

## How to Enter (Photographic) Salons and Exhibitions

2014 November - Version 3 (Andy Polakowski)

**Why bother?** Photography is a visual art form so how are you going to get your work seen? The possibilities within the Camera Club are limited: the monthly competitions will give an airing to about 24 images over the club year if you enter Prints and PDIs, an AV will use up quite a lot more and will tell a story or illustrate a theme or a piece of music and self-publishing via Blurb or similar will use as many as you like and will form a permanent memento and maybe even bring in a bit of dosh. And there are other outlets.

One of the greatest values for entering Salons is in obtaining evidence of how your pictures are "valued" outside of the cloistered world of the Camera Club. This can be invaluable when you decide to apply for Distinctions from such bodies as the RPS, PAGB, WPF and so on. It provides a way, nothing is infallible though, of selecting your images with confidence.

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You read that right. It is down to you to assimilate these results, compare your images to the Acceptances and work out what's going on. But you are not alone, the exhibitionists in Mold will be willing to help; the process can only improve your skills at assessing your own images. Surely that is what we all want to be able to do.

The idea behind these notes is to simplify the whole process for entering Salons. I'll stick to using "Salons" but the term is interchangeable with "Exhibitions". It is not a difficult process but there are enough differences between the various Salons for there to be definite pitfalls. I have a fairly good understanding of what's required but I'm not infallible - if you think I'm wrong somewhere, or if you don't understand something please get in touch with me and we'll resolve it.

This will be the first of three documents. The second will cover Nationals (British Photographic Exhibitions) and the third will cover Internationals (both UK and Foreign).

So, firstly, there are two types of Salon: affiliated and unaffiliated. The affiliated are sponsored by BPE for Nationals and any combination of FIAP, PSA and UPI for the Internationals.

The unaffiliated Salons are those without any sponsorship from any of the several national or international photographic bodies. Listed these are typically:

**Mold CC:** annual exhibition, usually in Buckley Library since the closure of the Gallery in Mold over the Library, prints only, up to about 10 per member, no entry fee, usually for a few weeks in September, we try to hang everything but also represent everyone who submits work.

**NWPA (North Wales Photographic Association):** annual exhibition, currently in Venu Cymru in Llandudno, prints and PDIs, up to 6 colour prints, 6 mono prints and 6 PDIs per entrant, entry fee in 2014 was £6 minimum to £12 maximum, entries close April/Mayish, entries are selected by a panel of 3, entries may be sold, framing for the period of the Exhibition will be carried out by NWPA. Please note that these details may well change for 2015.

**North Wales Open:** organised by Clwyd Theatr Cymru, up to 2 entries, must be framed, handling fee of £5 per entry, closes June, runs to end of August, entries selected by a panel, entries may be sold, cash prizes are available.

**London Salon:** formed as The Linked Ring in 1892, the London Salon is a group of (currently) 42 photographers the aim of which is "to exhibit only that class of photographic work in which there is distinct evidence of artistic feeling and execution". You may enter up to 4 Prints (only) in either or both of the 2 Sections, Colour and Mono, £12 for one section, £18 for two. Each member selects which 2 of theirs they wish to be exhibited, so that accounts for up to 84 of the 150 or so that they hang. The rest (that's you and me) are voted for by all the members present on the day and each print gets a score of either 1 (Acceptance by the majority) or 0 (not Accepted), but no more than 2 can be Accepted from any one entrant. As you can tell, this is a very prestigious Salon and also a very difficult one to succeed in. Entry is usually mid to late April.

**Welsh Salon:** this is only open to members of Welsh Clubs and has 3 Sections: Mono Prints, Colour Prints and PDIs (colour or mono). Entry fee is £1.50 per image, minimum £6.

**RPS:** at the moment I know nothing about the RPS Exhibitions.

## WHAT TO DO

**How do I start?** The first thing to do is to find the website for the Salon (for Salon read Exhibition also; Salon is easier to type) and download the Invitation or Rules or whatever you can find. The crucial thing is to be organised from the very start.

Consequently I have a Folder on my hard disk titled **Exhibitions**. The sub-folders and sub-sub-folders are:



Then, in the **Foreign**, **UK-BPE**, **UK-International** and **UK-Others** folders there is a folder for each Salon and within each of those there are currently sub-folders titled **2014**, **2015**.

The **Bodies** sub-folder is for information regarding their Awards or Listings of the Salons that they sponsor. BPE = British Photographic Exhibitions. FIAP = International Federation of Photographic Art. PSA = Photographic Society of

America. RPS = Royal Photographic Society. UPI = United Photographers International.

Whilst this may seem very tedious believe me, without good record keeping it will all get out of hand very quickly. Whatever system you use, make it "yours" - it has to be simple and intuitive for you.

The easiest way to handle all the information is with PDFs, the Adobe open system for documents.

Not all Salon websites have downloadable PDFs available but that is easily circumvented by use of a PDF printer facility. Browsers often incorporate this feature now so that if you want to print a page you are viewing, pressing Ctrl-P will bring up your printer and possibly a PDF option. If not, locate "PDF Creator" on the InterWeb (which is free) and add that to your printers. Or sometimes there is a "Save as PDF" option - if you have this use it, it usually gives the best quality.

**What next?** Read the documents very carefully and make sure you understand what they want and how they want it presented. At this stage comprehension is more important than your photographic ability. You may find it worthwhile to keep hard copies of some of the documents that you've downloaded - at least you have something relevant to write on and make notes on. Get a fat ring-binder and a lot of A4 clear filing wallets to keep it all in order.

You will start by entering PDIs rather than Prints. This is very cost effective as there is very little material cost and postage is low - not all Salons have on-line entry and so you may have to write a CD and post it (usually with a cheque - remember those?).

## **PDI SPECIFICATIONS**

**Image Size:** In the Mold Club, 1400x1050 JPGs is the norm in sRGB rather than Adobe Colour Space and that will apply to many Salons. Some will require 1024x768 (same ratio), some will require 1920x1080 (widescreen) but when you go International you will find many others (even square!). Generally these figures are maximums, occasionally these figures are minimums! Read what it says and understand it.

You should always aim for the maximum size by resizing your images if necessary otherwise your images may not project correctly. Regardless of photographic content any deficiencies in projection of your images will be marked down - you are expected to be competent in the basics.

**File Size:** Occasionally there will be a maximum file size given which you must adhere to otherwise you may not be able to upload your entry. This can be tricky and so the easiest way is to save the JPG with a lower quality level, say 11 or 10 instead of 12, and then checking the file size.

**File Type:** Only ever send JPGs. Don't send TIFFs and certainly not PSDs (Photoshop files) or RAW files.

**DPI:** The DPI (dots per inch) that you should use is 300. Publishing for Web automatically uses 72dpi but Salons require all images to be 300 for publication in

the Catalogue (if they produce one) - you *do* want your images reproduced don't you? In reality, it's usually only the Award winners that are published but there some that reproduce all Acceptances.

**Borders and Frames:** When it comes to borders and frames you must use the simplest possible. I always use a very thin (2 pixels wide say) black border surrounded by a similar width of white so that the image is held in by the black and doesn't "bleed" out and then that is separated from the background by the white. Without the white it is very difficult to tell where some dark images finish. I do these borders in Image/Canvas Size in Photoshop. These borders are included in the image size requirements so, for instance, your image must remain within the 1400x1050 criteria.

Unlike Club entries, do not pad out your image to make it up to the maximum size. For example you may have a square image that is 1050x1050 - do not fill out with black canvas to the sides to make it 1400x1050. The reason? It's down to publication again - they don't want to have to trim every image to lose the non-image areas. Thin borders are fine though.

**Colour Space:** This should always be sRGB. If you normally work in Adobe make sure you convert it to sRGB before saving as a JPG and check that it looks right - the differences may sometimes be seen in the Reds.

**Filenames:** The organisers will tell you when you need to write your filenames a certain way and do what they say. Also, sometimes you need to create specifically named folders if entry is via a CD-R. Very often, however, the Salon software doesn't care what the filename is.

Many systems used by Salons will automatically transfer the filename into their "Title" field. Don't worry, you always have the chance to amend it but it makes sense to generally make the title the filename. For this reason write the filename as you wish it to appear in the catalogue. So, instead of using bicycles\_at\_dawn-1400.JPG use Bicycles at Dawn.JPG - there's less correcting to do.

**Titles:** All images must have a title rather than "Untitled". Also, all your titles must be unique amongst your images. If you apply for FIAP and PSA Awards in particular it is a requirement that all your images are uniquely titled AND you cannot use the same image with different titles. Colour and Mono versions of the same image are a bit of a grey area (sorry) and I will have to check the requirements.

There is an exception to this in that an image can possess a short title and a long title. The reason for this is that some software has a limit on the number of characters you can enter and it can be as low as 25. This limit can be particularly restrictive when it comes to Nature images.

So titles need to be chosen carefully. Until your image is Accepted somewhere you can change the title of course. One of mine originally titled "The Travelling Salesman" just wasn't getting Accepted, but has had 6 since I changed it to "Despair" - that is its title now and for ever more.

## **PAYMENT**

There is a cost to entering Salons. To enter lets say 4 Sections with 4 images in each Section may cost typically about £16. But the cost structure can vary between Salons.

It may be that each of those 4 Sections is £4; occasionally the cost will be per image. Very often the cost is front loaded so that, for instance, to enter 1 Section it could be £8, to enter 2 could be £12, 3 could be £15, 4 could be £16. Occasionally it might cost £16 however many Sections you enter.

As ever, read it and understand it: sometimes it may be worth entering extra Sections simply because it doesn't cost much more to do so.

Actual payment for on-line entries is invariably through PayPal. You don't have to have a PayPal Account necessarily, you can pay through PayPal using your Credit or Debit card.

Postal entries will require a cheque or postal order.

### **POSTAL ENTRIES**

While we're on the subject of postal entries, and it may seem obvious, make sure you're sending the entry to the right address. The address prominently displayed on the front of the invitation may not be the address to which entries should be sent, it may simply be the address of the venue where that particular club meets, probably yet another Methodist Church Hall and your entry will be lost.

It will be there on the entry form somewhere, it's all part of the test that Salons like to put you through.

Copy your entries onto a CD-R, not a CD-RW (rewriteable) according to the instructions on the entry form and make sure that you finalise the session. To be absolutely certain that the Organisers will be able to read it, try it on a different machine to the one that has written it.

### **IMAGE ELIGIBILITY**

**What is eligible?** Anything is allowed that hasn't gained an Acceptance in that particular Salon previously. Otherwise, note the titles of the sections and select accordingly. Take note of any definitions provided, especially for Nature and Travel and Opens Sections that are sometimes called Trad (short for Traditional).

Put simply the definition usually states that minimum alteration is allowed: you cannot insert or remove elements of the image except by cropping and alterations to exposure are allowed. Whatever a reasonably competent photographer could do with an enlarger is allowed, nothing else.

Also take time to think whether your image matches the title of the Section you are entering. And the other side of that coin is if, for instance, there is a Portrait Section then if you enter portraits into the accompanying Open Section they will usually be marked down.

Also, you cannot enter the same image into different Sections at the same time, even if you have done a Mono conversion for instance.

One aspect of Salons is that they are not competitions as such; the images are selected on the basis of their being suitable to form an Exhibition of a certain standard. So if you have 4 similar images of polar bears wrestling, they could all be entered into the Nature Section and they all may be Accepted. So that opens things up for photographers who like to work in their own series or themes.

This means that every Salon has to be considered individually; they don't all have the same sections, so one of your images could conceivably be entered in various different Salons into Open or Open Mono or Portrait or Travel or Street. Take care, but it's your decision.

### **Sections:**

The Sections/Categories I've encountered over through 2014 are listed here with the most common being the first five:

OPEN - can be colour or mono

COLOUR - if it also says TRAD it means no manipulation\* is allowed

MONO - defined\*, again if it also says TRAD it means no manipulation\*

NATURE - nature/natural history has a few definitions\*, basically no manipulation

TRAVEL - defined\*, often called Photo Travel, may be split East and West

PORTRAIT - may be split into separate Colour and Mono

STREET - basically outside with human elements

SCAPE - usually covers Landscape, Cityscape, Waterscape and so on

LANDSCAPE - can include figures if subsidiary, sometimes Mountain Landscape

CREATIVE - defined\*, aka Altered Reality, Experimental

PHOTOREAL - defined\*

PHOTOJOURNALISM - defined\*

In the following you must use your own interpretation; if you get the chance on the Salon's website check out what has been accepted in previous years:

WORK

LIFE

INDUSTRY

ARCHITECTURE

PEOPLE

TRANSPORT

### **\*Definitions:**

**MANIPULATION** shall constitute any or all of the following modifications to the original image:

- Adding an element to the image that was not contained in the original capture
- Removing an element from the image that was contained in the original capture other than by cropping
- Moving or repositioning an element of the image that was contained in the original capture.

The following enhancements are allowed, and are not seen as manipulation:

- Correction of lens distortion, chromatic aberrations, purple fringing, lens vignette and vertical/horizontal perspective adjustments
- Removal of dust spots or scratch marks from sensor or scanned images
- Due to the limitation of digital sensors regarding dynamic range, the blending of different exposures of the same scene to broaden the dynamic range. (e.g. HDR)
- Focus stacking to widen the depth of field especially in Macro photography

**NATURE** photography is restricted to the use of the photographic process to depict all branches of natural history, except anthropology and archeology, in such a fashion that a well-informed person will be able to identify the subject material and certify its honest presentation. The story telling value of a photograph must be weighed more than the pictorial quality while maintaining high technical quality. Human elements shall not be present, except where those human elements are integral parts of the nature story such as nature subjects, like barn owls or storks, adapted to an environment modified by humans, or where those human elements are in situations depicting natural forces, like hurricanes or tidal waves. Scientific bands, scientific tags or radio collars on wild animals are permissible. Photographs of human created hybrid plants, cultivated plants, feral animals, domestic animals, or mounted specimens are ineligible, as is any form of manipulation that alters the truth of the photographic statement.

No techniques that add, relocate, replace, or remove pictorial elements except by cropping are permitted. Techniques that enhance the presentation of the photograph without changing the nature story or the pictorial content, or without altering the content of the original scene, are permitted including HDR, focus stacking and dodging/burning. Techniques that remove elements added by the camera, such as dust spots, digital noise, and film scratches, are allowed. Stitched images are not permitted. All allowed adjustments must appear natural. Color images can be converted to greyscale monochrome. Infrared images, either direct-captures or derivations, are not allowed.

Images used in Nature Photography competitions may be divided in two classes: Nature and Wildlife. Images entered in Nature sections meeting the Nature Photography Definition above can have landscapes, geologic formations, weather phenomena, and extant organisms as the primary subject matter. This includes images taken with the subjects in controlled conditions, such as zoos, game farms, botanical gardens, aquariums and any enclosure where the subjects are totally dependent on man for food.

Images entered in Wildlife sections meeting the Nature Photography Definition above are further defined as one or more extant zoological or botanical organisms free and unrestrained in a natural or adopted habitat. Landscapes, geologic formations, photographs of zoo or game farm animals or of any extant zoological or botanical species taken under controlled conditions are not eligible in Wildlife sections. Wildlife is not limited to animals, birds and insects. Marine subjects and botanical subjects (including fungi and algae) taken in the wild are suitable wildlife subjects, as are carcasses of extant species.

Wildlife images may be entered in Nature sections of Exhibitions.

A **MONOCHROME** image is one with tones from very dark grey (black) to very clear grey (white) A black and white image toned entirely in a single colour will be able to stand in the black & white category and can be reproduced in black & white in the catalogue. On the other hand a black and white image modified by partial toning or by the addition of one colour to a part of the image becomes a colour image and should be entered in the colour category.

A **PHOTO TRAVEL** image must express the feeling of a time and place, and portray a land, its distinctive features or culture in its natural state. There are no geographical limitations. Close-up pictures of people or objects must include distinguishable environment. Techniques that add to, relocate, replace or remove any element of the original image, except by cropping, are not permitted. All adjustments must appear natural. Conversion to full monochrome is acceptable. Derivations, including infrared, are unacceptable.

**CREATIVE** is a class that allows the photographer to manipulate images by the use of montages, changing colour, form, shapes, sharpness, etc., to make an image more surreal or less realistic than it would otherwise be. The use of HDR techniques without further montage or manipulation would not be included in this class.

A **PHOTOREALISTIC** image is one that has been created from more than one image or is a single image that has undergone a major physical change, but resembles a single capture image. The ability to create seamlessly merged images is encouraged in this class, but the end image should resemble a single capture.

**PHOTOJOURNALISM** images shall consist of pictures or sequences with informative content and emotional impact, including human interest, sport, documentary and spot news. The journalistic value of the photograph shall be considered over pictorial quality. In the interest of credibility, photographs which misrepresent the truth, such as manipulation to alter the subject matter, or situations which are set up for the purpose of photography, are unacceptable in Photojournalism.

## **THE SELECTION PROCESS**

The norm in the UK is for there to be a panel of three photographers experienced in Salon photography. Each of them has a keypad with four buttons marked 2, 3, 4 and 5. There is no actual time limit but they take about 5 seconds to each press one of the buttons. They should not be able to see what the others are doing and only the total score is called out.

So there it is: the image is presented to them, the title may be announced or appear briefly on the screen, they consider it and then give it a mark from 2 to 5, all in 5 seconds. Then the next image appears. This is how they can get through thousands of images a day. This is why your images need to be clear and easily understood. Don't complain, that's how the system works.

The actual marking is very straightforward in fact: a mark of 2 means the selector thinks it's not suitable for this Salon for any reason whatsoever. 3 means possibly yes, but not certain. 4 means definitely yes. 5 means definitely yes and should be considered for an Award. So the scores will usually range from 6 to 15.

What matters now is what the Acceptance Score is. The Organisers will have an idea of how many Acceptances they will allow. This can be from under 10% to about 33%. Then, based on the number of images that have scored 15, 14, 13, 12 and so on, they will choose a score which will give them the required number of Acceptances. Occasionally images from a lower score may be moved up a mark if the split comes in the wrong place.

For instance, if the Acceptance Score is 12 there may be insufficient 12s, 13s, 14s and 15s so they will look at the 11s. There are several ways in which you can score 11: 2+4+5, 3+4+4, 3+3+5. If they wanted to move some 11s into the Acceptances they would choose the 3+3+5s on the basis that at least one selector was very keen on it with no-one actively against it.

So, although 11 would probably be a rejection in this case take heart from the realisation that at least 2 of the Selectors thought it should be in.

Acceptance Scores can vary therefore and can be as low as 10 or as high as 14.

Scoring in Internationals is a bit of a mystery at times. Occasionally you get just an Acceptance or a Rejection but when you do get a score they don't always say what the maximum was. I've had scores recently in different Salons in the 20s, 30s and 40s and one member of the club was delighted to find she had beaten me with a score in the 50s!

## **AFTERWARDS**

You should receive a CD or DVD of the Acceptances and Award winners. Take the time to look at these as they will stimulate your process of assessing your images. But be wary about changing what you do to follow fashions, and there are definitely fashions in Salon photography. Only do it if you were going to do it anyway.

Otherwise your aim should be to do the best you can with what you have.

Sometimes you will receive a catalogue which are great to look at and show people. These can range from the half-hearted almost home-made attempts to sumptuous books.

Keep a record of your results; I keep a PDF as explained above and also a hard copy in my file. I also keep a spreadsheet/table of what each image has done and where - it's useful for getting a quick handle on how you are doing.

You will need to know what has already been Accepted if you enter a Salon the following year and you will also need to list your Acceptances if you apply for any of the Distinctions offered by the various bodies. What I can tell you is that all require basically the same information but all in radically different ways.

Advice from experienced exhibitors is to "follow the judges". If you feel inclined to do so, in the data that you are going to keep, keep a record who judged what. You will see many judges appearing in the prospectuses time and time again and although you won't know exactly what score a particular judge gave your image (because they are usually one of three) you may associate them as being involved in a particularly low or high score.

If you are lucky enough to receive a "Selector's Award" you know for certain who really appreciates your work - stick with them; give them the pleasure of judging your image over and over again.

## **DISTINCTIONS**

The requirements for Distinctions range from the very simple to the very complex and this is why you need to keep adequate records. For instance, BPE only want to

know what Acceptances you've had in BPE Exhibitions, they're not interested in what Images have been used.

FIAP require a minimum number of Images to be used in a minimum number of FIAP patronised Salons in a minimum number of Countries.

PSA require a minimum number of Images to be used in discrete Sections such as Colo(u)r, Mono. Travel, Nature in PSA patronised Salons.

UPI are the simplest of the International Bodies, a bit like BPE for Nationals. You get points for any International Acceptances, double if they are from UPI patronised Salons and extra points for Awards and Medals.

I hope this hasn't overwhelmed you, it's meant to cover the many variations and pitfalls we have found over the last twelve months; believe me, it's an exhilarating way to improve your photography. The intention is for you to get the best out of your own photography, that is all. If anything else comes your way then that is a bonus.

Oh yes, the other initials I haven't mentioned are OCD - any tendency in that direction will definitely help you.

Good luck.