



2020 Judging Guidance – Appraising Workshop Photography

Introduction and Summary

This discussion summarises a collective Judges' view on the perceived issue of 'workshop images' entered into club competitions. This was discussed at the SCPF Judges' Forum in March 2020.

Workshop images are those made, or of the type that are typically made, on tutored workshops and photography events.

Concern over 'workshop photography' in competitions was first raised a couple of years ago by an SCPF club. There was disquiet among their membership about such images on the grounds that they are sometimes not 'wholly the work of the photographer'. This has also been discussed by PAGB in a recent edition of E-News.

Our intention is to:

- a) Understand the issue from a judging perspective
- b) Define a common approach that judges can take
- c) Encourage clubs to think about the issue

This paper is a statement of principle issued by the judging community, such that clubs understand the difficulties presented to us and can guide their photographers accordingly. It is as much for clubs as for judges.

SCPF Judges will be expected to adopt this approach but, in practice, little changes for us. We already have a robust methodology for appraising all images based on what we see, and we should be using it consistently. The types of images under consideration here should not be appraised differently solely because they may have been made under workshop conditions.

We also recommend that clubs consider whether images made at workshop-type events should be permitted into their competitions, based on the question: *'To what extent is this image the photographer's own work?'*

It is important to note that we recognise that workshops provide valuable learning and great social experiences, and that club photographers must continue to have freedom to pursue any kinds of photography for their own enjoyment.

The question is only whether it is fair and reasonable to enter an image into competition as your own if someone else has played a significant role in its production.

... Ken Scott
SCPF Judging Adviser
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Background

This background statement was issued prior to the Judges' Forum in March 2020.

We – and many club photographers – have come to recognise certain workshop-type images. A concern was first raised a couple of years ago by an SCPF club, on the grounds that such images are not 'wholly the work of the photographer' and 'should not be entered into competitions'.

The disquiet has also been picked up by PAGB. An article in PAGB E-News 246 in January 2020 <http://www.pagbnews.co.uk/newsletter/issue-246> rightly makes a distinction between workshops where photographers have significant creative freedom and input, and those where the tutor does everything except press the button. It also rightly asserts the photographer's freedom to indulge their hobby in whichever way they choose.

In addition:

- The PSA (Photographic Society of America) has included in its definitions for Travel photography the line *"Images from events or activities arranged specifically for photography, or of subjects directed or hired for photography are not appropriate."*
- There is also refocused attention on wild vs captive, and on the welfare of animals in nature photography – see [RPS The Nature Photographer's Code of Practice](#) – following the rapid growth of kingfishers diving into tanks and staged studio setups involving mice.

Defining 'Workshop Photography'

What is a 'workshop image'? A not-exhaustive list might include:

- 'Display' nature: usually birds flying for the benefit of paying photographers;
- Sports, theatricals, dance or any other events staged specifically or solely for photography;
- Tutored studio shoots with hired models or animals or still-life subjects, sometimes in the club environment;
- Guided location shoots for e.g. landscape, people, wildlife or travel-style photography;

Workshops do provide valuable learning and great social experiences. So it is important to distinguish 'training', where a tutor provides 'How To' instruction and then allows photographers their own creative space, from a photography event where at the other extreme everything is set up for photographers to achieve consistently a predetermined result or effect.

The following scenarios are not in question:

- Where three or four photographers "share costs" for a model and studio and collaborate together and with the model and a studio tech on objectives and setup;
- Where images made on a workshop in any circumstances are layered into a composite;

We also have to understand that workshops may provide the only opportunity for photographers to work with esoteric animals or experienced models or other unusual subject matter that would be otherwise difficult or expensive to access.

What IS in question is when the staging is presented on a plate and the photographer has little or no creative or technical input to the final image.



What constitutes the ‘photographer’s own work’ ? The following have to be taken into account:

- Selection of the setup and staging of the subject and subject matter
- Choice of framing and composition
- Choice of, set up and / or response to lighting (which outdoors is uncontrolled)
- Setting of camera controls – aperture, shutter speed, ISO, focus etc.

Any image made with significant third-party input to two or more of these aspects cannot be considered ‘wholly the work of the photographer’.

The question is whether it is fair and reasonable to enter an image into competition as your own if someone else has played a significant role in its production.

Consider these examples:

- a) An image made at a reptile or butterfly vivarium, where an animal is placed, consistently lit with their studio lighting rig, your camera is placed in the pre-set prime position, you’re guided as to the optimum aperture for the flash, and you press the shutter.
- b) An image made at a theatrical or dance workshop where lighting and staging are pre-set for you to achieve a specific predetermined effect.
- c) An image made of the famed Camargue Horses, or other popular nature species, which are run to order for photography groups. You are guided as to where to stand, with some technical guidance, but you make your own decisions on framing, timing, aperture and shutter speeds.
- d) An image made on a butterfly workshop in the wild, where you are guided to the subjects and, maybe, given some tuition as to the technical requirements. Thereafter, it’s down to you to make your own decisions.
- e) An image made of a common subject in response to a magazine article, or inspired by a demonstration you had at the club. You follow the guidance but you make all the decisions.

Example a) could not be considered the photographer’s own work unless they have free choice of subjects and framing, even if there is some assistance with lighting.

Example b) is more complex. An image could be considered the photographer’s own work if they have directed the model on pose, movement, setting and use of props and costume, even if under tuition; if they are in full control of the camera for framing, timing and effects when photographing a pre-staged movement or set; or if they had control over the lighting and staging.

Examples c), d) and e) can be considered largely the photographer’s own work, at least on the technical and craft fronts.

The late, great Galen Rowell said of workshops:

“Most images made at photo workshops are like musical scales – exercises of tone and interpretation that prepare the would-be artist for future performances”.



The Judge's Perspective

Workshop images do present a difficulty for judges.

The underlying assumption is that there is more intrinsic Expressive Quality (EQ) in an image that is wholly the photographer's own work than in one that is guided or staged by a third party, however technically accomplished it may be. Notably, the E-News article makes no mention of EQ.

The craft value, however good it appears, is also limited if the setup and staging are controlled by someone else.

The difficulty for judges is that we cannot know for certain how an image has been produced. We are expected simply to appraise the image before us. We have learned not to make assumptions; if we do, we invariably fall into a hole. If we make the wrong call, we attract criticism.

If we don't call it out and the image is awarded a high mark, others grumble because they do know. In either case if the image attracts a lower mark, we attract accusations of bias. In other words we are damned if we do and damned if we don't. Which is unfair on us.

We have to remember that most club photographers are seeking feedback (aside from hoping to win, of course). So we have to be able to competently and fairly appraise all photographs, which includes being able to say when a photograph is very well made but not as expressive as others.

In Summary

Therefore:

1. We will continue not to make assumptions. No image should be appraised differently solely because it may have been made under workshop conditions. We will assume that that any image presented to us is eligible and 'largely the photographer's own work'.
2. Instead we will use our already robust methodology for appraisal: that is to assess all images on the basis of Technical, Craft and Expressive Quality (EQ), with EQ carrying the credit weight. If many people make similar images on repeated workshop events, they quickly become fashionable and unavoidably cliché*.
3. If we feel that EQ is limited for whatever reason, including (in advanced classes) cliché, then we will appraise and mark appropriately on that basis. We will do so subjectively and without bias.

And we recommend that:

4. Clubs consider whether images made at workshop-type events should be permitted into their competitions, based on the question: 'To what extent is this image the photographer's own work?'

**Cliché can be defined "an idea or expression that has lost much of its force through overexposure"*



Judging Workshop Images - Principles

The following principles are deemed to be practical and reasonable.

Judging Principles

1. We recognise that club photographers must continue to have freedom to pursue any kinds of photography for their own enjoyment.
2. We understand that images are often made on workshops and will deal with them sensitively. We will not denigrate or differentiate solely on whether an image was or is believed to have been made on a workshop..
3. We will assume that that any image presented to us IS eligible and 'largely the photographer's own work'.
4. It is beholden on us to be familiar with the types of images that are often or typically made on workshops and organised events.
5. We will continue to assess all images on the basis of Technical, Craft and Expressive Quality (EQ), with EQ carrying the credit weight. We will do so subjectively and without bias. If we feel that EQ is limited for whatever reason, then we appraise and mark appropriately on that basis.
6. In Advanced classes we may take into account the idea of cliché when assessing EQ. Cliché affects all popular styles and subjects after a period of time.

Recommendations for clubs

7. Clubs might consider whether images made at workshop-type events should be permitted into their competitions, based on the question: 'To what extent is this image the photographer's own work?'.*
8. Clubs might consider asking photographers to comply with a voluntary code, which declares that the image is 'largely their own work'.
9. Clubs might consider guiding photographers to title their images appropriately and honestly as to the location and circumstances of the image.
10. Clubs might consider their stance relating to the Nature Photographers' Code of Conduct and other ethical matters.

*Below is an example of a club competition rule in use:

"The content of a print or digital image must be entirely the work and copyright of the author [...] Where parties other than the photographer have made a significant creative contribution to the image, we encourage the photographer to consider whether their own contribution is sufficient to claim the image as their own work".