"IMAGE EVALUATION WORKSHOPS – AN ALTERNATIVE TO COMPETITIONS"

This tutorial is based on original material prepared by Des Crawley, with additional notes prepared by Michael Smyth. this brief tutorial is intended to introduce the photographer to the concept of workshopping images as an alternative method to club competitions. All materials Copyright.

OUTLINE

The purpose of the Image evaluation sessions is to adopt a new way of discussing and evaluating images in a more cooperative and interactive forum, to allow open and honest discussion of ideas and encourage creative thinking and experimentation in image making.

The evaluation sessions will comprise separate evenings devoted to no more than 3 photographers who will prepare and present for discussion a panel of new work based on a theme or idea they wish to address.

The panel should comprise not less than 3 or more than 6 images that the photographer will display and which will be the basis for discussion and group evaluation. A positive and interactive discussion is encouraged whereby the club, the moderators and photographer can discuss the ideas behind the image and evaluate the effectiveness of the work presented.

It is assumed that some or all of the images presented will be images that are still "in development" and not yet finalised. The discussion should concentrate on what the photographer is trying to say with the image and how it can be made more effective.

The purpose of having a body of work to review rather than a single image is so that the photographer can gain experience in exploring an idea or subject in a more comprehensive and creative manner and to learn how to put together a group of images that form a folio or photo essay. This is similar to the submission requirements expected of students studying photography at HSC level.

METHODS

The format of the material presented for discussion can be in any form, however, for logistical purposes it is expected to be in either large print form or as projected images. For those on a restricted budget who are presenting "work in progress", projection may be a preferred format, however the options are to be left to the photographer to choose what method of presentation works for them.

We will be having 4 sessions spread throughout the year and this will enable participants to pursue further work on their images and have the opportunity to re present them at a later date.

To be an effective tool in expanding the photographer's skills and creativity, it is essential that the images presented are new and not the result of a trawl through their archives. In fact, an essential part of the process is the pre visualisation of the images and the subsequent work undertaken to create the images that will form the panel of work.

SUBJECTS AND SUBJECT MATTER

The choice of subject and subject matter for the panel is to be left entirely to the photographer to choose. For assistance, we have included a list of subject ideas that can be used, or ignored as the participants see fit.

For the purposes of these sessions, we define "Subject" and "Subject matter" as follows:

The "**Subject**" is the overall theme, idea or statement that the photographer wishes to address. For example, you may wish to examine the impact of climate change on our environment. This is your subject.

The "**Subject Matter**" will be the specific aspects of the subject (in our example - climate change) that you examine, for example – drought, rising seas or species extinction are all aspects of climate change that can be used as the subject matter for the subject being addressed.

Your panel of work presented should be unified by the choice of subject and not the subject matter. The goal is to present a series of images that effectively addresses your subject in the use of subject matter, photographic style and method of presentation. Ideally, each image should stand alone as well as form a part of the whole body.

THE PROCESS

To assist the participants to get started on the process of developing a subject and working through the image creation process, we will hold some small group meetings to discuss ideas and help participants refine their thinking.

STEP 1
The initial task is to find the subject you wish to address. This is the most important part of the process as it will guide your thinking through the remaining steps. It is likely that your subject matter and images resulting from the examination of the subject may develop as the process expands, however without a clear idea of what your subject is, you may well become distracted and lose direction in your approach.

The initial meetings and discussion groups will hopefully assist you in refining your thinking. As a guide, try not to make your subject too broad as you will probably have difficulty in refining your subject matter choices. Choosing an abstract idea or subject can be beneficial in developing your creative thinking about the subject.

STEP 2

Once you have settled on your subject, you need to create a "mind map" or outline of your subject. Write down on the left hand side of a piece of paper a full description of your subject and all of the terms that help to illustrate your subject.

On the right hand side of the page, write down a list of words and ideas that relate to the subject. The use of a Thesaurus and or dictionary can be of great assistance here. Write down as many ideas and words as you can. Often thinking of one word will lead to the words that describe other aspects of your subject matter. There is no limit to how many words or descriptions you come up with during this process.

These words and ideas will lead you to the subject matter that addresses the subject you have chosen.

Once you have worked on this list, you will come up with a "short list" of subject matter that you will use as the basis of your image making. Often during this process a previsualisation of an image will come to mind that you can develop into a photographic image.

STEP 3

The next step (notice, we haven't picked up a camera yet !) is to sketch out how the completed images will look. Now you will need to think about how the images will be constructed, how they will be laid out and what photographic language you will employ to refine your image choice. Now you will start to think about such things as image content, framing, background, lighting, inclusion of key elements and symbols that will be used in the image. We have attached a list of photographic language terms to assist in this process.

The outline of the image can be in the form of a sketch or a word description. To assist in this process, imagine yourself at an exhibition of artworks or photographs. Now write a description of the piece of work for someone who will not be seeing the images. This description will not only describe the content of the image in detail, but also your response to the image.

STEP 4

The next step is to take your detailed description and sketch of the images and set about creating them in the camera. You should think hard about what you intend to include and what you want excluded from the image. Remember that everything in the image is there because you have made a conscious decision to include it as part of the image construction.

This step is the most challenging and also the most rewarding. You will soon find that your powers of pre visualisation need to be worked on as you will almost certainly find that the real world is more complicated than your visualised image. This is normal and will help to refine your thinking for future image making.

STEP 5

This step is the processing of the image and refining the content to reflect your sketched layout and visualisation. Depending on your chosen subject matter, this step may or may not involve a lot of image adjustment and enhancement.

It is generally understood that all images will need some form of post processing, however the intention is always to do the most work pre capture and employ good technical practice in the image capture activities. Photoshop cannot "fix up" poorly captured images, out of focus, shaky or otherwise degraded images.

STEP 6

This step involves presentation of the "work in progress" or completed images for peer review. You should also be sure to employ a large amount of self assessment before you present the work. At all times you should be referring to your subject and how your image conveys the idea, story or message that is relevant to the subject of your choice.

This is when the images will be presented for the Image Evaluation night. You should be prepared to be honest and open about your intent with the images and be able to talk to the subject and subject matter.

The evaluation sessions are a two way process, the moderators and club members will gain valuable experience in evaluating images based on content, message and ideas and not just on impact. The photographer will gain valuable understanding of their ability to communicate with their image making and will have the opportunity to discuss their methods and ideas in a positive and constructive environment.

Following presentation at one of these sessions, the photographer may elect to rework or finalise the images that are a work in progress and will have the opportunity to re present the final panel at a later date.

The Image Evaluation sessions will open up a wonderful new world of creativity for those that participate. By thinking more about the construction and previsualisation of the image, you will be much more effective with your visual communication. After all, communicating with images is what photography is all about.

To quote Ansel Adams, "**Great images are not taken, they are made**".

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APPENDIX 1 – SUBJECT IDEAS

Here is a list of ideas that could be considered as a subject to be explored:

emotions,
fears,
follies,
character,
anxiety,
joy,
guile,
decay,
age,
desire,
isolation,
family,
anger,
boredom,
persistence,
family,
love,
depression,
deceit,
masculine,
feminine,
dependence,
memory,
deception,
generation,
identity,
personality,
relationships,
innocence,
animal characteristics,
animal behaviour,
animal interactions,
animal relationships,
habitat,
majesty,
power,
grandeur,

faded glory,
destruction,
erosion,
decay,
information age,
attack,
majesty,
sweet,
sour,
adventure,
beauty,
peace,
peaceful,
pleasure,
ancient,
sublime,
fire,
faith,
control,
taste,
flavour,
time,
movement,
ambiguity,
success,
rituals,
beliefs,
traditions,
patriotism,
exclusion,
vigour,
symbolism,

If none of these ideas appeals, try something from your experience or imagination.

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APPENDIX 2 – EXAMPLES OF PHOTOGRAPHIC LANGUAGE
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Abstraction	Elements combined for their graphic quality – process is intended to eliminate elements that distract from representation/idea.
Reduction	Process followed to eliminate information from an image that does not serve intention
Simplification	The avoidance of any element within an image that competes with or confuses compositional principles
Implication	Element used to suggest presence of compositional feature that is not actually visible.
Metaphor	An element used to represent another idea. Eg. fire as danger; flower as beauty; snake as evil
Confrontation	Element that conveys a conflict or contested idea or presence
Narrative	Story telling elements within image
Discordance	Elements that at first glance seem out of place or pose questions/provoke curiosity
Ambiguity	Element that is unclear or subject to a variety of interpretations, 'Is it a tree?'
Omission	Absence of element that ought to be present and that absence enhances the power of image in some way.
Trope	Various figures of design – line, shape, pattern, repetition, figure-ground.
Symbolism	Element that is a powerful shorthand way of communicating complex idea and relationships. Eg. flag=patriotism/identity, coin=wealth/exchange; cracked earth=drought/infertility; tree=strength/growth
Dissonance	Elements arranged to provoke curiosity, perplexity or negative emotional behaviour. Elements that make viewer uncomfortable
Space	Element used as a positive or negative area to provide links to key compositional features.
Atmosphere	A quality which encourages/elicits a moodful response from viewer.
Contour	The edge of a design element that in itself endorses, supports or adds to design character image
Proximity	To position design elements so that the near/far relationship adds to the compositional goals.
Emotion	Elements intended to appeal to sentiment as opposed to pure intellect/reason.
Allusion	Use of a design element that points or makes an indirect/oblique reference to an idea
Sensation	Element(s) intended to evoke response via senses. Use of texture, for example.
Colour	Elements where hue in complementary or contrast form or via other qualities (saturation) adds weight to intention
Similarity	Element(s) that possess shared characteristics that enhance intention.
Illusion	Creation of a presence that is neither obvious nor readily apparent but nonetheless is real within the image. Use of optical illusion to convey thought.