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Note from the Editor

The more established members of Sheffield Photographic Society will have noticed that there has been an unusually long wait for the publication of this latest edition of our Newsletter.

Since undertaking the role of News Editor I have gradually become aware of the sheer quantity of work and effort that my predecessor, Colin New, applied to its publication. For several editions it was clear that Colin had largely supported the publication by the inclusion of his own excellent and thought provoking articles and that contributions from other members had been, at best, scarce.

Unfortunately this situation has not significantly improved since I so enthusiastically took 'office'. I am grateful for those members who have provided me with the excellent articles for this edition, but would like to take this opportunity to encourage many more of our members to send me their thoughts and ramblings which will allow the next newsletter to be produced.

Anyone wishing to submit an article for publication should email it in Microsoft Word compatible format to:
p-matthews@hotmail.co.uk

All of you who have attended our society evenings will be aware that my time has not been solely spent fretting about when the next newsletter contributions will arrive. We have now firmly brought the society into the internet age by establishing the Sheffield Photographic Society Members' Forums.

I am genuinely excited about the potential for the forums. Whilst there are many photography sites to be found on the internet, with which we can never hope to compete in terms of general photographic or equipment advice, to my knowledge there are none that offer the opportunity for our members to talk specifically about photography and events that are of direct relevance to Sheffield and Sheffield Photographic Society.

For those members who have not yet sampled the forums I would encourage you to 'give it a go'. In the short time that the forums have been live we have seen a growing number of

excellent posts covering technique and equipment advice, photographic locations, comment on society evenings and competitions and a quickly growing Critique Forum in which members are posting images for comment and constructive criticism.

It is the Critique Forum in which I believe we should be most excited and in which I see the greatest potential to assist us in becoming better photographers. A cursory look around other photographic societies seems to confirm that the societies which consistently perform well in inter-club, regional or national competitions are those in which there is a culture of constructive comment and critique... those clubs in which the photographers help each other to push the boundaries of their own ability and improve their own images. I believe that, in the Critique Forum, we have a means for this form of 'self-improvement' to take place and, with the opportunity to download images and make suggestions on the actual photographs, I believe Sheffield Photographic Society is now offering its members something which is simply not available in most other Photographic Societies.

Perhaps due to the delay in publication of this issue of the Newsletter, I was recently asked whether the Forums have replaced the 'old' Newsletter. In hindsight it was an understandable question, but was one that somewhat puzzled me at the time. I have always seen the Newsletter and Forums as being complementary to one another. The Newsletter being the place for thought provoking and crafted articles and the forum the home of more immediate discussion. I had even included a forum for 'Newsletter Discussion' in which I envisaged members having the opportunity to challenge or enhance the views expressed in the Newsletter articles. My vision for this remains unchanged and I hope that our members will be inspired to frequent the forums and express their own views on the content of this edition.

I am confident that there is something of interest for all in the following articles and hope that the wait for this edition of the new look Jottings has not been without reward.

PETER MATTHEWS

"I feel that a successful club is about more than just winning prizes"

"There are plenty of other societies in the country but I don't think you could find one that is more welcoming than ours."

President's Piece

How time flies! It only seems like yesterday that Ron invited me to take on the role as President, and here we are in 2011, over half way through the season.

Being President has been a very interesting experience and I now realise how many people are involved in making sure that the Society events run smoothly.

But to me it's the members that make SPS such a successful society. I know we could do better in inter club competitions, but that is something we can work at.

I feel that a successful club is about more than just winning prizes. I have come away from meetings so many times feeling inspired and



*Ecclesall Road and Psalter Lane Junction
From Janet Thorpe's President's Evening talk.*



*Beauchief Abbey and Dalewood Estate -1920s
From Janet Thorpe's President's Evening talk 'From Past to President'*

wanting tomorrow to come so that I can get out with my camera. I have also come away feeling happy that I'd been in the company of so many like-minded, friendly people.

I hope you all feel the same way, why else would you be a member of SPS?

There are plenty of other societies in the country but I don't think you could find one that is more welcoming than ours. We shouldn't become complacent though, so if you find yourself sitting next to a visitor or new member

please have a chat and make them feel welcome.

We are always looking for ways to improve the society so if you have any ideas please feel free to have a word with me or with any of the council members. We are easy to spot, as we should be wearing our name badges.

Many thanks to all of you for making my President's year such a happy and enjoyable one.

JANET THORPE

"Dealing with the Lord Mayor's Office is a pleasant experience and usually goes smoothly"

"Typing out the blurbs is time-consuming but enjoyable – it is always interesting to read what members have produced"

Organising a Winter Garden Exhibition

When we started using the Winter Garden for our autumn exhibition it was easy; few activities used the venue and we could use the central area. This year was different. I couldn't get the usual November dates. Further, for the first time I had to sign an indemnity form absolving Sheffield Council of any responsibility for damage to our prints or display stands caused by just about any eventuality including, it seems, the roof falling in! The indemnity form might be partly as a result of the Winter Garden now being open until 11pm.

We can no longer use the central area. This applies to all artistic exhibitions apparently. We have to use the space around the walls of the Winter Garden. This sounds fine, except we are not allowed to block the Millennium Gallery windows. Further, experience has shown that the wind blows our stands over if they are too near the end doors. Also, I like to avoid going anywhere near the hotel entrances because one year our stands got knocked over. We must not block the seats and we must leave vehicle access at the top of the ramp. Obviously we must not restrict pedestrian flow.

Apart from those, we may set up anywhere!

Having set the dates, the Lord Mayor has to be invited to open the exhibition. Dealing with the Lord Mayor's Office is a pleasant experience and usually goes smoothly. They send me details of the Lord Mayor's CV and family history so I can ask our President to bone up on these so that no gaffes are made and the President and Lord Mayor have something to talk about other than our pictures.

The next thing to do is to invite the members to

sign up for a panel in the exhibition. There are only forty-two panels available and so it is first come, first served. This seems to be a popular exhibition for members and so I do not have to twist many arms.

Lady Luck is invited to take a hand now. Of the stock of display boards available, 28 are large, one metre square boards and the rest are smaller. So, to be fair, my wife Jennie draws numbers out of a hat to select who gets the smaller boards. However, members who have been given a small board in the last three years are excluded from this draw so they get a large board anyway.

I produce an updated information sheet and layout forms for the appropriate size boards. These go to our webmaster Peter Mason who makes them available on the website. Those few members who do not have internet access have to be provided with hard copies.

I produce posters and fliers in Elements from a template on my computer, having only to alter the text from year to year. The files then have to be sent to the printer in good time.

Some weeks later (during which entrants get a number of reminders that they should be getting their panel together), pictures, hanging fees, layout forms and "blurbs" are collected in. It is far easier for me to collect the blurbs by email and fortunately most entrants are able to comply with this before the deadline.

Typing out the blurbs is time-consuming but enjoyable – it is always interesting to read what members have produced. They are typed to the same format to give a corporate feel to the exhibition and so, even though I have most



*The Winter Garden
Exhibition November
2010*

*Another achievement
by Exhibition
Coordinator Keith
Allchin and his band of
helpers*

“Forty-two boxes, bags or carrier bags have to be carried from my car, into my house and up two flights of stairs to the attic”.

“The press have deadlines so this job has to be done in a bit of a rush”

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blurbs already on my computer, I have to convert the fonts and layout. Spelling and grammar are not always what they should be and this has to be corrected. Some blurbs will not fit onto the A4 sheet so I have to do a bit of editing.

Also, when authors have used Word's bullet and numbering facility, this can cause me problems with reformatting.

Most members meet the deadline for prints etc. and those who cannot usually make arrangements with me to bring their entry directly to my house, which is fine.

Now for the worst part (for me). Forty-two boxes, bags or carrier bags have to be carried from my car, into my house and up two flights of stairs to the attic. They have to be unpacked and the bags labelled with the author's name so he/she gets their prints back in the same bag.

Hanging fees have to be checked. Pictures have to be checked against the blurbs (it is not unknown for an author to submit last year's blurb by mistake!) and labelled according to their number on the blurb. Layout forms have to have the numbers added in most cases but some members helpfully do this themselves.

Now I can print out and laminate the blurbs. Printing is no problem on my laser printer but laminating is a chore. This is because, when I bought the laminator for the club, I thought I was being helpful in taking advantage of a special offer on laminators at Smith's. This laminator has to be nursed along. Also, it makes a very bad job unless I put three thicknesses of A4 paper in each packet. I tend to save used A4 sheets for this job, although this year I was able to use the redundant posters.

Each laminated blurb has four pieces of Velcro strip stuck to the back. Blurbs, layout forms and pictures are then put in order for transport to the Winter Garden on Setup day.

Now that I have the pictures, I can compose and submit the press release accompanied by a few images. I go through the pictures and choose some which I think will make the best impact in the newspapers. I photograph them, trying to avoid reflections from my attic window, and process them in Elements for submission by email to the papers. Usually Meg Jullien submits the press release and images because she has built up many contacts with the press over the years. The press have deadlines so this job has to be done in a bit of a rush if we are to make the papers at the best time.



Posters and fliers are collected from the printers (Meg Jullien or Keith Bomford usually are kind enough to do this for me) and most are passed to Meg and Judy Smith for distribution to the libraries, shops and other publicity sites. Any left-over posters are given to members to display in appropriate places.

Event Sheffield and the local radio stations are also notified by Meg and Judy.

I buy the blue ribbon needed for the Lord Mayor to cut, and clean and sharpen my scissors in readiness. I remind our President that they will need to redeem the SPS chain of office from the pawnbrokers in good time.

Two weeks or so before the exhibition, I persuade members to volunteer for setting up and dismantling the exhibition, as well as stewarding. Just as importantly, I arrange for my trusty panel of drivers to transport the boards etc. to and from the Winter Garden. These drivers have to be available on the appropriate days and have cars big enough to take the board cases horizontal between the wheel arches.

Once I know which cars we will be using, I see that Traffic Services are notified of their registration numbers so that (hopefully) we can avoid problems with the traffic wardens outside the Winter Garden. Even so, the cars cannot stop for more than a few minutes so this requires careful scheduling.

"We decided we could not knowingly risk our expensive stands at a rock concert"

"Unfortunately the Lord Mayor was not available on the revised opening date"

(Continued from page 4)

So, at last, the day arrives when we can set up and open the exhibition. This usually goes very smoothly because SPS members can be relied upon to arrive on time and do their jobs well. Hopefully we all have a bit of a laugh and manage to get a coffee in. We seemed to mysteriously run out of poles this year but I have realised at last that the number of poles used depends on the configurations of the boards. Peter Mason and I have now devised mathematical formulae (see the note at the end of this article) to determine the number of poles needed for each board configuration.

Setup usually takes a couple of hours.

The Ambassadors in the Winter Garden are also very helpful and cooperative.

Now I can relax while the stewards do their job. Usually some prints suffer from the humid atmosphere in the Winter Garden and the stewards have to deal with this in the first day or so of the exhibition. I leave them equipment to cope with this. I do tend to be on tenterhooks (especially this year now that the Winter Garden is open to 11pm) for a phone call from the Ambassadors to say the stands have fallen over or some other problem has arisen, but this is very rare.

Takedown happens much more quickly than Setup, but we do have to make sure that the right boards and poles go in the right bags. The display boards go back to storage at Janet's and St Luke's and the prints and other equipment go back to my house.

Once home, I sort the prints back into their owner's bags. These go to the next club night in my car in the hope that the authors will be there and can relieve me of them. Usually I am left with some prints, occasionally for several weeks.

Finally, a thank-you note is sent to the Ambassadors, my expenses sheet handed to our Treasurer, and I can relax – until the next exhibition!

This year's special problems

Shortly before the exhibition was due to open, I had an email from a member who had seen in a newspaper that "Scouting for Girls" were due to perform a rock concert in the Winter Garden on an evening during our exhibition. Alarm bells rang and I contacted other members of SPS Council for their views. We decided we could not knowingly risk our expensive stands at a rock concert (even though, obviously, they are insured) and so we postponed the exhibition until the concert was over. This meant revising the press release and reprinting the posters. Unfortunately the Lord Mayor was not available on the revised opening date so we had to do without an official opening and our President was unable to wear her chain.

Note

For those with a mathematical bent, the number of poles needed in a particular board configuration is given by:

Number of poles needed = $n+2$

Where n is the number of boards in a configuration. For example, a small star configuration has six boards and needs eight poles. A larger configuration using fourteen boards needs sixteen poles. So the more small configurations we use, the more poles we will need.

Simple really. Can you tell I used to be a teacher?

KEITH ALLCHIN



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*“the further a
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*“anything can be
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Musings on Art and Photography

Not too long ago I had been browsing through the Digital Photography Review Internet Forums and had stumbled across a rather heated debate over the use of the term ‘art’ when applied to photography.

One member had posted an image of a winding red staircase, set against green bushes and a vivid blue sky. The photographer heralded the image as one of their favourite pieces of photographic art. Whilst in my own view the image was nothing out of the ordinary, I could certainly see that the contrasting primary colours and graphic shapes had a degree of artistic merit.

What intrigued me about the forum thread was not the image, but the growing consensus amongst the DP Review members that the image was not art, nor could an un-manipulated photograph ever be classed as art.

A number of forum posts proclaimed that ‘Photography is simply a visual record of what the eye sees, an image of what already exists and an image that is produced by a machine’. The argument continued that ‘as cameras have become more sophisticated and foolproof there remains no artistic skill involved in the capture of a straight photographic image’ and consequently ‘a photograph can only become art when the photographer manipulates the image after it is taken in order to create their own vision of reality’. Ultimately the forum members concluded that ‘the further a photograph is manipulated away from being what the eye sees the more chance it has of being regarded as art’.

The resulting conclusion - that the process of taking photographs is not ‘art’ but is instead a mere ‘craft’ or ‘skill’ that may be learned as readily as one can learn to type or lay bricks - was something I found a little distressing, particularly when that view was the result of a consensus of opinion from members of a Photography Forum. If photographers themselves, in this digital age, believe that the process of making a photograph in the camera can no longer be regarded as art then we are surely entering an age when ‘traditional’ photography has lost its way.

It seemed that there was a very clear view amongst the forum photographers that un-manipulated photographs were not art, however it was notable that this exclusion of ‘straight’ photography from the art category had been achieved without actually defining what ‘art’ was or what characteristics a photograph would need to display or possess if it were to be classed as art. The absence of such a definition is really of little surprise given that some of the most influential sociologists and philosophers throughout history have wrestled with the definition of ‘art’ but that, without exception, artists have continued to push the boundaries of what they create to consistently render such definitions obsolete.

Personally I tend to sway towards the description that ‘anything can be art’, but struggle to be comfortable with such an imprecise definition and do not really believe this represents how we perceive the objects around us. Perhaps the definition that I am most comfortable with is that anything can be art provided it allows the author or artist to communicate an aesthetic, emotional or intellectual vision.

As I believe in such a broad definition I was keen to understand what qualities the forum photographers believed an artwork must possess that would lead them to preclude straight photography from acceptance as an art form. After re-reading the forum comments I was able to determine that there were a number of clearly defined strands to the ‘not art’ argument:-

The first was that in order for an artwork to be created it was considered necessary for the artist to demonstrate high levels of technical skill, a mastery of their tools. Here the mental image was one of the renaissance master who created paintings with a technical virtuosity unmatched by their peers. The lack of technical skill required to use the latest digital cameras was regarded as a sure sign that photography could no longer be accepted as an art form.

The second argument was that the amount of time and effort expended in producing a work increased its credentials as being a piece ‘art’. Again the argument gave rise to a mental

"Surely the camera is simply a tool which records reality rather than defines its own"

"Clearly it is absurd to determine what works may be classed as art by the length of time taken to create them, otherwise we could be certain of success in club competitions if we were to use slow shutter speeds"

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image of the troubled artist who dedicates the final years of life to the production of their seminal work. Producing an image at the click of a shutter release button surely could not be considered artistic when compared to such monumental efforts.

The third argument was that an artwork required the artist to produce an image which encouraged the viewer to see things differently, to warp and change the view of reality. How could a straight image from a machine which 'never lies' challenge our senses and make us see the world around us in a different light? Surely the camera is simply a tool which records reality rather than defines its own.

On the basis that disproving a theory is only possible by finding examples that don't correspond with the theory (was it ever possible to prove there were no Weapons of Mass Destruction by searching for them?) I decided to look at works from different art forms to see if the criterion that were being applied to photography held up when applied to other widely acknowledged artworks.

The first argument, which held the pre-requisite for the artist to demonstrate great technical skill, appeared heavily flawed following even the most cursory glance through art history. True, much of Rembrandt's appeal was actually his acquired skill as a painter and yet the extent of the actual painting work that was carried out by Rembrandt as opposed to his workshop assistants is heavily debated. Is it possible that Rembrandt's use of his assistants can be regarded in the same way as our reliance on modern camera technology - the artist guiding the machine? True, the level of acquired skill Rembrandt demonstrated goes beyond what the average photographer can demonstrate with their Nikon or Canon, but the photographers are still demonstrating a skill which allows them to communicate an aesthetic vision or provoke an intellectual or emotional response... creating artwork.

Moving forward in time we have the likes of Duchamp who famously presented a urinal as a piece of art, to convey an intellectual argument. I don't like it as a work, don't believe it involved much skill and don't believe it should have ended up with the status it did as an influential work of the 20th century, but the fact

that it provoked an emotional response and intellectual debate from many viewers means I can't deny it was an effective piece of artwork. However, I think all but the most hardened Duchamp fanatic would struggle to argue that he was demonstrating great technical skill.



*The original 'Fountain' by Marcel Duchamp, 1917
An effective piece of art, but does it exhibit technical skill?*

What of the concept that the effort and time expended in producing the work helps define it as art? Possibly the Sistine Chapel ceiling derives some of its wonder from the knowledge that Michelangelo laboured for four years, from 1508 to 1512, in its creation, but is it really possible to define how long an artist need spend on a work before it is classed as art?

How many lines must an artist draw before they are deemed to have created an artwork? How many notes must a composer write to have their musical composition classed as 'artistic'? John Cage's musical composition '4'33'' contained no notes at all but, as a result of its ability to make an audience think of the space and sounds around them, became one of the most radical and influential pieces of musical art in the 20th Century.

Clearly it is absurd to determine which works may be classed as art by the length of time taken to create them, otherwise we could be certain of success in club competitions if we were to use slow shutter speeds!

The final argument is perhaps the most

“Is it now a pre-requisite that we have to delve into Photoshop to produce something that may be classed as having artistic merit?”

“without photography having defined an 'in focus - out of focus' view of the world we would not perceive our surroundings that way”

“That they could perceive the artworks on display as not being 'artistic' did not make those works 'not art'...”

(Continued from page 7)

pertinent to our digital, post processed, photographic world. Does an image really have to re-define reality to qualify as artistic? Is it now a pre-requisite that we have to delve into Photoshop to produce something that may be classed as having artistic merit?

Here it seems that the basic concept of the argument is flawed. The history of the visual arts was for centuries defined by the pursuit of realism. Recording an accurate representation of reality in painting and sculpture was for generations considered the artistic goal. The conscious decision to detach an artwork from reality is a relatively recent phenomenon, most markedly coinciding with the advent of photography... it is not what defines it.

Even assuming that re-defining reality is an essential component of art, photography fundamentally does that in every form, even basic snapshots.

Transforming anything from three dimensions to two dimensions redefines reality. Abstracting an image from our environment is surely a creative act of composition which redefines how we present our surroundings to others. Do we not create artificial relationships between what we see by our choice of focal length?

Black and white photography always goes some way to detaching the photograph from reality and is one of the reasons why much 'fine art photography' continues to use the black and white medium – it is a simple mechanism to make us think differently about the image that the artist is presenting us with.

Basic photography also has many other ways of re-defining reality, which we now take for granted. Depth of field and selective focus are typical. I may be wrong, but I can't recall many paintings produced before the advent of photography that used selective focus as a visual mechanism... without photography having defined an 'in focus - out of focus' view of the world we would not perceive our surroundings that way.

The question remains as to why the photographers on the DP Review Forums were so unanimous that 'straight' photography could not be classed as art. I believe that to answer that question we need to stray into the field of cultural, social and academic contexts.

Many years ago whilst viewing early byzantine art in the Uffizi gallery in Florence I overheard a number of English schoolchildren condemning the paintings as 'rubbish' because the 'people were badly drawn'. These children 'expected' good art to be realistic due to the photo-real quality of the paintings they had grown up with in their culture and point in history.... anything less they saw as not artistic. That they could perceive the artworks on display as not being 'artistic' did not make those works 'not art', it simply reflected that they did not (or could not) make the effort to step back from their cultural position to understand why the artists had created the works in the manner they did.



*Cimabue - Santa Trinita Madonna—1280. Uffizi Gallery.
To fully appreciate artwork we need to understand the
artist's cultural perspective in creating the work.*

The photograph of the steps that started off the DP Review Forum thread prompted the view that straight photography can never be classed as art. This view is really no different to that of the schoolchildren at the Uffizi. That

"Can an artwork from one culture ever become 'just a record of reality' in another culture? "

"sometimes we all fall into the trap of not being able to step back from our photographic culture to appreciate artwork as it was intended"

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the photographers on the forum can perceive the photograph not to be artistic simply reflects that they come from a culture (specifically a photographic culture) where post capture manipulation of images is the expected normality and consequently they view anything less as 'just a record of reality' (not art). As was the case for the byzantine paintings, this does not make the photograph 'un-artistic' it simply means that the viewer is unable to detach themselves from their learned expectations of photographic art and are consequently unable to appreciate the aesthetic message that the photographer was trying to communicate.

Can an artwork from one culture ever become 'just a record of reality' in another culture? I would argue not. It may be perceived as such by a viewer who does not make the effort to understand the artist's cultural, social and academic motives for creating and presenting the artwork, but it does not change the status of the work from 'art' to 'not art'.

So where does all of this leave us as photographers?

Our photographic competitions are a constant reminder of the 'cultural' rules which are being asserted by the judges, who are perhaps embedded more rigidly than most in the 'in vogue' culture of photographic acceptability. It is little wonder that a judge who has seen hundreds of well exposed, dramatic, sunlit landscapes will regard these as a lower form of art than the latest Photoshop de-saturated and hand tinted shot of a bus shelter. The judge's view of what is a straight record of reality and what they believe constitutes a higher form of art has been defined by their photographic culture. Only the best judges can step back from this cultural position and appreciate each image as the artwork the photographer intended.

Perhaps the moral of my ramblings is that, as photographers, we should seek to concentrate on what aesthetic, intellectual or emotional message we want to communicate with our own photographs and with what tools we wish to achieve this, even if this does not correspond with the current 'rules' for photographic acceptability. Post capture manipulation will almost certainly give more scope to produce the 'perfect' image but there is nothing wrong with limiting ourselves to only those artistic tools that are provided by our cameras. A composer of a piano sonata would not be criticised for failing to introduce more

instruments, photographers should not be criticised for attempting to communicate their vision without recourse to post capture manipulation.

If others consider that detaching the image from reality in Photoshop is a pre-requisite to create artwork then we should remember that this is simply a result of their inability to step back from their own perception of what constitutes photographic art. Ultimately they are losing out on the pleasure of appreciating our images, just as the children at the Uffizi were unable to appreciate the paintings displayed before them.

As our annual exhibition draws ever nearer I believe we may again be presented with a demonstration of this cultural divergence in the perception of photography as art. The best prints of the exhibition as voted on by the public traditionally differ from the prints that have received awards from the annual exhibition judge. Which are the better prints?... well, it has never been truer that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and sometimes we all fall into the trap of not being able to step back from our photographic culture to appreciate artwork as it was intended.

PETER MATTHEWS

Fine Art Photography

I was browsing through a few back number photo magazines the other day and I found myself reading about something called 'Fine Art Photography'. I suppose I'd always thought it had to be monochrome images of rather sombre landscapes on the lines of Fay Godwin's work, so I read on. Rather to my surprise I discovered that there are quite a number of views, quite contrasting views, it seemed on what actually constitutes 'Fine Art' in photography. So here are a few quotations from some professional and amateur photographers on this matter:-

'Fine art is something that must evoke emotions and depth of meaning. I love the mystery of monochrome, it makes me want to question what I am seeing. I like fine art to make me think'.

"Fine art photography should inspire, should make you want to keep looking and should evoke a feeling within you"

"I started to worry that we were going to end up with something that belonged on a shampoo bottle, or on the side of a white van."

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'It is difficult to try and come up with some form of definition of fine art in photography but context has a lot to do with it when shown in a gallery space, pictures take on a different set of readings and interpretations. It is in the eye of the beholder and the viewers' reading of the work is more valid than labels placed on work by artists or curators'.

'I've always regarded fine art to be mono and meaningful and photos to be beautifully produced. Images should have clarity, depth and resonance. They should have a timeless, lyrical feel'.

'I am instantly drawn to mono images. However, colour has its place! Fine art photography should inspire, should make you want to keep looking and should evoke a feeling within you'.

'Fine art photographs should evoke an emotional response and make you reflect on

the subject matter. It is more than a record of time and space'.

'Fine art should make you say - that would look good in a frame and hung on a wall. There are no boundaries to art - the only limits are ethics and morality'.

'There is no such thing as fine art, it's just a name applied to certain pictures to help them sell. I'm still not convinced that a certain type of picture should be classed as fine art and others not'.

'There is no real definition of what fine art is or should be, no one seems really to know what it is. I don't think it's a photographer's place to say that his/her work is fine art. Surely that's for everyone else to decide. Personally, I think it's just a load of rubbish'.

So there we have it, and I hope it helps!

PAUL CUTTS

The New SPS Logo

Last year, while writing all the thank you letters and such, I became very aware of our old logo and the mess of additional information carried on our letterhead. I had another problem with the old logo, in that it was on the wrong side of the sheet. Logos are best placed on the right hand side, because that's the bit that's seen when flicking through a file.

The more I looked at it, the more I thought the 'camera' shaped 'thing' to be a bit pre 'O level art' in character, so I began to play with the initials to try to find something new. When I showed my first thoughts to Council, I got the feeling that they thought it to be worth about a '12'. But I had opened the issue up and as other peoples thoughts were shown, I started to worry that we were going to end up with something that belonged on a shampoo bottle, or on the side of a white van.

It eventually dawned on me that our full name combined with some small, faintly photographic device...a stylised lens, with some added colour, might do the trick. One less element and therefore more clean space on our letterhead had to be an improvement.

So, I hope all of you can live with my efforts.

RON WALKER

Miroslav Tichy

I recently visited an exhibition at the International Centre of Photography, New York. The work on display was by a photographer who takes pictures for no other reason than for his own pleasure, a photographer that has found worldwide acclaim yet still lives hand to mouth and has no interest in seeing his life's work exhibited in the most prestigious galleries.



The photographs didn't make much of an impression at first. They were blurry, over exposed, dog eared and crooked. The images were in a very poor condition and the content was the type of shots that most photographers would have discarded for lacking the desired quality.

They all showed girls and young women, in

"The cameras certainly didn't look functional, he fashioned them from shoe boxes, cardboard tubes and plexiglass, polishing the lenses with toothpaste and cigarette ash"

"Miroslav Tichy is known to have encouraged visitors to drop his prints on the floor and step on them."

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He did not take up photography until the late 1950s. When he did, he quickly moved from landscapes to his fleeting portraits of the women of Kyjov.

Allowing himself three rolls of film a day, he wandered the streets performing his own personal version of the Czech government's surveillance program. He was a stalker of pretty girls with a secret agenda.

streets and public parks, going about their business, mostly unaware of the camera. Several of the images wore hand painted mounts and often the prints themselves had been illustrated with pencil outlines.

I found a small audio visual room which was showing a documentary about the photographer, a Czech who took the pictures during the 1960s and 1970s in his hometown, Kyjov. The man who was being interviewed was a Miroslav Tichy.

You might call Miroslav Tichy (pronounced TEE-kee) an outsider artist if it wasn't for the inconvenient fact that he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and was for a time a celebrated painter.

I picked up the documentary as he sat looking through his art collection, holding his paintings (every one of them had been destroyed by thick layers of dust). Tichy created art for his own personal enjoyment. He did not sell his work, he didn't hang it. On completing an art work, he would pile them up on his studio floor where they would stay for years. In the documentary he is wetting a canvas with a cloth "they are all ruined!" he says wiping another canvas to show vibrant colours appear and disappear as the canvas dries and the dust prevails.

Miroslav Tichy was marked from the beginning: he was a non-conformist with a history of mental illness, and a former member of the Brno Five, a group of painters who broke with the state-sanctioned Socialist Realism of the post war years. He was monitored and, from time to time, institutionalized.

Clearly Miroslav Tichy admired legs, and bottoms, often cropping the image to show just the lower body. But he did more than ogle. Many photographs show conspiratorial pairs of women: gossiping, telling secrets or otherwise staking out bits of privacy in public.

He seems to have been tolerated as the town eccentric, alarming in habits, daily visits to photograph at the local pool and his appearance, unkempt beard and tatty sweater (hand repaired over the years to become a work of art in its own right), but harmless enough. In one memorable shot two seated girls confront the camera with disdain, as if to say, "There's that creepy old guy again."

The documentary (Tarzan Retired) a film by Roman Buxbaum reveals some of Miroslav Tichy's subjects assumed that his camera was fake. The cameras certainly didn't look functional, he fashioned them from shoe boxes, cardboard tubes and plexiglass, polishing the lenses with toothpaste and cigarette ash. I saw some of these self-fashioned objects in two glass cases, along with stacks of tattered prints. They were amazing.

The photographs' condition can be troubling: it suggests not just carelessness, but mental decay and even the degradation and defilement of women. Miroslav Tichy is known to have encouraged visitors to drop his prints on the floor and step on them.

ADRIAN RICHARDSON

“there is a counter argument that a wider range of marks are required if our members are to receive meaningful feedback from the judge on their images”

“I assume it’s an accurate record as no one would have manipulated an image to end up with something this dull”

How to Interpret Judges’ Comments

The marking system that is being trialled in this year’s members’ print competition continues to elicit strong opinions amongst society members. Whilst the system has been instigated to reduce the chance of marking inconsistencies by judges there is a counter argument that a wider range of marks are required if our members are to receive meaningful feedback from the judge on their images.

Whichever way our print competition is marked in future years I believe it is important that members also learn to interpret judges’ comments if they are to gain maximum feedback on their submitted images. To this end I have included below a handy guide which explains what the judges really mean by some of their most commonly made comments.

Technically very good

This one is a bit boring and I can’t really think of much else to say about it in the time available.

The photograph could do with a tighter crop

It’s not really very good, but if I suggest it is made smaller then there will be less of it visible to upset me.

A classic photographer’s shot

I’ve seen the same shot done better dozens of times at other clubs.

An excellent effort but it is up against stiff competition tonight

One of the worst of the bunch.

An unusual viewpoint

There is a good reason why people don’t normally take the photo from this vantage point and this hopeless photograph demonstrates it perfectly.

It’s a humorous title appropriate to the print

The print is laughable.

It looks better on the screen than the print

The photographer obviously has no control of colour and exposure and even the washed out blue tint of the projected image looks better.

It has been cropped a little too tightly for me

The photographer has picked out the wrong bit of the scene to photograph and would have done better including something else to try and make it more interesting.

There is a magenta / cyan / yellow (varies from judge to judge) colour cast

I hope no one notices that I’m colour blind.

The highlights have burnt out a little

This is massively overexposed.

It’s an accurate record of the scene

I assume it’s an accurate record as no one would have manipulated an image to end up with something this dull.

The mount colour doesn’t help the photograph

It must have taken two days to set up the shot and a lifetime of learning to capture it correctly... If I ignore the photo and comment on the mount board that should really annoy them.

A good example of its type but doesn’t quite make it to the last few

It’s a good example of a very ordinary print and certainly won’t get a good mark from me.

A superb example in which I can find no faults

I’ve already shortlisted quite a lot of prints, I’d better give this one a low mark.

I think the photograph is let down by printing on the wrong type of paper

If I criticise it enough I should be able to flog the photographer some ilfospeed ink and paper and keep my sponsor happy.

I think the photographer should consider cloning out the distracting light / figure / building (varies from photo to photo)

It must have taken real skill to capture this photograph, but I’ll completely ignore that by suggesting a bit of quick manipulation in Photoshop is all that was required to make it any good.

“Don’t think you’ll always get a good mark by submitting photos of penguins at the South Pole”

“Even a chimpanzee with a copy of Photoshop would have produced a more subtle result, but I’ve been told to keep my comments positive”

“It is a job which by its very nature exposes the judges to criticism, but one which few of us could tackle with equal expertise”

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This is a photograph which would make the parents proud

Why has someone submitted a snapshot from their family album?

I like the sense of movement

It’s a shame it’s a photograph of a building.

I think the photographer should go back and have another go in better lighting conditions

Don’t think you’ll always get a good mark by submitting photos of penguins at the South Pole.

There are possibly two separate photos vying for attention in this scene

It’s a shame the photographer hasn’t captured either of them.

I can see why the photographer was attracted to this scene

Not another boring sunset!

This looks like it was probably taken at a wartime re-enactment

I’ve travelled up from London to mark this competition. I don’t think they still dress like this in Sheffield but I’ll hedge my bets just in case.

The photographer has correctly focussed on the eyes

I’m not really sure what to say here... I’ve never had to mark a photograph of a potato before.

I always say that the ‘rules’ are there to be broken

And I always mark low when they are. They never learn do they?

This print shows that photography can have an emotional impact

I’ll cry if they’re all this bad.

I think the digital treatment really helps with this photograph

Even a chimpanzee with a copy of Photoshop would have produced a more subtle result, but I’ve been told to keep my comments positive.

This is a well seen photograph which most of us would have walked past

And just because one of you stopped I’ve now got to try and say something nice about it.

It has been a pleasure and a challenge to judge such a high quality and varied selection of prints

Do you need my sort code or do you normally pay by cheque?

I hope the above has provided a more light-hearted view of photographic competitions, however as I was compiling the list of comments and translations it became very clear to me what a difficult job the judges do.

Whereas I could compile these few comments at leisure our judges are often faced with over 100 photographs on which they are required to comment constructively and individually in a period of less than 2 hours. It is a job which by its very nature exposes the judges to criticism, but one which few of us could tackle with equal expertise.

PETER MATTHEWS

Contributions for the next issue of Jottings should be submitted in MS Word compatible format to:-

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