovely to see people out enjoying this relatively new landmark on the Napier foreshore, there is little within this capture to suggest a greater, perhaps more profound story.

No Power for the Hut

This black and white image has considerable contrast within it, with quite a few pixels pushed in my opinion, to their extreme within the highlights. I sat for some time and contemplated the story of this image. The placement of the fallen powerline holds the balance of power (pun intended) in the frame, it has a heavy visual weight and yet there is a lot of intrigue in the small cottage sitting within a vast landscape. I wonder if this is a composition that seeks to tell a story, but ends up missing the expression of the greater, and perhaps for me, more nuanced tale.

Pou

Pou has been captured in what I take to be a happy moment. Perhaps he has achieved well whilst participating in an Arborist climbing competition? Being old, I don't understand his hand signal, but I do presume that the young women holding her baby are included within the celebration.

Stoned

I have seen people from time to time using these Optical Glass Reflective Spheres, or glass balls to create some interesting perspective-warping photographs. This dark image has one element of light, and that is within the sphere of the glass ball; perhaps a reflected sky? It is from this element of light that I begin my exploration of the scene, a scene that whilst stoned feature, is just a tangle of shapes – and then I re-read the title *Stoned...* and thought perhaps that it is a story of hallucination, a story that is not intended to be read through the usual literal lens.

Unfurling

Albeit a touch overexposed, this unfurling fern frond has been captured with the perfect balance between sharp subject, and softened background. The excellent details of fern hairs, and even a glimpse of a spiders web along with a nice navigable curve, are all elements that combine to make a very enjoyable image.

Watching you Watching Me

Whilst I think this duck is preening rather than watching the photographer, this image has been well captured. Taken at duck-eye-level, with a nicely sharp eye, and surrounded by swirls of blue and white sky reflected water, this is a very easy image to contemplate. The feather detail is mostly there, with just a little overexposure on the left-hand side. The touch of duck reflection is a bonus.

RESULTS:

A GRADE

Champion Image: Ollie
Runner Up: Lake Wairarapa
Runner Up: Kai Iwi

B GRADE

Champion Image: Unfurling
Runner Up: Dr JP
Runner Up: Watching You, Watching Me