

SPA President's Summer Newsletter

The sun is finally shining and there has been a marked increase in photographic activity – not just in my house but in the many clubs I visit where the level of engagement and competition appears to be moving in the right direction.

This increase in interest may be a factor in the scale and success of the SPA Inter-Club PDI Competition on 13 May. We had 27 clubs competing in the Open Category and 26 in Nature, the highest entry for a number of years and congratulations to all the clubs and their members for the high quality of the images submitted for the event.

The revised rules on eligibility of images, particularly for 'nature' ones in the Open Class worked well and there was less than a handful of referrals back to clubs, which for an entry of 432 images is a good result.

Our judges; Roy Lambeth, Sue Sibley and Pete McCloskey were excellent and a review of the numbers shows the average score in Open was 10.97 and in Nature is was 11.19. There was a good spread of marks and two scores of 15 were awarded in each category.

Congratulations to the successful clubs and individuals who received Judges Awards. All the details and images are on the SPA website, and here are the key results:

Open Class:

Best Image: *A Walk through the Fields* Dave Stoneleigh, Epsom

Judges Awards:

Roy Lambeth: *The Lost Shoe* John Phillips BPE4*, Richmond & Twickenham

Sue Sibley: *Gaze of the Gorgon* Graham Wilcock, Horsham

Pete McCloskey: *St Thomas Church* Alan West DPAGB BPE3*, Yateley

Winning Club: Richmond & Twickenham
 2nd Epsom
 3rd Godalming
 4th Bookham

Richmond & Twickenham and Epsom will represent the SPA at the PAGB Inter-Club PDI Championship in 2024

Nature Class:

Best Image: *Snowy owl in southern Ontario cornfield* Kirsten Asmussen ARPS, Bookham

Judges Awards:

Roy Lambeth: *Winter Lynx* Brian Howe, Yateley

Sue Sibley: *Little Bee Eaters* David Oldham, Horsham

Pete McCloskey: *Red Deer Stag on a misty morning* Paul Stuart, East Grinstead

Winning Club:	Epsom
2 nd equal	Bookham
2 nd equal	Woking
4 th	Godalming

Full results, including the scores for all images, have been sent to each individual club and should have been distributed to all your members.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) - Competitions

As I briefly covered at the SPA Competition, we are currently considering the implications of AI for photography. We are monitoring the evolving PAGB guidance and conditions being specified by other organisations which run salons etc.

As a start point, here are some thoughts. Photography has adapted to evolving technology from its earliest days, with digital cameras and the advent of Photoshop being two classic examples. We have learned how to embrace technology without impeding the fundamental principles of photography and I am confident this will be equally true for the latest developments in AI.

The literal translation of photography is ‘drawing with light’ – from the Greek ‘photo’, meaning light, and ‘graph’ meaning to draw. The essence of a photograph can therefore be considered to be something ‘drawn’ – or captured – by ‘light’ falling on a sensor (digital or film based). This will continue to be the basis for a competitive image in the SPA.

The challenge of the latest AI tools is that they are based on vast databases of typically, scraped images and generate composite images based on the input requirements. The resultant image has no copyright – nor can it be claimed as such.

There are other AI tools that are used for image refinement, such as Topaz, Luminar and now Photoshop. These are less controversial as they enhance images rather than generate completely new ones.

The current SPA competition rules state:

Images entered must be entirely the work of the photographer. Composite or Montage images are permitted in the Open category, provided all component elements meet this requirement.

Entrants must own the copyright of all parts of all images used in any submitted entry. The SPA assumes no liability for misuse of copyright. For the avoidance of doubt, the following are not allowed: use of images from any other source including, but not limited to, picture elements available within editing software (eg. replacement skies); royalty-free images; and clipart.

These may be refined in advance of the Autumn competitions, but the rules are clear; AI generated images, or elements within an image, are not acceptable.

A more recent set of rules is currently in use for the Edinburgh Salon, and an extract says:

By virtue of submitting an image, the entrant certifies the work as his or her own. Images may not incorporate elements produced by anyone else (for example: clip art, images or art by others downloaded from the Internet).

Subject to Divisional restrictions (particularly Nature, Photo Travel, and Photojournalism) images may be altered, either electronically or otherwise, by the maker.

Adjustments to enhance images or creatively modify images are allowed providing the underlying photograph is retained in a way that is obvious to the viewer. Images may not be constructed entirely with a computer and must be the sole work of the author.

We will refine our guidance on AI and issue it to SPA member clubs as soon as it is available.

AI has the potential to change virtually all of the creative arts, including photography and we need to adopt its potential in the most appropriate way.

When the great artist JMW Turner saw his first photograph he apparently said;

“This is the end of art, I am glad I have had my day”.

Nearly 200 years later we still have great art as well as great photography and I am confident AI will not change that situation.

SPACOM

This year's SPACOM took place on the 18th March and thank you to all the clubs who joined us for the sessions on Zoom. It was good to see how the various ideas under discussion resonated across many clubs and there was a sharing of ideas and experience.

The first session covered:

What is the “new normal” in this post COVID environment?

The exploitation for technology such as Zoom was a key theme and also the use of social media to both maintain contact with current members and to attract new ones.

Membership numbers are beginning to recover and those clubs which exploit social media and place emphasis on local engagement, using all available channels such as local and even parish magazines are having success in attracting new members.

An interesting development is the increase in numbers of women photographers joining clubs. This is having a positive impact on clubs and making them less male-dominant.

More work is needed to encourage participation in Print competitions.

The second session discussed ‘Looking beyond the Club’ and the details have been incorporated into various elements of this Newsletter.

As a result of the points raised at SPACOM we will now restrict the notices that go to clubs to Exhibitions and those Speakers who are from outside the SPA and are not on the usual speaker circuit. This will limit the number of notices to those that have wider relevance.

The full minutes of the SPACOM have been distributed to Clubs, and hopefully further distributed, either in full or in summary to your members.

Judges

There will be Judges Forum meetings in August and a training session for the candidates to become new judges in the autumn.

Please note: Rosemary Wilman's email is now wilmanphoto@gmail.com

One important point for clubs booking judges is the implementation of the revised London ULEZ Zone on 29 August. This extends the ULEZ to all London Boroughs and whilst it doesn't quite reach the M25 there are a significant number of SPA clubs within the revised Zone. As a result, any judge who has a car that is not exempt from the ULEZ charge (typically due to age of the vehicle) they will have to pay £12.50 to judge a competition in any club in the new Zone.

Clubs need to be aware of this and plan accordingly. It is a charge the judge can reasonably expect to be paid by the club they are visiting. Judges who intend to add £12.50 to their expenses should bring this to the attention of clubs when bookings are made and if they have any bookings for which they intend to make the charge in the diary after 29 August they should alert clubs now in case the club wishes to make alternative arrangements.

Achievement of external distinctions

Our clubs have a great track record of assisting members gain external distinction. We have plenty of members with RPS experience and our success rate there is very good. Our track record with PAGB Awards for Photographic Merit (APM) is less successful.

The SPA is to host the PAGB Awards for Photographic Merit adjudication on 22-23 November 2025. In preparation for this there will be an SPA APM workshop on 8 October 2023 to assist those interested in applying for APMs. The PAGB will provide 4 adjudicators who will be able to advise attendees at the workshop if their work is likely to be at the required award levels. Please advertise this date to your club members: further details (including venue and cost of attending) will be provided shortly.

It might seem a generalisation but success only at club level is not necessarily a strong indicator of potential success at PAGB level. The criterion for CPAGB is "good club photography" and it can be difficult for some club members to know if their photography is at that standard. Clubs which participate in SPA Inter-Club competitions provide their members with the opportunity to have their images judged by external judges and they will also be evaluated against the best images from across the SPA. This exposure to a broader level of quality is a good way of assessing whether a member's images are likely to succeed at the higher level of scrutiny they will receive in order to achieve CPAGB etc. Advice is also available from David Smith who is our PAGB APM Officer.

Achievements:

In my last Newsletter I invited clubs to notify us of awards and distinctions achieved by their members so that they can be recognised across the whole of the SPA. Here are a selection from the last 4 months:

APAGB. On 6 April I attended the opening evening of the Richmond and Twickenham Photographic Society's Exhibition and had the great pleasure of presenting the APAGB certificate and badge to Jay Charnock FRPS.

Thanks to the cooperation of a number of co-conspirators in that Club and on the Committee, it was a complete surprise to Jay, and she was somewhat taken aback when her name was announced.

This APAGB award is in recognition of Jay's work over many years, and to quote an extract from the citation:

“she has made an exceptional contribution to her Club for well over 30 years and has contributed to the broader Association level activities for more than 20 years. Her influence has been felt by all the clubs in our Association and through her work with the broader community she has helped build the future generation of photographers.”

ABPE. At the SPA PDI Competition I was delighted to make the award of Associateship of British Photographic Exhibitions (ABPE) to Mike Rowe FRPS, DPAGB from Godalming Photographic Club.

This is a major achievement and has taken Mike 10 years of successfully achieving acceptances in National exhibitions. Having achieved BPE5 Crown Award he then achieved a further 100 acceptances in member exhibitions and 20 awards using at least 10 different pieces of work.

I have known Mike for many years, and it was with much pride at his achievement that I made the award to him.

And there are two ARPS achievements to report:

Graeme Wales of Kingston Camera Club has been awarded ARPS in the Contemporary Genre, and

Randal Tajer from Bookham Camera Club has been awarded ARPS in the Natural History: Nature genre.

If you would like to recognise achievements of your own club members, please let the Secretary know the details.

Finally, thank you all for your continued contributions to your clubs and for supporting the SPA.

Keep enjoying your photography and I look forward to seeing you on Saturday 21 October for the AGM and Individual Entry competition.

Best wishes



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