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by IACC member Allan Reich

A JUDGING COURSE HELPED MAKE ME A BETTER PHOTOGRAPHER

Recently, I went to Red Deer to take the [Canadian Association of Photographic Art \(CAPA\)](#) Judging Course. I wanted to take the course as part of my photographic journey. I'm interested in understanding "What makes a great image?", even though the topic can be subjective. I also want to improve all of my image taking in any genre and I thought judging would provide some insight.

The full day course was put on by Henry Schnell, CAPA President and Dan Sigouin, CAPA Education Director. There was a group of about twenty of us in class, including Larry Holland, a fellow Images Alberta Camera Club (IACC) member. All in all it was a good day, and time well spent.

PHILOSOPHY OF JUDGING

We started with topics covering:

- the art and philosophy of judging
- qualities of a great judge (experience and tact)
- CAPA's style of judging (respectful and avoids judgment)
- technical achievement
- creativity and impact

We talked about evaluating images and giving the benefit of the doubt to the photographer, as well as CAPA's role in providing a national standard for judging. Then we covered the process and flow of providing a good image critique. For example, we learned the phrases to reward and encourage a photographer's image and phrases to avoid.

GENRES OF PHOTOGRAPHY

All that was great but then we got into the various genres of photography, which I'm most interested in. They provided examples and judging tips for each type, for example:

- Landscape - addition of people can add scale to your image
- Nature and Wildlife - storytelling, technical quality, and wildlife ethics are important
- Portrait - focus on lighting, pose and location of the person
- Architectural - light and shade add drama; statues, doors and ornaments are included in this genre
- Photojournalism - recording of recent events or a visual narrative
- Still Life - focus on technique, lighting and composition
- Creative Photography - this can include image sandwiching (effects similar to multiple exposures), film cross processing, conveying a mood, or a unique arrangement of photographic elements
- Fine Art - think Steve McCurry's Afghan Girl or Edward Westin's famous Pepper No. 30.



We also discussed notable photographers in various genres ranging from [Annie Liebowitz](#) (studio portraits), [Alfred Stieglitz](#) (B&W), [Diane Arbus](#) (street portraits), to [Hiroshi Sugimoto](#) (fine art). I had to look up Sugimoto.

TECHNICAL JUDGING

Next we did some mock judging. CAPA's judging technique has three elements: Technical, Organizational and Emotional (TOE). Each element has sub-elements, for example, colour, sharpness, composition, subject, etc. CAPA uses a ten point scoring rating from Poor to Wow. Their competitions normally include three judges who provide a composite score out of thirty.

Each of us evaluated sample images from the various genres, followed by a group discussion of the images. This was helpful because other's perspectives confirmed my own assessment or helped me see what they saw. Interestingly, most of us were within one point of the CAPA judges' score for the image. That's a good thing. If a CAPA judge scores an image a 9 or ten, it's considered exceptional. There were a few of those.

At the end of the day, we all became CAPA Trained Judges. This is just the start of the journey. The next step, if you want to take it, is to become a CAPA Certified Judge. People who take the advanced training and pass an assessment can apply to judge specific genres in formal competitions.

WHAT'S NEXT

Despite my new training, I've decided not to volunteer to judge monthly competitions at IACC. I'm a Club member and could be biased. I think it's best for me to consider any next judging phase outside of the Club and to focus on specific genres, such as portraits.

For now, I've got a good foundation from the judging course to continue developing my own work. For instance, I understand abstract images include colours, textures and how the elements interact with each other. Landscapes' appeal are based on shapes, angles and viewpoints. I can apply this thinking to the different images I take, in almost any setting. I know my photography will continue to improve over time.

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