



PERMAJET THE INKJET PAPER SPECIALISTS - PROUD SPONSORS OF THE PAGB e-news

e-news

from the Photographic Alliance of Great Britain

Issue 291 extra. 15 September 2021

What makes a Good Photograph?



A Brush With A Cactus by Paul Mason

Hon Editor: Rod Wheelans MPAGB MFIAP FRPS FIPF HonPAGB HonSPF. e-news@thepagb.org.uk

Opinions expressed in e-news are not necessarily the opinions of The Photographic Alliance of Great Britain and neither the Editor nor the PAGB accepts any liability for any content. Any mention of products or services in e-news does not constitute an endorsement or approval of those items

What makes a good photograph?

It is an impossible question to answer but we asked it anyhow and this issue includes many of the varied responses we have received. Some are aimed more at what a judge may be looking for. You may find some opinions contradictory and you may not agree with them all but hopefully some will resonate with you and will encourage you in your personal pursuit of photographic excellence.

Opinions expressed in this e-news are not necessarily the opinions of The Photographic Alliance of Great Britain and neither the Editor nor the PAGB accepts any liability for any content.

As amateurs, we do this for fun so your primary objective may be just to enjoy your own images.

Agony and Ecstasy by David Keep



When I view a photograph, I do so, not merely with my eyes, but with my heart.

What does it make me feel?

Does it matter what emotion it evokes?

The answer to the second question is not a jot. The answer to the first is largely in the hands of the photographer. No matter what the subject matter or genre the photographer should ask themselves what is the feeling they wish to convey. How did they feel when they pressed the shutter? Is that feeling evident in the finished image? If the photographer is employing post processing techniques they need to constantly ask if there is anything in the image that detracts from the feeling they wish to communicate. Anything that does detract has to go!

What sort of feelings can a photograph elicit? For landscapes, I want to 'feel' the water of that waterfall; the cold of that ice; the blistering heat of that desert. I can be amused or brought to the verge of tears by people pictures. The full gamut of human emotion can be captured and communicated. In sports photography I'm looking for effort, the harshness of the conditions, I want to share the total dejection or elation of the athlete. I want to feel like it's me who is competing. Great nature photography still needs to have the ability to make the viewer feel something even if it just saying 'wow'. I want to be scared, repulsed, wowed etc.

How I engage with an image is up to the photographer. Many images are what I call 'so what images.' Little thought has gone into their production. I often ask myself if someone who was standing next to the author would have got the same shot. If the answer is yes then I conclude that very little of the photographer's soul has gone into the image. That's the key: make it your own, put your own mark on it.

Many years ago, when I first came into photography, I was privileged to view a prospective Fellowship panel by someone who now has two Royal Fellowships to his name. I knew nothing about the criteria for such things. What I said certainly resonated with the author. It was this, 'all those photographs have your name written all over them.'

Above all, photography is means of communication. It is not merely a method of recording what is in front of the lens. A photocopier could do that! It should speak to the viewer.

Let your photography speak for you!

Kathryn J Scorah MPAGB FBPE EFIAP
kathrynscorahcreativephotography.weebly.com/



Ferocity by Kathryn J Scorah

I AM VERY NEW TO JUDGING,

I was invited to judge a PSA competition 10 months ago. I have since done 2 more and have 4 in the pipeline. I have found this whole adventure one of the most amazing things that I have done and I feel incredibly honoured to be asked. I have never judged a club competition on my own.

I feel a strong responsibility to judge every image fairly, and to respect the guidelines of that required theme.

In the first round you normally score 1-5 for each image. For me a 1 is only used for an image that does not conform to the guidelines. There are a few, and travel sections have quite strict rules. We are asked to be sure that the image has not been staged.

I use a score of 2 if there are obvious technical images. In general an image that gives the impression of lacking something. A score of 3, for me, is when an image is good but could be better. You look at the image and you like it but you feel it has something to let it down. Score 4: these images just stand out from the others, sharp, clear, well produced and show the author has thought about the image.

An image scoring 5 really stands out from the rest, showing a story presented to perfection. These images do stand apart out of the selection, actual personal preferences doesn't make my choice, but respect for a job well done will help me award 5. Sometimes you may see an image that you have seen in another competition, this can be difficult as you see it having seen it before this requires more dedicated judging as you can lose the initial "wow" factor.

I compete in internationals. I know how expensive it is, and I fully respect that I have to judge honestly and fairly. I never thought I would judge but I hope it will continue, and I remain honoured to be asked.

Jennifer Margaret Webster DPAGB MPASA EFIAP/b ARPS SPSA BPE3*



Large Male Grizzly Bear by Jennifer Margaret Webster

Barbie Lindsay MPAGB FBPE EFIAP^s AWPf

<http://www.barbielindsay.co.uk/>

A good photograph is one that I wished that I had taken!

Sharp where it needs to be, well exposed, balanced, has a story telling feel, especially if creative, and originality is important too.



Mother Earth by Ross McKelvey

Brian Cathie CPAGB EFIAP LRPS

Technically good, stirs an emotion, has impact at first viewing for a start.

Tim Pile MPAGB FIPF ARPS

<https://timpile.co.uk/>

It depends on what the image is for, there are certain types of images that I hang on my wall, and for those I choose images that I am happy to look at each day and so they must be pleasing to the eye and you don't get bored with them, others are for exhibitions and I choose images with impact, so in the first five seconds of seeing them you think wow that's interesting, then images I put in panels which must fit in with other images so may not have immediate impact and which don't contain any technical or other obvious faults which can be spotted in the 5-10 minutes that assessors may look at a panel for. So "good" depends on the image's purpose.

Terri Adcock CPAGB AFIAP LRPS PPSA

Quality of light and something that speaks to me.

Alan Sharples

Some say they look for narrative, I like drama in a photo.

Suzy Hicks

Purpose, storytelling, creativity I like originality, good use of light, techniques, technically good

Caroline Preece

<https://www.carolinepreecephotography.com/>

Photography is a visual language, it can say something deep and meaningful about the world today, or something as simple as, "hey, look at the amazing light on that tree", however it should say something and be convincing in what it says (even the most fictional scenes should be put together in a manner which is believable - think good film versus badly acted film).

A good photograph is one where the photographer has something to say about the world, real or fictional, and communicates it effectively.

Mike Clatworthy

Really is a difficult question, because personal preference comes into it. For me, a good photo shows me what the photographer wanted me to see and should capture a mood or feeling. It should be presented in a way that is sympathetic to the subject and it's colouring.

With such a wide range of subjects and styles for photography, if you were to say what made a good portrait, then that criterion would not be right for sport or wildlife photos.

Everybody's idea of what makes a good photo is going to be different, you can probably never say exactly what a good photo is, but you will always know when you have seen one.

Janey Lazenby DPAGB LMPA

<https://www.ejlazenbyphotography.co.uk/>

An image that feeds the eyes, draws you in and the more you look, the more you discover and enjoy.

Ian Douglas

<https://iandouglas.photo/work>

A good photograph, including the subsequent processing and presentation, is one which captures what the photographer intended in areas of the idea, emotion, exposure, the colour (including monochrome), the moment, the message intended, the light at the time and is sharp where it needs to be, and perhaps where not.

A great photograph is one that has all the qualities of a good one but evokes an emotion, memory or the attributes of a good photograph for other viewers. In addition it may show something in a new way, something unique, and indeed may be shocking, as in the case of war or documentary photography. Ideally it should need no narrative.

Dennis Russ

A good photograph is in the Eye of the Beholder

Andy Gutteridge DPAGB EFIAP^P

A good image will be acknowledged as such by a few. A great image will be acknowledged by many

Anne Given

The short answer is that image makes you go Wow ...no good for devising a standard but works when advising people on what images they need to select!

Colin Bradshaw DPAGB BPE4

What makes a good photograph, there are so many genres of photography it is impossible to make one statement that covers them all. It also depends on the intended use, for example if the picture is intended as a PDI entered for either BPE or international exhibition impact is important as the judges have a very short viewing time. If the picture is intended for a gallery, it may need subtlety and more content to hold the viewer's attention. Impact is important, also the image must not have anything the judges might question, i.e., what is that squiggly bit at the bottom of the image or what is that light area. There should be no blown out areas and none blocked.

Beyond that it is down to the preference of the Judge, we have all heard the phrase Marmite image, the judges view is very subjective and influenced by many experiences, a judge may have seen an image before and seen it has won several awards this is going to subconsciously influence the judge. However, if a judge has an affinity with any subject, it can work either way. If for example I see a picture of a Buzzard I would like it more than a Red Kite as we are lucky to have lots of these locally and few Buzzards, the subject matter will also influence the judges, a polar bear on an ice flow will always score higher than a cow in a field but they are both animals in their natural environment.

In summary, if your images are well presented and well printed, if they are prints with impact, good colour balance, sharp where they should be etc., it is down to getting the right judges on the right day or, if you are unlucky, the wrong ones

Trevor Swann CPAGB

A Photograph may meet most of the conditions described above, but photographs are subjective by nature. What one person likes another may not. To achieve a certain standard a photograph must meet a technical standard in the way it is presented and be able to talk to the viewer with its content so that the person is left in no doubt as to the meaning behind the image. It could be documentary, it could be defining colour, texture, personality but above all it must deliver a message, a statement, a question. This however must stand out and be expressed in just a few seconds in front of a panel of judges, no matter how experienced they are they can miss a good snap because it does not immediately have "the wow factor".

Bruce Kendrick

A good image stirs feelings of reflection and invokes what DH Lawrence called the spirit of a place or event. "A memory of an experience, or somewhere you once stood, or somewhere you would like to be, or even a dream that you recall." For that I prefer beautiful realism rather than fanciful fantasy. I want to feel a 'closeness' to the image, an intimacy but that comes from an empathetic relationship with the image. There can be art in good photography which comes close to the feelings I get whenever I look at a Rembrandt self-portrait, especially as a vulnerable old man

Kyle Tallett FRPS DPAGB

<https://www.kyletallettphotography.com/>

Photography is an art not a science. In science there are clear and defined measurements that are rarely open to debate or dispute. In art there are no such benchmarks and measures. Sure there are technical measurements but how an image is marked is based I assume on the impact or how it makes the viewer feel. That is variable, but a successful image will invoke a reaction in more viewers than others. Therefore I feel that a panel of 6 experienced assessors is the only way to go, unless you wish to turn the process into a technical exercise

Des King ARPS

A photograph that has instant impact. I don't care if there are blown highlights or strong blacks.

Gordon Roberts

An image that gets a 20 is the one that I look at and say to myself, "I wish I had taken that one".

Rob Stephenson

A good photograph is one you are happy with!



X-ray Waiting Room_Colin Trow-Poole

Coyote In The Snow by Julia Wainwright



Alan Harris

I'll let Grant Scott answer this question for me - "I wonder if we all have a photograph that stays with us through life. One that we see at a pivotal point in our cultural awareness, that we can never shake from our memory. One that moves us, maybe shocks us, appeals to us, talks to us and connects with us. A photograph that makes us go beneath the surface of the image. That makes us want to find out more. Perhaps about the photographer or the subject of the image, or both.

https://unitednationsofphotography.com/2020/09/03/the-photograph-that-stays-with-you/?utm_campaign=The%20Weekly%20UNP%20Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Revue%20newsletter



Flower Girl by Michele Campbell

VISUAL

The visual aspect is about processing and printing qualities. Do any technical aspects of the image help or hinder our enjoyment whilst viewing? Amongst other issues, the image may be too light, too dark, unsharp, blurred, pixelated, noisy or poorly masked. These are probably the easiest problems to identify when judging and also the easiest to offer advice to mitigate. Sometimes apparent technical problems may be intended by the photographer for artistic effect, think grainy textures or intentional camera movement. A judge should be aware of this possibility when commenting.

COMMUNICATING

Communicating is about getting a message across. The principal driver here is what we loosely term composition. There are many formal rules about composition in art, and many of these have proved useful to photographers. The term “arrangement” may be more useful in judging, since it can include content, visual and tonal viewing paths and the balance of principal points of interest with the background. A judge may consider the content, the choice of lighting, choice of viewpoint and also on the choices made during post-production. A judge should have the skill and experience to explain how to improve the image without ignoring the artistic intent.

INFORMATION AND EMOTION

The information and emotion aspects are always present in every photograph, but they can be difficult to identify and express. In just a few seconds, most observers and judges will have decided how they connect with the image, what stands out for them and how the image compares to their expectations. This is all very subjective and personal. The skill of a judge is to recognise the emotion and to be able to comment on it without particular bias. This is a difficult balancing act. We demand a judgement which is generally acceptable, even though it is based on the personal experiences of the judge and of the viewers.



Mattheson Lake Dawn by Chris Forster

There are many reasons to take photographs, documentation, commercial, artistic, personal and for competition. These reasons are not exclusive and any one photograph fit several requirements.

Photographs entered for club competition/exhibition are assumed to be primarily intended for competition and this allows them to be judged against expected standards. These standards may be different for beginners and more experienced workers and may differ from club competitions to exhibitions. The standards may change with time as new processes, styles and trends become accepted. The standards will be influenced by photographic judges and by the entrants and will be set by general unspoken consensus.

The expected standards do not prescribe the subject matter of photographs but may limit the content and presentation to a limited range of contemporary styles. If this were not the case, then entrants would not know what to enter and judges could not judge consistently. It is important that a judge should be actively competing at a level above the level of the competition so that they can understand what is possible and what is expected.

JUDGING PHOTOGRAPHS - WHY AND HOW**ROGER NORTON LRPS**

Judging is no easy task when presented with a "new" photograph and only a couple of minutes to gather thoughts and respond. Fortunately, the basic questions can be broken down into a number of sub-questions or considerations.

1. Does it appeal to me or does it disturb me in some way? *a "yes" to this question is an indication that the image should be regarded as successful.*
2. Does it invoke feeling or mood such as "I wish I was there" or "I wish I'd taken that"? *"yes" to this question is a re-enforcement to question 1*
3. Does it leave me feeling indifferent? *a "yes" to this question almost certainly indicates that the image is a failure.*
4. Does the photograph tell a story, or make social or political comment? *If so, is the story/comment obviously stated (the judge must set aside any contrary opinion on the topic).*
5. What has the photographer done to make it his/her personal take on the subject or is a simple record of what anyone would see? *Has the photographer "used existing tripod marks" or has he/she presented the subject matter in a personal way. Does the photographer appear to have a personal style?*
6. Is the approach to the subject novel or hackneyed? *For competition entries, the photographer should be looking for new subjects or presenting "old" subjects in a "new" way.*
7. If it is a set subject competitions, does the image meet the brief set out by the club or organising body. *Judges should be prepared to reject any image that fails to fulfil the brief, however challenging that may be. (Some judges are too lenient on set subject compliance which is unfair on participants who meet the brief.)*
8. Technical
Beginners. Give detailed advice on technical flaws and how to avoid them.
Advanced. Briefly point-out any technical flaws but give no advice on avoidance. Strictly speaking, technical flaws should be absent in advanced work.



Despair by Charles Ashton

Bald Eagle Walking on Snow by Julia Wainwright



The four things that make a great photograph and the one thing that doesn't by DAVID TRAVIS ARPS

One of my goals with my photography is to stop focusing on individual photos, "hero shots", and instead create collections of images that tell a story. It's difficult to provide depth or narrative with a single photo but when you collect images together, they have significantly more impact. Sadly, for this kind of photography, most club photography judges, and most photography competitions prefer the hero shots.

So it's ironic that my focus on collections has got me thinking about what makes a great individual photograph and I've narrowed it down to four things.

Timing



Sometimes, you just need to click the shutter at the right time. 1 second earlier or 1 second later and the picture has gone. This is one element of Cartier-Bresson's famous 'decisive moment'.

< This was an example of good timing: waiting for something to happen. I could see the bird flying through the shaft of light, so I set up the composition, pre-focused, and waited. Canon 5D Mk III with EF 50mm f/1.4 lens. 1/5000s, f/2, ISO 2000.

Most good street photography is about timing. The reason for this is because streets are generally cluttered with people and cars, and you need to wait until the scene simplifies itself. This is why many street photographers camp out in a particular location (their 'stage') and then wait for the actors to appear. 1 second earlier or 1 second later and their picture has gone.

I took this image in Glasgow. I spent about 30 mins in this spot. I took about 50 photos during that time, but this is a busy street and many of the shots featured a car or too many pedestrians. The two people in the shot were a couple of tourists who plonked down their bag looking for something. Olympus OM-D EM-5 Mk 2 with M.17mm f/1.8 lens. 1/125s, f/4, ISO 200.

Wildlife photography and sports photography are two other specialisms where timing is everything. On the rare occasions when I've tried to photograph birds, most of my images are of empty branches. Similarly, in a 90-minute football game, if you added up all of the times when you could get a good photo, it would probably amount to less than 30 seconds.

This is a good example of why I don't do bird photography: most of the time, I get empty branches. Olympus OM-D EM-5 Mk 2 with Leica DG 100-400 f/4.0-6.3 lens at 400mm. 1/320s, f/6.3, ISO 1600.



But timing in photography is not just about choosing the right second. It applies in landscape photography too where timing is about choosing the right month or season. Some locations just look better in Autumn than they do in Winter.

Again, timing is everything.

Lighting



A selfie silhouette taken in a hotel room where I stayed in Newcastle. It was ordinary morning light but filtered through coloured windows. iPhone 6 Plus. 1/350s, f/2.2, ISO 32.

There's not one kind of 'good' light. Different light suits different subjects. What matters is matching the light to the subject.

Great light makes a great photograph. This could be the golden light of sunrise or sunset, the open shade of a garage, or the hard light of a sunny day.

< I took this at home after noticing the gorgeous evening light Fuji X100S. 1/60s, f/2.0, ISO 3200.

It could be the feathered light from a softbox, the punchy light of a beauty dish or the light from a handheld torch painting a scene during a long exposure.



< This is hula hoop artist Helen Orford, who comes with her own LED hula hoops. That, plus a soft box, created an interesting portrait

Canon 5D Mk III with Tamron 35-70mm lens at 49mm. 0.8s, f/9, ISO 100.

None of the photographs in this section are only of light, but I think all of them have interesting light.

Composition

You've heard the 'rules' of composition, such as the rule of thirds, the rule of odds and the idea of leading lines... I'm not a great fan of rules when applied to creativity, since they can lead to clichéd images, but rules do provide a useful framework. You need to start somewhere when searching for a composition and these basic rules can get you started on the journey.

This is a classic shot of the lighthouse on Llandwyn Island. I can't really claim this as 'my' composition since I simply stood in the same place as many photographers before me. It's a visual cliché - but the thing about clichés is that they often work.

Olympus OM-D EM-5 Mk II with M.Zuiko 25mm f/1.8 lens. 1/13s, f/11, ISO 200.

I like Edward Weston's definition of good composition as "the strongest way of seeing". This always reminds me to move around the subject, to look from up high and from below; to discover where I should stand for the best viewpoint to organise the stuff in front of me in a way that best suits my purpose.





< This is a simple composition, but I think that the strong graphic shapes make it an interesting one.

Canon 5D Mk III with EF 100mm f/2.8L lens. 1/320s, f/8, ISO 2000.

In his book, *Things*, Jim Krause writes:

“What are the components—small, medium and large—of this thing that best expresses its character, functions and age? Which views of this thing might reveal its most aesthetically pleasing details?”

I like this quotation because it captures the idea that seeing (and composition) is an active process, not a passive one.



I once heard a story about the great portrait photographer, Jane Brown. Apparently, she would walk around her subject like a lion stalking its prey until she found the ‘right’ place to position her camera. “Oh, there you are,” she would say to her subject.

Composition also captures the graphic elements of an image: the use of line, form, colour, texture, balance, rhythm, pattern, even empty space. This also means the component shapes of the image, such as triangles and circles.

< This is an example of using the compositional trick of “leading lines” to draw the viewer’s eye (in this case, to St Paul’s Cathedral).

Olympus OM-D EM-5 Mk 2 with 12mm prime lens. 1/20 sec, f/8, ISO 200

Below. The lighting in this image is ordinary. The composition is better: I like the way it emphasises depth. But really, the dog should be facing the other way. A picture of a dog’s backside isn’t great composition. However, there is a real story here: you want to know what’s happening. Fuji X100S. 1/170s, f/5.6, ISO 400.

Impact

And that brings me the fourth component: impact. Impact means that it draws you in, it tells a story, it shows you something you haven’t seen before (or it shows you the thing in a different way). Flickr calls this ‘interestingness’ and their algorithm curates the most interesting images and displays them in their Explore section. Jay Maisel calls it ‘gesture’. I think of it as ‘story’.

I used to think of ‘story’ as a strict narrative: something that has a beginning, a middle and an end. Nowadays, I don’t think that’s either useful or necessary.





This is another example of an image that tells a story, or at least gets you asking the question: "What's going on?" Canon 5D Mk III with 16-35mm f/2.8L lens at 16mm. 1/160, f/5, ISO 100.

I spent years reading, practicing and thinking about timing, lighting and composition. But I feel I've made more progress in my photography since I've been thinking about story, than at any other time. Before taking a photograph, I now ask, "Why?" and "Who?"

Why take that picture?

What is the purpose? How would the world be different if that picture didn't exist? What am I trying to achieve? What reaction do I want to evoke? What discussion do I want the picture to start? This doesn't have to be a grand concept: even simple questions help, such as, "Why take a head shot rather than a full length?" and "Why do a studio portrait rather than an environmental one?"

Who is the audience for the image?

Who am I trying to influence? Or impress? Is it someone who wants a print of the image on their wall? Is it a photography club judge? Is it someone who runs a gallery? Is it other photographers? This question, though difficult, gets me away from thinking in terms of just creating a 'cool' or 'clever' image that lacks emotional impact.



< You can even arrange three pears in such a way that there appears to be a story happening.

Canon 5D Mk III with 100mm f/2.8L lens. 1/160, f/2.8, ISO 50.

Combining the four elements

Focusing on any one of these four elements can create a fine photograph. I've taken successful photographs because the timing was right, the light was good, and the composition was appealing; and I've taken one or two fine photographs that contain the elements of story. I think of all the images in this article as 'fine'.

But 'fine' isn't good enough. It's only when you combine all four elements that you get a great photograph. I'm not sure I've taken one of those yet. That's why there are no photographs illustrating this section.

In the context of photography, story or impact can mean any of the following:

- **Emotion, feeling or mood.**
 - **Gesture.**
 - **Metaphor.**
 - **Symbolism.**
 - **Message.**
- **How the photographer responded to the scene.**
- **Why the photographer found it interesting.**
 - **Depth of meaning.**
 - **Animation.**
 - **Expression.**
- **What the photographer is trying to say.**
 - **Your vision**

This isn't an exhaustive list, but I hope you get the idea.

The one thing that doesn't make a great photo is Gear!

As a rookie photographer, I spent most of my time obsessing over technique and equipment. It's true that you need mastery of your camera, but in the search for better photographs this risks becoming a "rabbit hole". There's always another lens, or another light modifier, or another camera system. Of course sharpness matters but as the venerable Ansel Adams said, "There is nothing worse than a sharp image of a fuzzy concept."

Equipment manufacturers encourage this obsession by paying great photographers to use their gear, leading you to believe that the photo is made by the camera, and not the person behind the camera. Ansel Adams again: "The single most important component of a camera is the twelve inches behind it."

David Travis is a landscape and travel photographer based in Staffordshire. He is a member of Leek Photographic Club and Rolls Royce Photographic Society. He holds an Associate distinction in the landscape genre from the RPS. You can see more of his work at <http://davidtravisphotography.com/>

It's true that nice gear makes the experience of photography more pleasant, but you can make great photographs with a camera phone. You just need great timing, great light, great composition and a great story. It's that simple—and that difficult. *David.*



Lady of the Lake by Sharon Prenton Jones

Luskentyre Light by Ken Lindsay



White Smoke by David Byrne

Dianne Owen FRPS

<http://dianneowen.info/my-imagery/>

Not every image needs a story. A good still life or a good nature shot etc. are still good images without a narrative. I find some images are simply contrived to tell the story to please judges. On many occasions it seems that it is not about skill, but what other people think you should take. I've always thought it's about what the photographer enjoys, not the award value. That's an extra. In the end it's about the images that make you go wow! And you remember when you walk away, because they have something special.

Joan Miro

"You can look at a picture for a week and never think of it again. You can also look at a picture for a second and think of it all your life."

WHAT MAKES A GOOD PICTURE? - BOB GOODE CPAGB LRPS EFIAP/s BPE2

I would argue that context above all else is perhaps the key to deciding the worth of an image and much overlooked by many of us whose focus is club and competitive photography.

To answer the question, we could start by considering the work carried out by the late Eddie Sethna when framing his articles on Judging which, after all, is the process by which we seek to measure the “goodness” of an image. He considered that communication was paramount; the image must generate some emotion in the viewer and thus defining a good picture is a very personal affair. Of secondary importance was the content, the choice of subject and how it has been dealt with. The technical prowess of the photographer in producing the image was subservient to both these factors. Eddie’s concise views on what a judge should consider when viewing images form a strong basis for defining good photographs.

Communication requires both a perceptive and a receptive viewer. Perceptive in that viewers must recognise the nuances of the image and receptive in that we must not be blinkered. We are all been guilty of suggesting that something should be cropped, perhaps without sufficiently considering the motives of the photographer for including it. We have probably all dismissed an image because it does not fit our personal idea of technical quality despite being an emotive work.

**Communication
requires both a
perceptive and a
receptive viewer**

Our photographs are consumed in many arenas and that is why context is so important. I have a photograph of my wife which I made when I was taking my first stumbling steps in the club world many years ago. It is technically poor but, content wise, it does OK as I managed to keep the essentials in without other distracting elements. However, it did not strike that essential when placed before a judge. For me it is one of my finest works, as I captured the look in her eyes that persuaded me to propose! Context you see.

In a similar vein a brilliant shot of the latest Volvo FM460 truck may win advertising awards but would leave many to dismiss it in another context. Don McCullin’s images of the war in Vietnam are undoubtedly great images, but would they take prizes at a press award? Yes, of course, but would I ever buy one for the wall?

If we accept that context can influence our view of an image, then we might consider if there are photographs which can transcend the context barrier and, if so, would these be great images? Certainly, there are examples of great works from years gone by which remain great, even seen through today’s filter.

Then we have the issue of what we mean by “good”; is there a definitive criterion or might we do better to dismiss the idea of the definitive good or bad images and consider each image in relation to the others in the set. Strangely, we have come to the point of club competitions and have stumbled on the reason, or at least part of the reason, that an image may do well in one competition but die in another.

The influence of personal taste must not be overlooked and, to digress, perhaps that is why some judges are highly respected for their ability to set aside our personal taste and see the strengths of the image, regardless of genre or style. To some extent we can all train ourselves to see what is good in an image rather than focus on the shortcomings, to look beyond the surface of the paper or screen and to attempt to understand the motives and choices made by the photographer during the creative process.

**... the most
important criteria for
a good image – they
pleased me!**

But we should also consider the extent to which that context is influenced by time. What seems fresh and exciting today may seem passe tomorrow. Does this mean that the image is any less good with the passage of time? Images which I made in the 80’s and which achieved a measure of acclaim would likely not gain a second glance now.

As I review my early work there are those which are unlikely to see the light of day again, yet at the time they fulfilled the most important criteria for a good image – they pleased me!

WHAT DO APM ADJUDICATORS LOOK FOR IN A PHOTOGRAPH?

Most Club members can recognise a good photograph when they see it but it seems impossible to define in advance what a good photograph will look like. Judging is an Art and not a Science and our response to an image can be highly subjective. Sometimes we don't even know why we have reacted positively or negatively to a photograph.

Our Adjudicators are very experienced and are chosen for their ability to assess all kinds of image fairly and as accurately against our requirement as is humanly possible. They are carefully briefed and we have in place an established review team who are able to adjust the score of any image which has been "unlucky".

None of this is very helpful to an entrant trying to understand what the "standard" is at each APM level, so we have tried to list just some of the things that you should consider when assessing your own work.

Content. We are hoping for the interesting, original, creative content to convey an idea, an emotion, a message or a purpose. The subject can be quite mundane, provided that the photographer has demonstrated an interesting approach, showing us something that we may otherwise have missed.

Composition. This is central to the attraction of an image and should bring all the visual elements together harmoniously, so as to express the purpose of the image. Effective composition immediately attracts the Adjudicators to the image and should prompt them to look where the photographer intended. Good composition will normally lead the viewer to the main point of interest. There can be primary and secondary centres of interest, and occasionally there will be no specific point to look at if the entire scene collectively serves as one focus of interest.

Impact. Our Adjudicators are not pressed to assess too quickly but the immediate impression is still important. Images with impact can instantly evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, admiration or wonder.

Lighting. The use and control of light is the essence of photography and critical in APM entries. Our Adjudicators will look for the effective use of light, natural or manmade, to add excitement to a photograph, enhancing its story telling and impact

Story Telling. We are not looking for a "big" story, simply how the image communicates with the viewer to help them understand why it was taken.

Colour Balance. Our Adjudicators will consider the use of colours and tones in an image. An image in which the tones work together, effectively supporting the image, can enhance harmony. Of course, a lack of harmony can be used for effect, to evoke negative feelings

Technique. This is the approach used to create the image. Does it show effective input and choice by the photographer, in view point, lens chosen, focus and other camera settings? In other competitions where the image has done well, did the prize go to the photographer or to the subject? What did the photographer bring to the image beyond pressing the shutter release? Effective use of focus, tone and contrast can greatly enhance an image, giving it depth with a more 3 dimensional quality.

Delivery. All of the above are the most decisive factors, but the APM also require a degree of skill in processing and printing - appropriate to the level applied for. At CPAGB this should demonstrate competence but minor errors or deficiencies may be overlooked if the image meets the other criteria. Processing, printing and presentation should be excellent for a successful DPAGB entry and at MPAGB should be extremely proficient, approaching perfection with no detectable faults.