

Evaluating an Image

ALL perception of art is subjective. There's no right or wrong!

Whatever you think about your image is right, for you, and whatever a judge thinks of your image is right, for them! But there are common things that are often found in images which are mostly liked by most people, and common things which make an image less appealing.

1. **IMPACT** - does it have a "Wow!" factor for you? An image doesn't necessarily have to have strong initial impact to make it a good image, but if it **DOES** have strong impact it probably **IS** good. Some good images will just sneak up on you though.
2. **EMOTION** - does it make you **FEEL** something? It doesn't need to make you feel good, it might disturb you, make you unhappy, uncomfortable or it might challenge you in some way, but if it moves you in any way that's a good start.
3. **STORY TELLING** - does it "take you there"? Does it intrigue you? Does it make you want to know more? Does it give you answers? Does it satisfy you?
4. **LIGHT** - "Photograph" means "light picture." How do the quality, colour and direction of light affect the image? Lighting can make or break an otherwise good image. Eg. flat light doesn't usually work for landscapes but can bring out the texture in an animal's fur without causing blown highlights. The "golden hour" produces beautiful light which enhances most images. Light can be used to create mood.
5. **TECHNICAL FACTORS** (help to create the above)

Composition - is your eye drawn to the main subject?

- does the composition "sit well" for you or does it disturb you? The "rule of thirds" or golden ratio can be used to take advantage of the fact that these proportions tend to sit well with the human mind. Diagonals, spirals, leading lines, triangles, odd numbers, leaving space for an object to move into etc. all affect how we intrinsically feel about an image.
- are there any distractions which draw your eye away from what you want to be looking at? Bright objects in the background, cut off limbs, objects disappearing out of the frame, dust spots, trees sticking out of heads etc all draw the eye away from the main subject.

Focus - are the "right" parts in focus? Is selective focus used to draw your eye? Blurred backgrounds can be used to make the viewer look exactly where you want. Eyes of people or animals generally need to be sharp, unless you deliberately choose to draw the viewer to some other part of the image. An entire image out of focus doesn't generally work unless you're deliberately creating an abstract.

Exposure – is it over or under exposed? How does that affect the way you perceive the image? Exposure can affect the mood of an image, but unless you're deliberately using under or over exposure for mood you need to make sure the overall exposure is right.

Presentation – choice of paper, print quality, issues such as colour noise, banding, haloes, over-sharpening can all affect how we perceive the quality of the image. Some images suit matte paper while others look best on gloss or satin. Metallic paper is a new innovation which can make certain images pop. Post processing and printer quality affect the final presentation.