

SELECTING AND OPTIMIZING IMAGES FOR COMPETITION

Richard Fisher

Dramatic Light

Disclaimer

Competition is optional - not for everyone

Can be daunting, but also a great learning experience

Chance to see your images beside other club members' images

Scores are a form of feedback, though message is not always clear

Scores will vary evening to evening due to

Judging is subjective, not formulaic

Some judges score higher than others

Some judges have biases and score different types of images higher

In the end, scores should be considered as guidance, not absolute

CACCA provides guidelines to score images

Article can be found on CACCAPhoto.org

Under Competitions Tab

Select Judging Guidelines

Judging should be on the merit of the image, not how much a judge likes an image

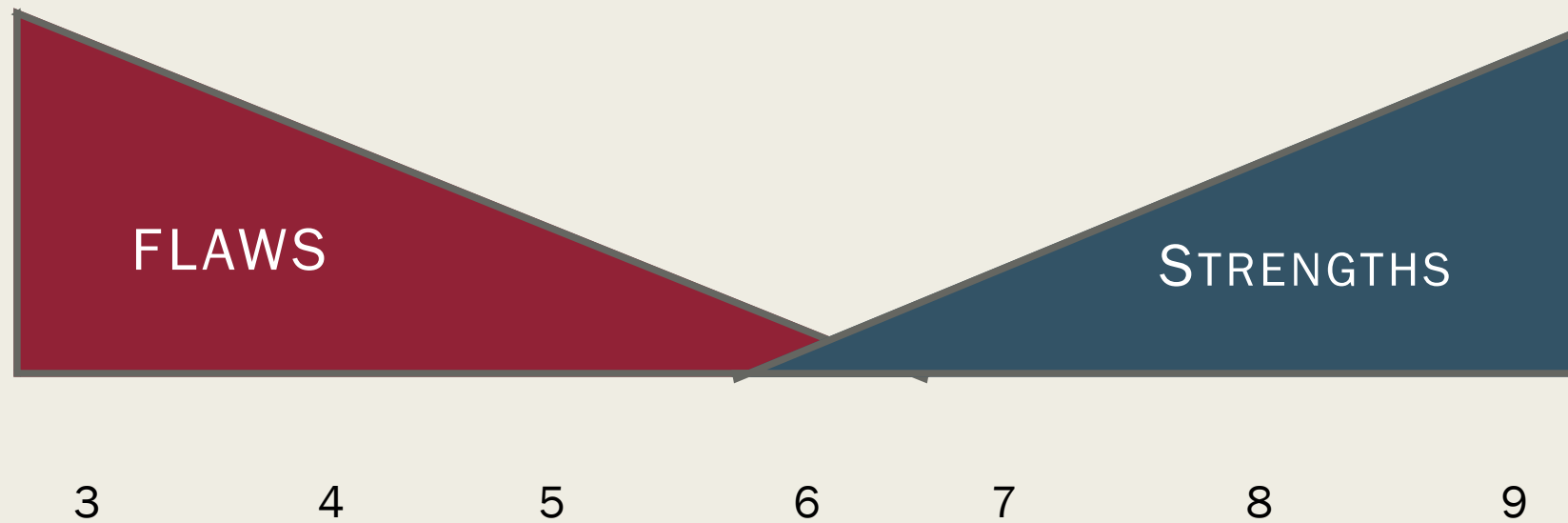
Scores can range from 3 to 9

I have never seen a 3

Only once a 4 and very few 5s

I have seen a number of 9s

Scores reflect both strengths and flaws in the image



Examples of strengths

Technical excellence

Exposure, especially if challenging

Subject choice

Lighting

Composition

Depth of Field

Emotional Impact

Freshness and creativity

Remember photography is ART

Traditional forms readily recognized

Avant Garde forms challenging

In reference to Jackson Pollack works, every time art takes a new form, people will ask "is that art?" or "is that good art?"

Avant Garde painters take years to gain acceptance

Don't expect images to get the same score at different clubs, a club and CACCA, or even different nights

Dramatic
Light

Dramatic
Light

Challenging
Exposure



Dramatic
Light
Composition

Technical
Excellence



Dramatic
Light
Depth of
Field
Creativity



PSA International Gold Medal Print

Dramatic
Technical
Light
Excellence

Composition

Emotional
Impact



Dramatic
Light
Weaker
Image

Washed out -
no strong
whites or
blacks





Dramatic Light

Score of 6

- No significant technical strengths
- No significant flaws
- Acceptable but no special interest, does not stir emotion
- Proficiency using auto-exposure and auto-focus

Dramatic Light

Score of 7

- Good Solid Image
- Exhibits at least one strength
- Elements work together
- Flaws are minor or non-existent
- Don't break rules except when enhances the image

Dramatic Light

Score of 9

- Exceptionally Strong Image
- Not perfect
- Technical excellence
 - *Often includes advanced techniques*
- Elements work together
- No flaws
- Multiple strengths

Dramatic Light

When selecting an image

- Ask yourself what is the image about
- A great image can be described in a few words
- A good image perhaps a sentence
- If something in the image does not support the main message, eliminate it
 - *Crop or clone it out*

Dramatic Light

Few thoughts on how to create better images

- Lots of good advice. Read a lot, find what is right for you
- Example - David DuChemin “20 ways to make better images” (free PDF)
- Just say NO - don’t shoot it. Or shoot a lot and pick the best. Or shoot a lot, get it out of your system and then shoot for real
- Change your perspective. First idea is not necessarily the best. Work the subject

After shooting
the owl in the
tree, I waited
for it to fly



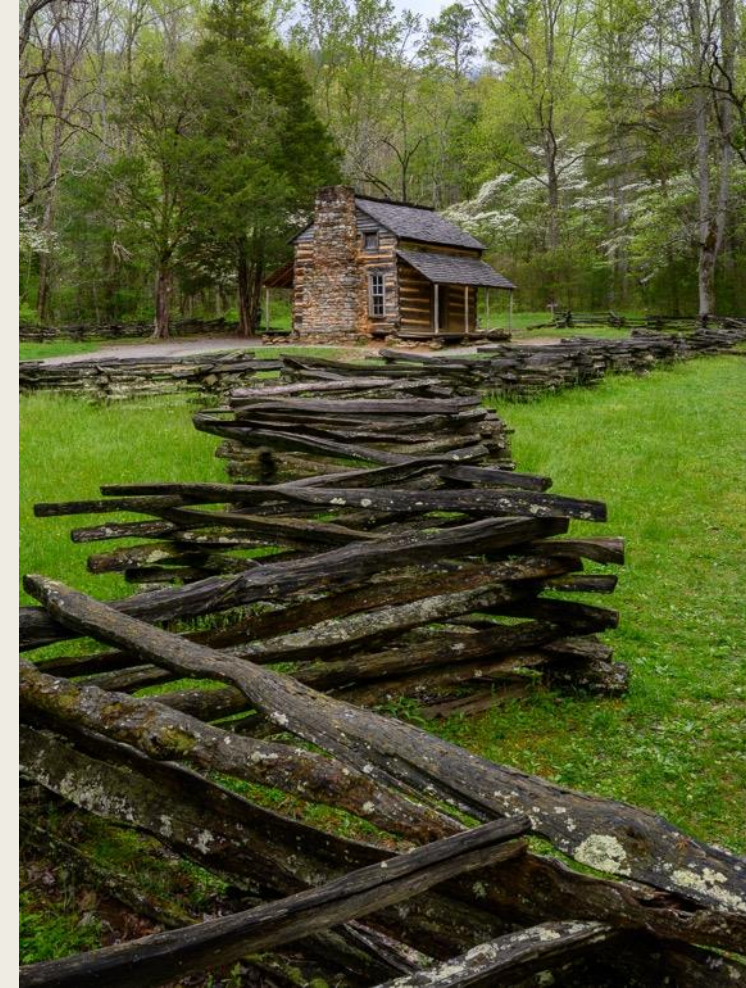
Dramatic
Light

Rules of
thirds

Look towards
the sun



Change your
perspective



Poor
backgrounds
can ruin a
shot



Embrace
symmetry
when it
works



Dramatic Light

Some Tips

- Start with your sharpest image
- Don't over sharpen
- Make sure your system is color calibrated
- Work your images. Set them aside and look again

Dramatic
Light

Is your

image

sharp?

- I am mean really sharp
- Not just when it fills the screen
- But at 100% magnification
- More essential if you print an image, less critical for DPI (which is “low” resolution)

Barn Owl

2 pictures from a burst



A



B

Barn Owl

Image A



Barn Owl
Image B
- looks
sharper to
me



Barn Owl
I'd go
with B



A



B

Dramatic
Light

Poor

sharpen
can create
artifacts

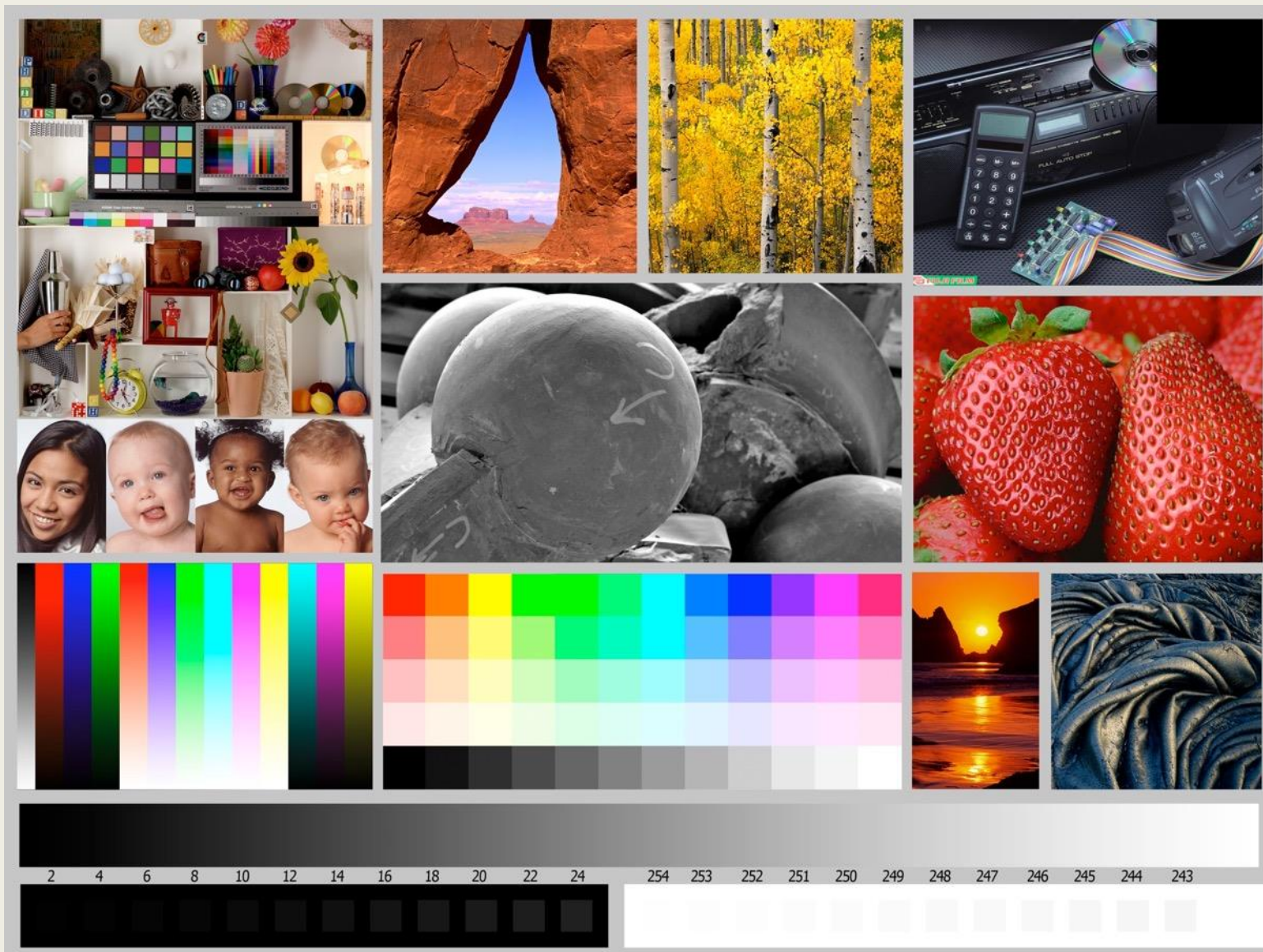
- If the image looks crunchy
- If there are halos
- If there is noise in sky, snow, or other “smooth” areas
- Excess sharpening
- Sharpening is a skill. Topic for an evening

Dramatic Light

Need proper color management

- Color on monitor and print should match
 - *Not exactly but very closely*
- Test image (next slide) should look accurate
- If printing always use profile for your printer, paper, and ink
- If prints or projected DPI look dark, monitor is too bright
- I have a presentation ready

Test image



<http://www.outbackphoto.com/printinginsights/pi048/essay.html>

Final
image



Original
image



Dramatic Light

Steps to create B&W church image

- Converted to B&W with Perfect B&W from ON1
- Converted to B&W with Nik Silver Efex Pro and then masked in area I liked better
- Applied curve to light and dark areas
- Retouched area (removed speakers, fixed holes in wood, ...)
- Brighten area above alter and candles
- Sharpened in 3 steps

Dramatic
Light

Final

thoughts

- What looks good on your wall, does not necessarily do well in competition
- Remember, photography is “art”. No right or wrong. Just individual tastes
- Competition is learning experience.
Experiment, realize that scores are not precise, and enjoy as you learn