

Photoevaluation Notes

Robson Ranch Photography Club September Contest

Dear photography enthusiasts,

Thank you for utilizing PSA and my services for your contest this month, with the theme "Silhouette." I'd like to give you an idea of where I'm coming from by outlining my criteria for evaluating pictorial images in general, and silhouettes in particular.

Your club conveyed to me that you wanted the criteria to include composition, originality, technical excellence, artistic merit and overall impact. This fits in well with the criteria I have been using successfully for over a decade, but in a more hierarchical fashion. For color and monochrome pictorial or "open" categories, I judge solely on **artistic merit**, in the light of theme should one be present.

I feel artistic merit is the overall, psychological result of the interaction of elements of the following characteristics:

- Content
- Composition
- Technical excellence
- Originality

That "psychological result" is the effect on the **viewer**, and it has two components:

- **Impact**--the immediate effect of an image (attention-getting, immediate sensual and mental stimulation).
- **Interest**--the longer-term set of effects of an image (time spent contemplating an image, later remembering an image, returning to see it again, purchasing or copying an image, buying an image, communicating interest to others, etc.)

To me the "viewer" is not just the evaluator, but also includes the evaluator's suppositions based on experience of how other viewers interested in photography in general might react with respect to impact and interest.

As you will see, my comments on your images will include many comments on "interest" and "impact" and how successfully they are generated by the characteristics of Content, Composition, Technical excellence, and originality.

Silhouettes

Silhouettes have a fascinating history. They are named after the 1759 French Finance Minister Étienne de Silhouette who was asked to do drastic budget cutting and tax raising to pay for Louis XV's wars. By implementing a tax on windows and doors, he infuriated the middle class, such as it was, and was considered a cheapskate. So, when artisans began marketing paper-cut outlines as a cheap version of personal portraits, they were nicknamed "silhouettes."

The silhouette is important psychologically because it is remarkably easy to identify individuals by their profiles. The dictionary.com definition is:

1. a two-dimensional representation of the outline of an object, as a cutout or configurational drawing, *uniformly filled in with black*, especially a black-paper, miniature cutout of the outlines of a person's face in profile.
2. the outline or general shape of something:

For the purposes of evaluating success of the theme, I'm putting more weight on the first definition, where a sharp outline is paramount, and contrast between the subject and background is important. The subject in most cases should *be* the outline and the way it is interpreted by the viewer.

Thank you for sharing your work with me! I wish you continued enjoyment working with your camera art!

Sincerely,
Jeff Dunn, Ph.D., PPSA

See my photos at
www.musicmemory.smugmug.com