



How NOT to select photographs for competitions

We have just finished judging over 3,000 images for the VECC National. This exhibition covers entries from UK photographers in four categories: Colour, Monochrome, Creative and Natural History. Now I am going to ignore the natural history – I don't understand the bugs and birds on sticks bit really.

So, here's some observations:

COMMON PHOTOS:

All judges have seen a gazillion photos of Rannoch Moor, Dunstanburgh Castle, The Bothy, Iron Man contests, Venice masks, Selfridges Birmingham, steam railways in the snow or at night and the British Library. Oh yes, dog racing, remembrance, bikes with the zoom filter as well.

If you really want to submit another one – please try and say something new, if nothing else, don't put your tripod in the previous photographer's spot. We have seen it before!

CREATIVE EFFECTS:

Using a push button filter on Photoshop does not make an image "creative". We are all old hands, we know exactly which filter you've used and it is not creative, new or clever.

Spot colour on monochrome images is very, very old fashioned.

Really bad cut and paste montage and layering is very obvious.



MOTION BLUR

Actually I like motion blur on the right image, but I can tell you know, it won't get accepted, so don't bother.

WIDE ANGLE

Apart from a personal thing that just way too many shots are spoiled by shooting too wide, the whole nearly fish-eye look – especially on portraits – is tired, tired, tired.

GRABSHOTS OF FOREIGNERS

Preferably kids with dirty faces. Just because they are foreign and you had an interesting holiday that is not an excuse for a poor grabshot of some poor native person.

VERY COMMON TITLES - MEANS VERY COMMON SUBJECTS

The following word lists are based on the last 7 years of entries, though to be honest the subject matter hasn't really changed in all that time.

17 watching	10 tulips	8 frosty morning
15 concentration	10 tulip	8 evening light
15 abandoned	10 solitude	8 determination
14 memories	10 reflections	8 autumn leaves
14 bluebell wood	10 red squirrel	8 alone
13 red kite	10 morning mist	7 walk on by
12 sisters	10 contemplation	7 the wave
12 robin	10 beach huts	7 the engineer
11 walking the dog	9 lindisfarne	7 one man and his dog
11 waiting	9 homeward bound	7 leaves
11 misty morning	8 winter trees	7 end of the line
11 low tide	8 windswept	7 eilean donan castle
11 lady in red	8 the mask	7 conversation

VERY COMMON WORDS IN TITLES - MEANS VERY COMMON SUBJECTS

164 winter	65 time	51 home
127 light	65 street	50 snow
122 blue	61 waiting	49 tide
121 morning	60 evening	49 last
107 tree	58 sea	47 sunrise
104 water	56 walk	46 window
104 storm	55 lady	44 walking
100 autumn	55 bridge	44 dawn
93 mist	54 misty	43 man
85 beach	54 girl	42 young
69 grey	53 wood	42 trees
67 sunset	52 old	42 reflections

CONCLUSION

Competition entries need to be different, but not too different. By their very nature they select for a median. But please, before you submit, please look to see if you are doing something new or just re-treading the same old ground.