



Judging What is a Creative Photograph—and What is Not

Orange and Green Leaves

PSA definition of Creative Photography: altered reality

There has been much discussion about what should be judged to belong to the category of a Creative photograph. Many are confused about the fine line between Creative/Altered Reality and Open photography because all good photography is intrinsically creative, expressing the personality

of the photographer and telling a story in an individual manner.

International salons offer a Creative category but none set out a clear definition. Entrants are presumed to know intuitively what is meant by “Creative” and where the line is drawn regarding Altered Reality. Often indisputably manipulated photographs gain awards in Open sections. There appears to be little consensus of opinion and

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Australia



Tunnel Runners



*Lily Blue
Distorted*



Beautiful Orchids Cutout

nothing disqualifies entries in either section; the final decision is solely the judge's.

There is no argument about defining the impressionist or surreal style of painting but, with modern technology giving access to sophisticated techniques above and beyond what was possible in the darkroom, we have yet to put an accurate name to photographic art described as Creative.

Professor Des Crawley, at a recent workshop in Australia, clearly explained the differences between the two forms:

A document: a literal record or a factual image. (Open)

A picture: a fictional or conceptual image, or photographic art. (Creative)

That is, a taken photograph as opposed to a created photograph.

Some other definitions available are:

The Australian Photographic Society
"Creative" covers photographs that display a

novel effect because of an unusual combination of objects and/or viewpoint. They are images that have been modified during or after exposure. The image must have a photographic base with the original work being exposed by the entrant.

Flickr

Creative: creative use of line, form and colour, expressing the photographer's ideas and/or feelings in a non-traditional style.

Northside Creative Photography (a progressive Australian club)

Creative photography is an extension of conventional photography into creative art. Its purpose is to stimulate creative thoughts and encourage experimentation with new ideas going beyond a simple photograph...The final result must be all the photographer's own work including the original image.

However, if the definition of a creative image depends on it being "novel" or "unusual," or even "non traditional" or "experimental," we are setting a moving yardstick. What is new and exciting to a beginner can be uninteresting to someone who has been exposed to a lot of creative work.

Set out below are examples of what could be considered to be a Creative photograph—and what belongs to the Open category. The intention is to provoke healthy discussion, not to provide definitive answers.

Open

Adjusting levels, straightening a horizon, hue/saturation, removing blemishes or burning and dodging are good housekeeping—work that skilled film photographers previously carried out in the



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Yachts in the Mist



Errol Mono

darkroom. They prepare a photograph to be shown at its best and make the end result closer to what the eye saw originally.

These are examples of photographs that belong in the Open category but which some may consider borderline and, in some cases, Creative:

Borders and Frames

Vignetting is often used as a framing effect.

A colored line or lines outside or inside an image are framing techniques that do not alter the basic image.

Using the image itself as an outer frame is another imaginative technique. (*Rainy Window*)

Blurred Images

Blurring a photograph can be an attractive treatment that doesn't alter the basic subject.

Texture or Single Filter

A texture applied subtly can be considered merely an enhancement. Obvious filters may take a composition into the realm of Altered Reality. (*Edward Canvas*)

Series

A group of related images framed separately, such as a triptych, create an interesting method of presentation. (*Strike a Light*)

Cutouts

A figure cut out from one image and placed in the foreground of another is effective but does not necessarily become a Creative image. (*Swim Club*)

Selective coloring (permitted by PSA)

Adding a single colour to a monochrome composition for emphasis also adds impact. For example, a bride's bouquet can be the single colored area in a wedding photograph. (*Chilly Dip*)

Toning/Soft Focus

Toning can set a mood, while selective focus imparts a feeling of softness or places attention on a particular area of interest.

Replacing a Sky

This was done in the darkroom by great photographers such as Ansel Adams and adds interest to what was originally a dull sky.

Changing a Component

With programs such as Photoshop it's easy to add in or remove an object or person.

HDR (High Dynamic Range)

With HDR bright things can be really bright, dark things can be really dark, and details can be seen in both. Exposures are bracketed with a result that is



Figtree Castle

stunning in clarity and detail. The downside is that an image with everything sharp can overwhelm a viewer accustomed to selective focus to isolate important elements in the composition.

Panorama

A panorama consisting of several vertical or horizontal images joined together is a creative effort but the result is not a Creative image.

Abstract

Abstract photographs isolate a small area to create an image that can be difficult to identify but has a character all its own. If the photograph is not

Beautiful Tiger Sketch





Defying the Boot

altered or very unusual it belongs in the category of Open. (*Orange and Green Leaves*)

Borderline

These days many 'novel' and 'unusual' effects are becoming commonplace and have moved from Creative into Open.

Different Opacities

Several views of the same person or main subject blended into one image using different opacities can be very attractive. This can belong in either category.

Multiple Exposures

Photographing an action at continuous exposure



Edward Canvas

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Swim Club

captures a movement in an interesting way. Some photographers blend several exposures in the one image.

Stepping out of the frame

Another treatment is to place part of the image outside the frame, giving a 3D effect.

(*Beautiful Orchids Cutout*)

Zoom Effect

Using zoom in-camera or Photoshop's Filter>Blur>Radial Blur>Zoom (*Suicide Shoe*)

Creative/Altered Reality

A Creative photograph should depart from reality and be noticeably different from a scene viewed through a camera lens. Another term would be Unreal (as opposed to real).

The following are Creative images:

Blended

Two or more photographs taken in different places, on different occasions, blended to tell a new story. (*Figtree Castle* and *Defying the Boot*)

Added filters for effects

Many filters and plug-ins are available to create original effects. These are a few examples:

Redfield Fractalius has many settings including sketch variations. (*Beautiful Tiger Sketch* and *Errol Mono*)



Suicide Shoe



Rainy Window

Virtual Painter has various painting style settings. (*Medieval Girl Oil Painting*)

Buzz Simplifier reduces details to give a painterly effect.

Photoshop filters

Artistic filters including Dry Brush and Paint Daubs, Stylise effects Extrude or Find Edges give interesting results. (*Tunnel Runners* and *Yachts in the Mist*)

Creative Abstract

Abstracts can be made using Distort>Polar Coordinates or the Liquefy tool. Creative Abstracts do not represent a true record of the subject. (*Lily Blue Distorted*)

In-camera techniques can create beautiful work in this genre. (*Tumbling Leaves*)



Tumbling Leaves



Medieval Girl Oil Painting

It's only human to find something new to be visually exciting but tastes change with exposure and fashion. Judges need to leave personal opinions at the door and comment solely on the image before them—easier said than done!

Any work created under the umbrella of altered reality should be credible, well crafted and contain intrinsic beauty of colour, line or composition. However, what is stunning to one person may well leave another cold. ■



Chilly Dip



Strike a Light