

Knox & Melton Mowbray International Interclub.

Australian Judge: Paul Robinson

Paul Robinson started photography as a teenager in Tasmania, then as hobby commencing membership in various photography clubs on mainland Australia from 1973. He turned professional in 1989 doing portrait and wedding work, then senior photographer 1992 - 2004 at an advertising agency in Melbourne. Paul conducted his own photography business until 2012 and the next year commenced at Deakin University in Victoria, completing a Bachelor of Creative Arts (Photography with Distinction) in 2015 and Post-graduate Honours in 2016. He commenced judging photography in 1978 and since then has evaluated over 700 photography competitions from local community to International Salons. He authored three books, including a reference book 'Judging Photographs' and also is published in many magazines, books, brochures and catalogues. He founded the Caulfield Photographic Society in 1981, President of the Victorian Association of Photographic Societies (1991-92) and was a founding member of the Australian Photographic Judges Association in 2014. A member of Photographic Society of America and of the Australian Photographic Society Honours Sub-committee he has been awarded an AFIAP, AAPS, SSAPS and SSVAPS.

Entry 1. A Welsh Waterfall in Autumn

The direction or flow of motion works well with slow shutter speeds which is obvious here. However, when it is too long with water it becomes milky and tends to obscure the sense of direction of movement. The blended stone structure with its environment provides an historical narrative to the scene, almost idyllic if not for the cold temperatures. White or light, bright colours at edges is called fringing which compete with the main point of interest and here the white sky is the visual distraction. Making it almost black would overcome this. The boulder on the lower left corner could be burnt in as it competes with the brightness of the waterfall. For inspiration see the work of the Japanese photographer, Tzido Sun (Web site gallery – Forest).

Entry 2. Asia

You have a quality high key image here. The black edging suits a computer screen but may not be necessary when projected. It has all the hallmarks of thorough preparation for a photoshoot, well groomed, fresh make-up and custom costume. Lighting is glamour lighting in style which has flattened the facial structure modelling; I am hopeful you experimented with loop lighting and butterfly (aka Paramount lighting). Split lighting would be quite wrong for the model's facial structure. When making any style of portrait be aware that jewellery such as earrings, bangles, rings and wrist watches all compete with the eyes of models, unless included for a purpose then consider omitting this kind of prop. See the work of David Bailey (UK), Annie Leibovitz (USA) and especially Joyce Tenneson (USA)

Entry 3. Black Kite

Diagonal lines in composition give a sense of movement (which is handy in a static subject) and in conjunction with the bird in flight enhances this sense. The head of the Black Kite is horizontal which is about sight stabilisation to gain visual clarity of anything from prey to avoiding crashing into trees while in flight. The sky appears to have been layered in, but I will stand corrected on this, as there is a white line around the bird which happens because the selection is anti-aliased and alpha blending between the semi-transparent pixels. I would encourage you to continue with bird photography and to help you along see the work of the English photographer, David Tipling.

Entry 4. Bokeh Voddie and Lime

The palette in colour discipline terms is called Harmonious Colour Contrast and here its hue is akin to the colour of a number of alcohols. You have resolved the concept through colour and the bokeh effect in this particular image has a commercial advertising look. To further the separation between the upper left slice of lime and the background it is recommended you clone out the dark surrounding patches to make it appear to be more rounded. You have an eye for this style of photography so go to the Web and look up 'Beverage Photography' to help your skill level along.

Entry 5. Brown Goshawk

The reflection in the bird's eye looks as if it is outdoors on a clear sunny day and the background, being so far out of focus, suggests greenery of a natural location supporting the understanding of the outdoors. It is obviously a high-quality profile portrait of the bird that is pin sharp and the overall look is of the type generally awarded at international level photography. The mesmerising eye demands our attention and the internal lines from the tip of the beak are leader lines to it. To expand your drive with bird photography, see the work of the Hungarian photographer, Bence Mate.

Entry 6. Common Starling

Regarding nature photography there are at least four prime source definitions: first, PSA, FIAP & RPS; second, ANZANG; third, BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year; fourth, Audubon Photography Awards. Each have variations and this lovely shot of the Common Starling would be fine for any open competition it would be rejected in some of the international nature definitions. ANZANG has one section, item 8. Animal Habitat – the image must show an animal (or animals) in the environment it lives in. This can be a natural or built environment that the animal, either native or feral, has independently claimed as its habitat (captive species not allowed). So, your image would meet this sections definition. The narrative here is that the poor bird looks cold, wet and miserable and is technically a competent photograph. For inspiration see the work of the American photographer, Melissa Groo.

Entry 7. Connie Maria

Technically it is a proficient image and it has a key feature of Pre-Raphaelite composition called 'Contraposition' dealing with opposites. Here the opposites of old and new are represented by the decaying jetty and the boats. The subdued lighting of twilight is correctly having a blue look to the image. You may wish to consider further post-production work to make it look like a 'faux' cyanotype where it will appear more like a tinted monochrome. See the work of the American photographer, Mike Ware or from the UK, Walead Beshty and Anna Atkins.

Entry 8. Driftwood

The warm foreground colours and the cool background colours provide the third dimension in this image. Usually the third dimension is implied through aerial or linear perspective but here colour is doing the job. The opposites of organic and geometric shapes are a key point and, in some ways, mimic each other. The sand coated driftwood indicates that this scene is not as calm as it appears here and consider burning in all the driftwood except for the light-coloured tree trunk emerging from the sand on the right side of the batch of driftwood.

Entry 9. Drop in for a visit

This is a powerful story telling image and the viewpoint has overcome any background distractions that would otherwise appear. In colour discipline terms black has the capacity to enhance the brilliance of all colours which it has done so brilliantly here. The water is displaying properties one could expect such as ripples (for visual texture), shadows from the balloon and the kayak, reflections of both and the darkening effect of it upon colour. There is nothing bland about this image and to encourage you colour endeavours see the work of the great American photographer, Pete Turner.

Entry 10. Forth Rail Bridge

It is assuring to see an architectural image skilfully photographed with strong linear perspective combined with diagonal composition. In architectural photography one aspect is to accurately reproduce the vision of the architect and one way to do this is to ensure that vertical lines are precisely this. The time of evening contributes to the impact of the image and is nearing a fine art architectural photograph. It will help to further raise the quality of the image by burning in the sky and water, especially what looks like a slipway or boat ramp. Each year there are the Architectural Photographer of the Year Awards, have a look at these and especially the work of the Greek photographer, Julia Anna Gospodarou.

Entry 11. Grainy Curl

Grain and noise are generally frowned upon in photography but this is not always right. In a number of circumstances, it provides mood to an image. The title of the image is appropriate and its elegant simplicity is a hallmark of photography clearly achieved here. The middle curve needs a touch burning in on the curve where it is blown out on the highlight and the top 'triangle' needs to be completely vertical on its left side as it is out by between one to two degrees. Very few photographers delve into photographing shape as a practice so it is worthwhile pursuing; when they do it often falls into the realm of the abstract or still life styles such as the American photographer, Edward Weston.

Entry 12. Grey Day on Loch Fyne

This may sound like an oxymoron but essentially this is a B&W colour photograph. It is such a useful technique to make your own as most photographers would put their camera away and hide in their homes in this kind of bracing weather. Sometimes a centre line works in a composition and where it applies can be very specific to support a prime point of interest, in this case an advantage would be to crop to just above the line of hills to the left. Next would be to burn in the remaining clouds on the right to support the calm drama (another oxymoron). The general reason for avoiding a centre line is that it speaks to indecision in what looks best. I hope you made two other images of this scene, one as just mentioned, and the other where it is selected halfway up the mast reflection and showing more of the dramatic sky.

Entry 13. Harvest Mouse on Teazel

The depth of field is satisfactory as are other technical aspects. This tiny mouse is engaging with its dark eyes making contact with viewers in what is a natural habitat of a dried Teasel wildflower, mostly in the mid to southern areas of England. The image is strong enough not to need the vignette as the side twigs on the flower and most of its bristles point to its head. This disappearing species, as other fauna and flora, are worth the effort to photograph, not only for aesthetic reasons but also for environmental and historical reasons. You may get some inspiration from the American photographer, Joel Sartore, who is currently photographing all the endangered species on planet Earth.

Entry 14. Heron

In bird photography there are the four guiding "Fs", flying, feeding, fighting and yes.....flirting. However, there are other things to consider and that includes fine art bird photography, this is where your image resides. The contributing factors here are the rim lighting, reflection, atmospheric effects and the subtle background bokeh. It is an image with the emotional factor of mood. You have ably captured the delicate wading stillness of the bird in its hunt for food, the anticipation on its part for forthcoming dramatic action.

Entry 15. Honeyeater in Yellow

All through spring and summer I have these New Holland Honey Eaters feeding on Grevillea alongside the home. They are a small, active and beautiful bird and you have managed to capture it with great skill as well as the brilliance of the yellow Kangaroo Paw flowers. Technically it is well handled, pin sharp with just the right amount of depth of field. The image is strong enough to not need the vignette. The composition of diagonal lines for implied motion and 'X' shape for the sense of tension raises the quality of the photo. To give you further insight into bird photography see the work of the Peruvian photographer, Pedro Jarque Krebs.

Entry 16. Hoverfly Feeding

Quality macro images are unusual in photography clubs but you have a talent for this style of photography. The sharpness identifies the details of the insect with clarity, the depth of field is adequate, also the white areas on the flower could be burnt in to reduce their visual distraction. The cool green out of focus background does not impinge into the main point of interest and the warm coloured flower and Hoverfly advance towards the viewer to support the third dimension. You might get a kick out of seeing the work of the Spanish photographer, Javier Ruperez.

Entry 17. I am looking forward to this

The plane of the camera in relation to the bee is absolutely working in your favour resulting in extraordinary sharpness for focus and depth of field. Pollen can be seen on the bee. I will stand corrected but when enlarged and looking at the eye of the bee it looks as if the image was made under controlled conditions using a studio umbrella for lighting. Nothing wrong with this but in a national or international it may be picked up and marked down if noticed. The radial composition of the petals guides our eyes to the bee where it is well framed. Well done.

Entry 18. I'm watching you

It is interesting you chose B&W to make this image. My viewpoint I am about to say may cause a sigh, but when we really think about it, B&W is really an experimental form of seeing the world which is in colour, even at night. While purists see B&W as classic photography it nevertheless does not reveal reality. However, as B&W and working up the contrast it has amazingly enhanced the visual skin texture and the eye is unavoidable when viewing the image. The background is nicely out of focus and the depth of field could be a tad greater. The image should do quite well in a monochrome competition.

Entry 19. Imperial War Museum North

The lighting and contrast make the image along with the angle of view, resulting in a grand design that Kevin McCloud would be proud of. Oh, by the way, he is one of the world's great judges (of architecture). The vertical lines are about three degrees out of plumb but had this been a colour image it may have been bland (subject to paint or materials colour). The elevation you have chosen brings out the geometry and therefore, in this case, the composition of the image. The outer edge of the upper floor is tending to merge with the sky owing to the burning in used but further post production work can overcome this challenge. For inspiration see the work of the German photographer, Anna Laudan.

Entry 20. King Parrot

Extraordinarily sharp focus on the bird in its natural habitat where you have captured it satisfactorily from a technical perspective. As with any fauna photographed close up the eyes will dominate the image often owing to their colour, as seen here. I am hoping you also have other images of this bird showing off its brilliant red body colour. It is a straightforward image competently made and shows the skills you have attained in nature photography. To extend and challenge you further see the work of the American photographer, Melissa Groo.

Entry 21. Kookaburra Sits

Technically the image is high quality in that it is sharp, exposed correctly, has suitable depth of field and composed well. It ticks all the basic boxes. As photographers there are additional influences which can be considered, such as emotion, drama, concept and meaningfulness just to name a few. You are obviously a technically astute photographer; the next step is to take on board challenges which raises the bar. In doing so you will become frustrated with results that may take a while to meet your expectations, stick with it as perseverance has its payday. It is a delightful image of the Kookaburra displaying its colour to advantage in the subdued light.

Entry 22. Male Banded Demoiselle

This is a high-quality image of the insect which ticks off all the technical boxes. The highlight in the eye is the shape of a studio umbrella and the background is so even it implies an artificial background. However, I will stand corrected if it was made outdoors in its natural habitat. You were fortunate in that the wings had folded together which was extremely supportive for its overall sharpness regarding depth of field. Regardless of circumstances under which the image was made it nevertheless is an appealing image. We all should be making images of insects as their numbers worldwide are decreasing, for example in the UK as much as 25%, its no different to the animal world with loss of species. Although his style is quite different have a look at the images of the Italian photographer, Francesco Bagnato.

Entry 23. Me Landing

To stop the beat of a bees wings my research indicates that with ISO-2,000, f5.6 and 10,000/sec shutter speed it is possible using strobe lighting but then looking at this image the depth of field looks incorrect for the advised aperture setting, it was more likely around f16. Unfortunately, the image making properties for this image are unavailable so I am unable to check the technical details. Macro photographers would find this fascinating. But to the art: the angle of the bee to the flower and its stamen fulfills the notion of the title. The wings of the bee have the same characteristics as birds about to land and together with the strong complementary colours it has impact. Have a look at the images of the entomologist, Dr Alex Wild, from the USA to support your endeavours with this style of photography.

Entry 24. Meerkats

When considering the emotional qualities of an image this is the soft side, the type which draws a sigh from viewers. The environment seems to be in a zoo enclosure so it is best suited for an open competition at a national or international level. One small improvement would be to dodge in the highlight in the eye and work around edges of the eye to make them just a tad clearer. You have an eye, patience and perseverance, so be encouraged to continue with this style of capturing emotion in animals, continue to do so with other animals as well. Have the shutter set at continuous shooting or motor drive in old parlance, as this will give you the best chance at capturing the nuances involved. See the work of the American photographer, Tom Murphy, especially his images of ice and snow encrusted Bison.

Entry 25. Melbourne Reflection

Most of us hear about the World Wildlife Photographer of the Year but there is also the World Architectural Photographer of the Year and in recent years this has been won by various photographers using B&W with dramatic effect. One of the key components is doing what you have done here by making the sky very dark or black, here you have graduated this aspect very well. On the far right half way up there is a slither of another building which needs to be cropped or cloned out. The longer exposure has made the reflections work with the structures to enhance the sense of height to the image. Examine the architectural images of the Italian photographer, Simona Panzorini, for some tips.

Entry 26. Mini Moss Drips

Lovely close up of the moss and especially the reflections in the fresh water droplets. The bokeh effect in the background provides the artistic flair to lift its quality. Bright colours, as do warm colours, advance towards the viewer and create a visual impediment when in the foreground to the prime point of interest. The best alternative when making the exposure would have been to treat this a horizontal format but in post-production editing the area just below the stems could be cropped out. The depth of field and sharpness are commendable. You have a soul-mate in the Canadian photographer, Don Komarechka, check out his macro images.

Entry 27. Mungo National Park

For our English friends this national park is in the near outback of Australia in the south west corner of the State of N.S.W. It is where the remains of Mungo Woman were found in 1969 and Mungo Man in 1974 and are the oldest Human remains found in Australia dating back about 42,000 years. It is on the World Heritage List and 40,000 or more years ago it was a lake bed. To the photograph. It is a straight image where the sun was about 45degs up in the sky, just at the point where its colour was imbuing the natural colours of the landscape. Warm colours (orange, yellow, red) advance towards the viewer and cool colours (blue, green, violet) recede; they both contribute to the third dimension in two dimensional artworks. Your image displays this. An hour or so later and the colour would have been more dramatic or even after the sun had set Mungo can take on a pink hue. The middle third of the image is where the interest lies, consider cropping to a panorama which would then emphasise the lunettes in the landscape.

Entry 28. Near Birdsville

Located in far west Queensland not far from the South Australia and Northern Territory borders it is an outback area where temperatures can reach nearly C50degs in our summer months. Making your image a panorama is appropriate as it mimics the flatness of the country. The ancient disfigured Gum trees are so typical caused by the ravages of drought and heat, also, the timely inclusion of the flock of birds, for which the area is known, was quite fortunate. Having water flooding the plains is unusual, I should not do this but I am guessing it's the Diamantina River with the edge of the Simpson Desert in the background. The image has historic significance in presenting a desert region with so much water. Should you have an ongoing interest in outback landscape photography see the relevant images of Mark Gray or Ilya Genkin.

Entry 29. Now that's a real plane

The plane in question is a German WW2 Messerschmitt Bf-109 and you have made a story telling history photograph. It looks as if the image was captured with a long lens as the foreground figures are out of focus. From an aesthetic viewpoint the panorama approach was a good option, however, being more courageous by cropping the sky out altogether would emphasise this further. In addition, it would also remove glare from the image. I hope you also have other images where you stepped to the right or left to gain a portion of the profile of the aircraft fuselage. Technically it is satisfactory in that the plane is sharp and the picture is correctly exposed. Using a shutter speed which shows the propeller rotating without stopping the blades was an excellent choice.

Entry 30. On Observation

Conceptually the image at first glance has all the right ingredients. The lighting, looking through a Venetian blind down onto, presumably, a street below mimicking a classic Hollywood movie. Resolving the concept involves a few things to attend to regarding props. First, the camera is a 1940s/50's 35mm camera; the surrounding environment and the B&W approach all match for the concept. Second, the clothing of the model is not from the same era and this is where resolving concepts becomes important to get across an idea with clarity. It is why costume and stage designers spend a lot of time researching for appropriateness in historical productions. Two small points to consider are to remove the shirt stripes in post-production editing and second the left hand has been truncated so a little more breathing space would help. The Venetian blind shadows and the blind itself work for cohesiveness across the image.

Entry 31. On top of the Mountain

The slight pan with a high shutter speed has gained you a sharp image while still showing the rotation of the spoked wheels. The exposure and overall cool colour range together with the neutral colours of black, white and grey make this a restful looking image even though the motorcycle is anything but restful. A suggestion to improve the image would be to crop along the top (to just remove the sky) and then down the left side halfway between the rear wheel and the left edge (To give more space in front of the motorcycle to travel into). This solution is not always the best one for a subject in motion but it is the best for this image. I ride a motorcycle and take great pleasure in photographing motorcycle racing so we are soul-mates in this respect. See the work of the motorcycle sports photographer Milan Kubin.

Entry 32. Opera House

The Sydney Opera House is one of the world's most iconic structures and with all iconic subjects it makes it challenging to make meaningful images which are different to any other ever made of it. You have made a good effort to just show the 'sail' areas of the building. There is a story by Sebastiao Salgado that in a conversation with Henri Cartier-Bresson at the head office of Magnum, Henri said to him "Millimetres make a difference when selecting an image in the viewfinder", it is a lesson we can all take on board. Here the camera needed to be moved less than a centimetre to the left so the peaks on the left and right would align with the edge of the frame. Sharpness, exposure, tonal range and the sky all are capably captured.

Entry 33. Paired Marble Whites on Scabious

Butterflies regenerating tells an age-old story with beauty. The technical qualities tick all the boxes and from a compositional viewpoint not anchoring the flower stem in the lower right corner has helped it float along the bottom edge. There is a triangle perched on top of a semi-circle so structurally it is sound. The flower head is tiny as the two butterflies are slightly larger which underpins the sense of delicateness in the image. Backlighting may have been an alternative to lift its impact but that is an unknown until careful assessment of the comparison could be made. See the work of the American entomologist/photographer, Dr. Alex Wild.

Entry 34. Power and Light

Symbolically this is a meaningful image making the comparison of solar driven power to the coal fired or nuclear power plant. Timing of the photograph shows a clear choice between dirty power or clean power emanating from the sun. This interpretation of your image, whether accurate or not from your perspective, is where photographers face a challenge, i.e. making meaningful images in addition to the ubiquitous 'pretty picture'. It is a stark, heavy photo with a message about the climate crisis, when taking into account the equally dirty looking clouds appearing like aerial pollution. You are making a photographic statement about the downside the out of control and irresponsible approach to life on Earth. Technically the image carries this interpretation of the 'dark-side' well.

Entry 35. Puffin with Sand Eels

Middle of the day lighting has helped with the modelling of the bird and the eels to make an interesting image carrying the narrative of feeding. The droplets of water and out-of-focus marine background contributes to the freshness of the image. It appears as if the exposure is a tad under which could easily be overcome by placing the image through auto-contrast in any post-production editing program. Next, with judicious use of dodging, some further work could be carried out on the eye. The profile approach is an excellent way to capture an image of most fauna which has worked well here. To help you along with your nature photography see the bird images of the UK photographer, David Tipling.

Entry 36. Red Deer

You have captured the bellow of the buck with extraordinary good timing where it stands out from its lighter toned background. We all have options when it comes to how we make images and B&W is one of these which you have carried out well. When I was at University, in one photographic subject, a whole semester was devoted to 'Words and Images' which, amongst many others, made the point about appropriate titles for photographs. With this title a colour photograph would have served its purpose and the grey of the sky and background would still be apparent. Other than this point you have produced a technically satisfactory image that is full of life. Have a look at the Spanish nature photographer, Marina Cano, especially her B&W work.

Entry 37. Respect

Narratives are important in photography and here it appears to be an ANZAC Day remembrance service in the countryside. The colours are clear and the red artificial foreground poppies balance the red jackets the women are wearing. There is some indifference or distraction occurring as the horseman third from left is looking at you the photographer and the horseman on the far right is fiddling with something on his left side. These are minor points which brings me to the real point in that when photographing groups, the usual practice is make as many images as there are people in the scene. There are fourteen people here (some hidden behind others) so had you made at least fourteen images then the minor points noted above may not have occurred. It is a straight photograph apparently made with a wide-angle lens and with the trees framing on either side they hold our attention within the scene without the tendency to wander.

Entry 38. Robin

When bird photography first commenced with primitive film cameras it was mostly of bird nests with eggs and regularly with baby chicks in the nest. In Australia by the 1920's the first photographs of truly wild birds began to be made and during the decade of some in flight, mostly of seabirds because they were generally slower in flight or cooperatively were nesting on shorelines or floating on water. Flashlight, now essentially banned, came during the 1950s and 60s along with colour prints. This is not a put down but this delightful image is similar to earlier styles of bird photography. All the quality technical and compositional elements are evident and the background is of the style in vogue in recent years at international salon level photography. You are obviously capable of making quality images of birds, now extend yourself by taking up the challenge of capturing bird activity with the four 'Fs' – fighting, feeding, flirting and flying. See the images of the Finnish photographer Marcus Varesvuo.

Entry 39. Roxy

Your model is engaging, well presented (make-up, hairstyle) and has the facial bone structure for a variety of lighting techniques. The lighting here is an attempt at soft loop lighting where the key light needed to be raised about 10cms to more clearly show this lighting technique. The exposure for the image is correct, however, according to the embedded information shooting at f2.8 with the 155mm lens has caused a shallow depth of field. The shutter speed was 1/250sec so there was room to increase the aperture for greater depth of field which would then have brought both eyes into clearer focus, you probably would have been OK with 1/125sec hand held. Being the photographer, you are also the director in how you go about posing and the recommendation would be to look at the images of some of the great portrait photographers. Final point, jewellery competes with the highlights in the eyes of any subject, unless it is there for a purpose it is usually best to avoid and this includes wristwatches. Now to the recommended photographers – see George Hurrell, Yousuf Karsh, David Bailey and Annie Leibovitz. Also, if you have a spare \$2,000 you could buy a copy of the hard cover 1987 book of portraits "Your Friends and Mine" by Kenny Rogers – yes, he was not only an entertainer but also a great portrait photographer.

Entry 40. Salford at night

It is a colourful night scene along with a satisfactory composition. The metadata shows it was made using 6400ISO, 1/20sec at f4 meaning there was noise which appears as if in editing it was being suppressed thus causing the image to be not as sharp as it could otherwise be. There is a slight tilt to the left of about one degree which can easily be overcome in editing. So, what are the fixes. Options include making the image at twilight with a deep blue sky while all the building lights are glowing, using a tripod with ISO set at maximum of 800 ISO to reduce noise or for an experimental approach use a slow shutter speed and during the exposure rotate a zoom lens to show movement in the exposure. There are many other options but these are a reasonable start and if the location is near to where you live then make hundreds of images over the course of a year to make, for example, sequences and typologies. Have a look at the architectural images of the Spanish photographer, Alfonso Zubiaga.

Entry 41. Skydivers

Adrenalin, emotion, danger, action – you have captured these aspects in spades and this is a quality sports image which most people would be proud to have made. The expression and body language of the young lady says it all and the parachute Tandem Master looks cool wearing ‘sunnies’ while he calmly guides the parachute using its brake loops – hope they worked before touch down. The diagonal composition is also about motion which you have captured with acute sharpness. The overcast sky is uniform with no visual distractions and works well here by clearly showing the suspension lines. Had the sky been dark blue then they may have blended with it. Excellent timing combined with the excitement of the subjects makes this a quality image.

Image 42. Smoke haze Latrobe Valley

With 110,000 sq. kms of land burnt in Australia (An area roughly the size of England) between September 2019 and February 2020 (a significant portion being in Victoria) the smoke went into the atmosphere and reached South America. Smoke from coal burning power stations in the Latrobe Valley together with bushfire smoke made breathing difficult for some people. While your image has a poetic quality, it is also a meaningful image referencing the climate crisis. Usually with the sun this high in the sky the hues are generally not quite this strong and physiologically we recognise colour before structure (as in composition). The silhouette of the Gum trees provides a strong foundation and the dense black clouds have a depressive effect, from a compositional viewpoint implying squeezing life out of the lower atmosphere. Sounds like Armageddon and it could look like this.

Image 43. Snowdonia Tree

Monochrome landscape photography has been around for a long time with some great practitioners making memorable images. They worked on the drama or poetic qualities of the landscape sometimes with a Romanticist understanding of the delicacy of nature. I have hiked and travelled in the region and you have admirably captured its cold, wet atmosphere, also you have a wide tonal range which suits the scene. Now to the Romanticist approach. With some more post-production work by dodging and burning, enhance the drama of the clouds and the strength of the rain squalls in the mountains. Like Ansel Adams spend days working it up, not just a few minutes, then the veiled beauty here will be on full display. In 1941 the English photographer William Arthur Poucher published a photography book, “Snowdonia through the Lens”, it is worthwhile acquiring a copy as his photography stands up with the best of today’s monochrome landscape work.

Image 44. Sparks

The blacksmith is a character straight out of a Rembrandt painting and the natural lighting from a window or doorway together with the light emanating from the white-hot metal provides realism to the image. The sparks suggest a long shutter speed but the sharpness of the blacksmith and the interior suggests otherwise. The hammer is not actually touching the metal to cause sparks to fly so full marks for a skilful approach in post-production. Akin to being straight out of a Thor movie at first glance it has a convincing stagecraft therefore impact. A tad more burning in of the surrounding background and especially the metal wheel hoop behind his left arm will yield more clarity to the action you have produced so well.

Image 45. Sticky Beak

The Little Pied Cormorant has been delightfully caught either calling or gulping making it a memorable image. It is an above average bird portrait where it is sharp, composed well with an unobtrusive background. Some post-production by burning in or making the black colours darker with a slider and attending to detail in the white neck feathers will bring it closer to its actual colour. In nature competitions these edits are quite permissible. Potentially it is worthwhile entering into a National or International Salon. See the bird photography of the New Zealander who works in Malaysia, Graeme Guy.

Image 46. Summer on the Moor

The broad expanse of the scene with a sunray crossing where you were standing was made with sensitivity to the shifting nature of sunlight through a broken cloudscape. From a composition viewpoint it is classically on the thirds and the walking tracks providing a leading line to the clump of trees. I suspect that the camera light meter was showing it as correctly exposed, whereas a half to one stop underexposure would look more spectacular. With digital photography being experimental or inventive is not costly so when facing an appealing scene try a number of in-camera techniques that go beyond the straight representative. For inspiration see the landscape work of the outstanding Japanese photographer, Yoshikazu Shirakawa who photographed most of the mountain ranges on earth all on film.

Image 47. Summer Solstice Sunset

The slight underexposure has aided its visual appeal where details can be seen in the darker areas and the last fragments of subtle light filter across the wavelike field. An important part of this image is the orange material to the right of the windmill which makes an implied line between it and the setting sun; in Gestalt Theory for composition this is called Continuity. Between these two orange coloured points is the windmill which gains extra prominence owing to their presence. The cultivated landscape is not very well recognised in Salons but when we see this subject done well, such as by the Italian photographer Franco Fontana, one has to ask why not?

Image 48. Sunrise Stag

This is a beautiful, poetic and appealing image. The mood of the cold early morning has been captured with delicacy and excellent timing in seeing the exhaled breath of the stag floating in the mist. It is rare to see such a purist image made with such sensitivity, alertness and patience for what is essentially a fine art approach. While this would suit as a B&W it would not have the nuanced qualities of this colour image. Your soul mate with this style of photography is the American, Tom Murphy, see his images of Bison in winter.

Image 49. The Engine Inspector

Aside from looking quite dapper for the role you nevertheless have used the artificial light to good advantage akin to the chiaroscuro lighting technique. His gaze is fixed upon what his hand is doing which contributes to the narration of the image. The gas light is quite dominant in the image where you may consider toning it down a little and the shadow from his nose could be burnt in or cloned to make it look more like loop lighting. The internal framing supports the story line and encourages the viewer to look at the face of the inspector. Lighting technique is a key point in any form of portraiture and one of the best in environmental portrait work is the German photographer, Anthony Kurtz.

Image 50. The Mountains Called – he obliged

The tonal range and aerial perspective give good third dimension to the image. Placing the hiker in the image emphasises the size of the landscape where he is also an anchor point from which the main lines of linear perspective emanate. Some burning in of the outcrop immediately in front and along the bottom edge would improve its foundation and doing the same for the upper clouds for dramatic effect would enhance the impact of the landscape. Don't be afraid of post-production work as all the great landscape photographers have done this, often spending days in darkrooms to get the absolute best out of their negatives. You have the basis here for a Salon quality image.

Image 51. The tongue

Animal portraits require the same skillset as in people portraiture and this chiaroscuro-like image is high quality. The eye indicates a studio light was used and perhaps some post-production work also occurred on it. Technically it is a high achieving image with the added bonus of your timing to capture the dog's tongue, which is what makes the impact. It is gratifying to see the effort that has gone into producing the image, similar to the work of the American photographer, Carli Davidson.

Image 52. This could hurt – points: 12

The title and the facial expressions overlap each other well with the support of the body language. The timing, selection and camera controls makes this a satisfactory sports photograph. The composition of the diagonal of the shoulders and arms contribute to the sense of motion which is about to come to an anticipated sudden halt. Fortunately, there is nothing in the background which could be a visual distraction hence the comment about viewfinder selection. The crunch that took place a step later would involve greater visual impact but then that is talking about an entirely different image, however, it goes to the point of setting the camera shutter for continuous shooting and as Cartier-Bresson said 'millimetres make a difference' it is also true that milliseconds also make a difference.

Image 53. Tipping in

High quality motorcycle racing images are rare but this is one of those. Let's look at what is going on here; the right kneepad is only about three or four centimetres off the track surface, the rider is attempting to keep his head horizontal while he acutely leans the bike around a bend. The diagonal lean and the inside line of the track to the rear are parallel, the white top corner edge of the signage behind the exhaust pipe is the anchor point for radial lines emerging to the foreground all of which contribute to the sense of speed. To top it off the heat from the exhaust pipe is radiating in the air, distorting it, and this all at speed where you used 1/640sec shutter speed to stop the action. Quick tip for the future, set the camera at 400ISO which will give you more latitude especially when the bikes are travelling around 320kph.

Image 54. Uncle Joe

This is a powerful candid portrait of the man where one can read into his eyes the sad history his people have suffered over the past 230 years. He has strength indicated through the use of the black, red and yellow adornments saying he is proud to be who he is. Red represents the ochre colour of the earth (connection to the land), yellow represents the sun (giver of life) and black represents the Aboriginal people of Australia. You carefully avoided the ubiquitous superficial smiley portrait to show the character of someone with a story to tell. One of the best photographers of first Australians is the Aboriginal photographer, Ricky Maynard, his images are a revelation.

Image 55. Valley of Gold

This is a delicate and poetic landscape where the atmospheric shape the mood of the image. The aerial perspective provides a good sense of the third dimension where you judiciously avoided the sun. Just at that point along the top of the frame it could be subtly darkened so as to not compete with the nearer mist. It is a sensitive image quite different to the flat, dry outback scenery and would make a satisfactory decorative, framed and large wall print. The golden hues make it a warm and inviting scene, the opposite of what is expected in cold or brisk temperatures, where images often look cold because of the lack of twilight sunshine.

Image 56. Wallaby Courtship

The Rock Wallabies are well camouflaged within their environment, you were fortunate in seeing them in an environment typically similar to that of central Australia, especially along the MacDonnell Ranges. The intimacy of the scene is clear and as a natural history image should compete well in any nature competition. The counter diagonal lines of the enclosed scene support and direct our attention to the Wallabies in their procreation activities. You have captured a moment in time worthy of submission into Salons.

Image 57. Waoh

The image has earned itself high points owing to it being an unusual subject which has the capacity to surprise our eyes and together with its composition as well as the light show produces memorable impact. The wide-angle lens was a great choice as all the spark lines are in focus from side to side and back to front. Key parts of the image are the reflection and the brighter inner circles, being opposite shapes to the pier, these suggest mobility and here that mobility is in action. You were lucky in that the person stayed relatively still, giving a sense of size to activity occurring here. From an interpretational viewpoint it reminds me of an erupting volcano which has similar impact.

Image 58. Watchful

Resembling image 30 'On Observation' conceptually it is the same where the lighting and looking through a Venetian blind it mimics a classic Humphrey Bogart movie. Compared to the earlier image here the clothing of the model appears to be appropriate for the era and his staring eye is the key element. As in the other image the left hand has been truncated as well as most of the pistol so a little more breathing space would also help here. Similarly, the Venetian blind shadows and the blind itself provides cohesiveness across the image. Classic B&W Hollywood movies from the mid-1930s to mid-1950s are a great source for re-interpretation for subject matter today. One thing to look for is their mastery of lighting, especially in Marlen Dietrich movies.

Image 59. Water Refraction

This gorgeous image is masterful in its approach by using the correct lens and having the same reflected flower out of focus but still recognisable in the background. The arch of the leaf blade provides the support function much as an arch does in architecture. Tapping the image through an auto-contrast program will presumably lift its colour as it has a slightly 'muddy' appearance otherwise it generally meets quality criteria. It is recommended you see the images of the Canadian photographer, Don Komarechka.

Entry 60. Wings of Colour

Ornithoptera Richmondia, better known as a Birdwing Butterfly, it is native to central NSW and Queensland, also with a wingspan of up to 15cms it is one of Australia's largest butterflies. Technically you have perfectly captured the butterfly itself and to improve the overall image clone out the bright background spots and enter it into open competitions, not nature, as the forgoing comment would preclude it from the nature section in Salons. It is recommended you see the butterfly images of the Hungarian biologist/photographer, Adam Gor.