

Why Compete?

By Julie Hughes

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It's that time again. Please go to the Florida Professional Photographers web site for a full list of rules and regulations for 2008: www.fpponline.org/salon.html

We try to keep the rules exactly along Florida guidelines to keep everything on the same page. Below is a checklist and suggestions for a happy and emotionally safe competition. First though, I really want all of you to consider this as a print education. We want you to succeed. Really, in print competition, the only person who knows how you do is you. People don't know when your print doesn't score well, since no names are mentioned, people only know if you did well. If you don't want anybody to know, don't tell anybody you are competing! Do it quietly, anonymously, and no one will know, unless you win something! Even if you do not have the courage yet to enter, please come and watch! You can learn so much just as an audience member, and all the images are critiqued, to give you an idea of why they scored what they did.

There are some unspoken (and spoken but ignored rules) you must pay attention to. Remember, some of these rules are THOU SHALTS, and some are my own interpretation after years of competing. Salon is an art form, and beauty is always in the eye of the beholder. Things like size, thickness, and labels really matter. A lot of other things are suggestive only.

Read The Rules

In our Palm Beach Salon, you will never be disqualified unless you submit something dangerous or illegal, but a properly filled out label and proper payment of \$25 must be received. A 16x20 mounted on Gator Foam is your

best bet. Mount the label right side up, properly filled on the back of your print. Reedy Photographic Lab really has their act together, and prints most of my competition photos. In a real competition, if you do not follow the rules exactly, you will be disqualified, and your prints left in the case. At FPP, and PPA they do not have time to baby sit hundreds of makers, so if you do not follow the rules (which change every year), you are out. Something as simple as putting your label on upside down will cause your print to be displayed upside down. Check the FPP web site, and read the rules!

Glossy or Metallic

Again, this is more of a suggestion that your prints be high gloss or on Metallic paper. Metallic paper is not as popular in print competition as it once was, so be careful on what kind of image looks good on metallic. Commercial images tend to be more suited for metallic than say, children's portraiture.

Print Quality

Probably the biggest killer in Salon. Hire someone to print your image that understands salon lighting. The prints are viewed under intense lighting, which really drains the print. Most prints are under printed, meaning they are not deep or dark enough. It's like being on a stage with theatrical lighting, and wearing no make-up. I still compete at a local level for the judges' opinion, and a chance to see my prints under salon lighting. I often reprint something before state or nationals to make changes before they get out in the real world. Remember, local level is for educational purposes mostly, and we are here to help and support each other.

To Mat or Not to Mat

Most images on the 16x20 have an electronic mat around the image. Again, a simple mat is best. Just select a color out of the image, and go with that. High Key looks great on white mats, and dark photos look better with dark mats. Black mats can really look great, or look too severe. In digital we sometimes see a mat that looks bluish, or what we call "under printed" Make sure your blacks have depth and richness, and also match the blacks in your image! I've seen sepia toned warm black and whites matted with bluish black colored mats. Yek! Make an obvious mistake in print competition, and you will be punished. Placement on the mat is also very important. Obey the rule of thirds.

Get advice from a seasoned professional, and then listen! Get help from a lab like Reedy, or fellow photographer that really wants you to do well. Last year, my digital album won a first place, and a Kodak Gallery Award because Brenda Estes (Who loans her albums every year at PPA, which if you do not know what that means, out of about 7,000 entries only about ten photographers a year do that INTERNATIONALLY) For a fee, she will give you advice, and help you design an electronic album. Well worth it. Brenda taught me so much, and my album making skills have improved greatly.

Develop thick skin. This is not a personal attack. It is an exercise in growth, and transformation from adequate photographer to portrait artist. Don't be defensive or emotional when it comes to salon.

Continued...

Comments like "stupid judges" and throwing your shoe at judges is not recommended. Most of the time, they do know what they are talking about. Correct the mistakes in your print, and furthermore, correct the mistakes in your lighting and posing. Not seeing that palm tree growing out of the groom's head, and having it pointed out to you in Salon can feel humiliating or it can help you grow. Remember, no one knows what image is what, and unless you open your mouth, no one will know. Listen to what they say. Ask for critiques and listen. Be open about your abilities, and your shortcomings. So many times a student will ask for a critique, and then spend their valuable time (and mine) defending him or herself. ("I thought the palm tree added something... can't you see that green matches the green in the groom's eyes?...") Which brings me to my next point.

Judges are Not That Deep

We don't know the story behind the baby in the belly, or the infant that had life saving surgery. We cannot generally speaking, read that much into an image. Judges tend to evaluate quickly (Because that is what we are trained to do) and score quickly. Obey the rules (Until you know how to break them), Present a well printed, well presented image with plenty of impact, and it will do well.

If your image needs a lot of explanation for impact, it probably will not do well.

KISS

Keep Title Simple Stupid. Look at the picture. Title the image. Long wordy titles definitely do not do well; they can actually kill an image. Also, try to avoid cliché titles like "Through the years... Eyes of Love, Circle of Love... actually anything with of love in it... gets very stale quickly. On the other hand a creative title, like "Where's Waldo" titling an image of a Dalmatian dog on a high

key background painted with black spots with the dog hidden among the spots is brilliant. I saw this print at state a few years ago, and it won all sorts of awards. I also remember one of Judy Swan's of a beautiful wild coyote in a stretch position simply titled "stretch" was amazing in it's simplicity and elegance both in the title, and presentation.

I can't do anything unless I know Photoshop or painter. WRONG!!!!!! Nothing beats a pure photograph, retouched for sure, but a real story telling photo with beautiful print quality and impact. YUM! Sometimes us judges get so overwhelmed with obviously digitized images of space and flying boxes, that it can be very refreshing to see a wonderful, obvious, delightful photograph. Know Photoshop for image enhancement and print preparation to get the best out of your images.

Categories

Get help at first. Ask for help at a local and state level to get used to the different categories.

Anything with the word portrait in it, expect to be following rules of thirds, direction of light, proper posing, etc. Portrait divisions are always the toughest, so make sure your stuff in there has plenty of impact and is technically excellent. Unclassified is for experimental and out there images. Put your wild stuff in there. Environmental non-portrait would be considered scenic, or where humans are supporting elements instead a main theme. At PPA, most images are just put in the general collection, which does make things a lot easier.

One Rule Change in Our Salon This Year

All images must have a disc with your images on, along with your name and title i.e. Julie Hughes/Falling off a log/environmental portrait. We want



to publish winners in the newsletter, and also offer image critiques for the newsletter, if you wish. We can do it with, or without your name, but we will never critique an image without your full permission.

Please e-mail questions, comments, and images for critique to:

abbeyoflondon@cs.com

Do not hesitate to ask questions. The only stupid question is one that goes unasked.

Strive to do your best this year, and hope to see you soon!

Julie Hughes