

Camera Club Competitions

Excerpted from the PSA Journal, April 1998 by Bill Black

Why do people bring pictures in for competitions? Is it:

- to have a way of comparing their work with that of others, to see how one's photography is progressing?
- to learn from the evaluator how a picture could be improved?
- to "try out" a picture before submitting it to an international exhibition?
- to support a club activity?

These are all very good reasons for entering competition. Competition is fun, and a challenge.

Then there is the other side: people who enter competition just to accumulate points and perhaps a trophy at the end of the year. People who want to outdo other members and establish "bragging rights." In my thinking, these are far from the best reasons to compete. Competition has taken over to the extent it has become an end, rather than the means to an end, which is improving one's technical and artistic skills. [The latter is the purpose of OPCC. Also see attached article by Bill.]

Is competition all there is? Or are there workshops, programs, informal discussion and idea sessions and field trips as well? These are what strengthen the interest of the individual and encourage experimentation with different techniques and different approaches to a subject.

How seriously should one take competition, then? Seriously enough to try to submit good pictures. Not so seriously that the fun is gone. The 100-percent competitor is missing a lot!

There are guidelines for making successful pictures that will usually insure a good score.

Mastering these guidelines is a step toward more interpretive work for increased impact. Photography is an art form, and as such it is subject to individual interpretation. More progressive evaluators will recognize the avant garde as exciting and worthy of recognition. More traditionally-oriented evaluators will prefer images in the style of masters of the past. There is no absolute "right." Photographic imagery is what we make of it.

The important thing is to convey to the maker helpful thoughts about a picture. Every evaluation should be a personal workshop between the commentator and the member who submitted the slide. At the end of the evening, the member should be able to come up and talk to the commentator for additional comments which may have been held back. In this way members will learn what is good, and what can be better and how.

Finally, (let's remember that) competition is not an end-all in itself, but a way to promote still better images which may someday rack up there with the best of the masters. Let's recognize it as one more tool toward the creation of memorable images.