

# Why O3C Judges put emphasis on Technical Achievement

By Norm Ullock O3C Judge Chair

In my role as O3C Judge chair I get to interface with most all of our member clubs Executives. I also get asked to speak to club member meetings, where I enjoy meeting and chatting with people. One question that occasionally comes up is, why are our judges so demanding about technical achievement when judging images. I would like to try and explain why we do what we do.

The short answer is the purpose of club and O3C Competitions is to help you become a better photographer. Being capable of making your main elements fully sharp and correctly exposed with an image that creates some emotion in the viewer is a requirement of being a good photographer. So, you now may ask are judges more rigid about this than they need to be.

We develop our O3C judge training and scoring systems to be **inline** with major world photography organizations like PSA (Photographic Society of America) and FIAP (Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique ) which is the European body. CAPA (Canadian Association for Photographic Arts) also map their judging in line with these world bodies. The idea of this alignment is so as you grow as a photographer and artist and possibly begin to compete in National and International competitions, your images will be judged by the same basic criteria.

What I mean by our judging is **inline** with these bodies is our judges are **more lenient** when evaluating an image for Impact, Composition and Technical merit than a FIAP or PSA competition judging would be. FIAP & PSA competitions have entries from many of the world's top photographers, consequently the quality of the images is superior to what one would expect in a local club competition. Many international competitions have thousands of entries that are multi day judging events. Anything with a flaw is quickly discounted out of the way. So, your image would need to have great impact for a second look or be close to perfect to start with. The other thing is that these judges aren't evaluating an image with the intent to give a critique or comment so they will not take extra time in fully evaluating the image. It's just a time constraint they are working under. In O3C we recognize that we are, very often helping beginner and intermediate photographers, to rise to the level of winning club awards and regional recognition. Consequently, our judges are a bit more lenient in applying standards and try to be encouraging in their comments, which you do not get in an international competition. You just get a score. We are biasing our judging to encourage photographers to grow in their activity.

Judges also recognize that there are images that have an artistic twist like floral photos where the maker creates a softness in the image that is an obviously maker created softness where sharpness is less important and the out of focus elements are part of the composition. In categories such as Nature, Landscapes, Architecture and most Portraiture the main element's sharpness & exposure is important for a quality image.

Occasionally, I hear from club members that they see winning images in some national and international competitions where the subject is not sharp and composition and or exposure rules are not adhered to. So, they ask, "Why does O3C insist on sharpness, good compositional attributes and correct exposure?"

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Well there are international competitions and there are international competitions. Not all are created equal. You should ask yourself the following:

- What were the rules of those competitions?
- What was documented about how the images would be judged?
- How many images were being judged?
- What were the category definitions about the criteria the image will be judged on?
- What was the credentials of the judges and what judge training have they had?

I have also seen these kinds competitions where It is quite likely that those winning images if entered in another competition would score very differently. Often, I have seen terrible images win awards in some big competitions. I have also occasionally researched who the judges were. The following is an example of what I have often found:

- Example Judge 1, A watercolour artist who creates great still life paintings.
- Example Judge 2, A professional photojournalist photographer for 30 years. His /Her main job is to take newsworthy pictures in jpg format and upload to the editor. Never does post processing.
- Example Judge 3, An award-winning photographer who does mostly human portraits.

Do the above credentials make a qualified judge?

- They all have very good niche art skills.
- They have not had any training in how to judge images consistently using a scoring model. Their likes are likely personal and not objective and detached like O3C judges are trained to be.
- They will likely score images by their personal preferences and the standards in their own backgrounds, because that is how humans who are not trained will think.

In writing this article I spent some time working with my friend Francis King. Francis is a member of the Chinese Canadian Photographic Society of Toronto (CCPST), and he is an outstanding photographer with years of International competition experience. He is a GMPSA (PSA Grand Master) Photographer, which means is he has had 3,000+ image exhibition **acceptances** supported by Star Rating Certificates from one or more PSA Divisions. He regularly judges for the Toronto Camera Club's Annual International Salon, which is a FIAP competition.

Francis is also currently an O3C Judge in Training, nearing his accreditation. When Francis began his O3C shadow judging his scores were consistently too low for what our scoring model should generate. When working with Francis and his mentor we found that Francis was judging the images correctly but in line with standards of a FIAP competition. His comment was that in a FIAP or PSA competitions the quality of the images is superior to what we see in club competitions. After explaining that O3C scoring was designed to be more forgiving and encouraging than a FIAP competition. Once he understood that we are trying to bring beginner and intermediate photographers to a level where they can win club awards

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and that FIAP judging bar is too high for what we are trying to achieve, his scoring quickly fell into line with regular O3C judges. In other words, to be more lenient and encouraging.

In the many O3C member clubs, including my own club the Oshawa CC, we have done many things to help our members grow as photographers and to allow more leniency in scoring. On OCC, we have allowed hand of man in nature. We allow any and all post processing in all categories. We allow images of captive species to be entered in nature. None of these would be allowed in a National or International competition. We do expect that a photographer should be capable of getting their main elements or subject in focus from back to front. Some say that getting a bird or insect totally sharp is hard. Yes, it is but it can be done with the correct capture technique and camera settings and post processing. After many years of practice, I can get a body of a bee in flight totally sharp.

Do judges make mistakes? Absolutely, we are human but we are doing our best in fairly evaluating a subjective thing like art. By using our scoring model, we can be consistent from image to image and from competition to competition.

I had a conversation last summer with a friend who is a very successful painter artist who makes his living creating art and often enters art competitions. I was looking for ideas about how to train our judges to better evaluate great high scoring images as art. I explained what we do to train judges and how they judge using a scoring model. By the end of our beer, he was blown away by our O3C system. He said in art competition they have nothing like what we do. A winning image in one competition may not even be accepted in another competition a week later. He commented that everything was subject on what the judge liked. I received the similar comments from an executive of an Ontario art council.

I hope the above helps everyone understand why we do what we do for competition image evaluation. The next time you get a critique for your image why not ask someone for help on how to enhance the suggested area. There are at least 11 of us in OCC that are qualified judges and we are all listed in the website competition area.

About the Author:

Norm Ullock is an award-winning photographer. He has twice been OCC Photographer of the Year (POTY) and twice was Runner up for OCC POTY. He has been runner up for Photographer of the Year at the O3C Open Challenge. He is currently the O3C Judge Chair and is responsible for running our pool of Judges and Judges in Training. Norm is responsible for developing and providing judges education and accreditation. He also is frequently invited to speak on Photography and Judging at O3C member clubs.