Nelson Camera Club
August 2021 Competition
A Grade

Digital

Abandoned
This is a rather peaceful image. The stillness of the water and the pastel tones of it are good.
The placement of the dinghy is ok.
I feel the foreground being very flat, and therefore is not necessary so I would crop to just above it, leaving just a few rocks in the image, while keeping the proportions so crop some off the left side. If you could move the boat from the horizon line by cropping that would also help. Unfortunately, the rocks being very underexposed cannot effectively be recovered I feel.
I suggest you have another look at the processing and whether you can improve this by adding contrast and playing with dehaze and clarity. If there was more haze in the image that would be ok, but I feel that as presented it is neither one thing nor the other.
Accepted

Abutilon Flower
I like the framing of this image. The square shape of the frame works with circular shape of the flower.
I would look again at the processing of the image. Some adjustments would help increase the colours.
Also, I suggest that you practice with closeup shots.
With closeup and macro, depth of field is very limited and as opposed to normal photography where DoF extends from $1/3^{rd}$ in front of the focus plane and 23rd behind, n closeup, it extends halfway in front and halfway behind. Also, you end up with the DoF being only millimetres wide! I suggest that as a rule you stop down one to two stops more than you think as judging DoF in camera is difficult. It's a pity that DoF doesn't extend into the flower as the leaves in it being bright tend to draw the viewer. You could increase the ISO to keep the shutter speed up.
I suggest that you might tone down the leaf at the bottom, as the light hitting it means it draws the viewer.
Not Accepted

Accident
This is a well exposed image and composed image. It also shows sensitivity in not showing the victim. This is very important in situations such as this.
Cropping is good and there isn't really any other way to crop it.
All the important people are in the image and the only one that could possibly be removed is the person in the orange jacket.
This image could work better in black and white as the orange jacket is bright and does tend to draw the viewer. Changing this to B&W removes that problem. And I feel changes the focal point to the car and ambulance. That is a personal preference though.
Well seen and captured!
Merit

Bad Moon Rising
This is an interesting image and I'm guessing that you used a fisheye attachment.
I like the use of orange here and the composition. The use of a minimal tonal range is good and helps the image.
The position of the subject is good but I'm sure it was awkward for her!
I suggest that if you can, making the subjects right hand more visible will help here as it makes me want to see it more.
The use of a black frame around the circle is good as it makes the image stand out.
Well done for using your imagination here.
Accepted

Balls of Fire
Good use of technique here to capture the sparklers or whatever it was.
You have controlled the exposure so that nothing is really blown out.
The shapes of the trails, while uncontrollable work well.
Personally, I would darken the blacks a little more but apart from that, nothing needs to be done.
This can be a fun thing to experiment with, and it is worth everyone trying it.
Honestly there isn't much more to say about this.
Well done!
Merit

Banana Flower
I like the way you have arranged this with the angle leading the viewer from the bottom left diagonally across the frame. The shape of the leaves also helps.
I'm not sure about the parts in the middle and whether they are supposed to be like that, or the resolution is too small.
I feel that some additional processing would help here. The top leaf looks like it is translucent so I feel some backlighting would enhance this. Also, I feel that some lightening of the parts in the middle could do with being brightened.
I would suggest increasing the exposure by around a stop then adjust everything else from there. This begins to show the translucence of the leaves.
Apart from the fact that this appears to have been saved as a slightly too small resolution, I think the DoF is good. Just a suggestion is to stop down one or two stops from what you think is enough as DoF at close up distances is minimal and almost impossible to judge through the camera.
Not Accepted

Chrystals
An interesting image here. Everything appears ordered her, but really it isn't because nature isn't ordered!
This image keeps me looking at it to see the little changes which are everywhere.
The fact that you have converted this to monochrome is good, as I suspect there are lots of different colours here.
I would suggest playing with the light on the shadows here as I think it will reveal a little more detail in the black area at the bottom. As it is presented the black areas in the bottom middle draw my eye away from the rest of the image.
Images such as this require expertise to get them, and you have shown this.
Merit

Colours of a Tui

The composition is good here. The cropping is good. If you could have stopped down more to make sure the bottom branch is sharp would help. The background is nicely out of focus.

If you can I would suggest removing the branch at the right as it doesn't add to the image and attracts the viewer away from the subject.

I would suggest that you play around with processing to make the Tuis colours stand out more. I feel that as presented the colours are a little muted and the image lacks contrast.

I don't know what the focal length you used was but considering the cropping, I am guessing that you may have been able to zoom in more.

You could possibly look at tightening the crop while retaining the same proportions.

Keep at this as the only way to get better is to practice.

Not Accepted

Deal Done

Technically this image is good with exposure etc. The image would work equally well in black and white.

I would suggest that as the title of the image is Deal Done, then you could crop into this image so that the faces and the money changing hands are more dominant. That is where the interest is for me. While the deal may have been for the animal between the people, the fact that most of it is obscured means that it can be cropped out without any of the meaning of the image being lost.

As it is presented, I find my eye being drawn to the area at the bottom which is light in tone. Even cropping only that off will help, however I would crop to just below the lady's top. This will enhance the point of interest which really is the money and then the facial expressions. If you were to turn it into a black and white, then things such as the blue container in the left background will be less obvious.

You have obviously been aware of what was going on to enable you to capture this image, and I feel that just a few changes would have made this even better.

Accepted

Fogged In

Lovely lighting here with the fog. The processing is great as far as exposure etc is concerned. I love the soft colours etc.

I suggest you look the cropping again. I found the patch of daisies at the bottom distracting me from the subject. The fact that the area above the daisies has nothing to connect the flowers with the rest of the image makes me want to crop the foreground out and the image will end up becoming a more panoramic format. The subject really is the building and the fog and trees behind it and the foreground adds nothing to this I feel.

Maybe if you raised the camera viewpoint the daisies wouldn't be so dominant.

A very pleasing image that can be improved with a few changes I feel.

Accepted

If You Go Down To The Woods Today
I love this image. The light, colour and movement all come together in a nice abstract image.
While the colours are rich, they aren't too rich as if they were then they would dominate.
I like the fact that the sides are framing the movement in the middle.
The only thing I would possibly do is clone out the branch the goes from the lower left across the image as it is a little too dominant and draws attention away from the rest of the subject.
I feel that, unusually this image would also work in black and white, but the light areas would need to be lightened.
Beautiful!
Honours

Incoming Storm
The shapes and textures in this image work well. Framing is excellent and the panoramic shape works well.
You have done a great job with the processing. I feel that this image wouldn't work as well in colour as the colours will take away from the shapes and textures.
The position of the boulders at the left lead the viewer into the image to the rocks and then across to the mountains at the upper right. The wave leads the viewer from the bottom right across towards the left.
The sky has been enhanced to be really threatening.
This is a great image and is just begging to be printed really large and hung on a wall!
Honours

Jesters Café
You've shown good imagination here. Both the idea and the exposure are good. I do think that some adjustments could be made to change the processing of this and make the image pop more. I would also experiment with the opacity of the exposures. Even if just the people were made less transparent, I feel this would help. Selectively changing the opacity of parts of the image such as the trees in the sky would also help, I feel. I found that there wasn't really anything in the image to fix my eyes on, apart from maybe the chimney, which really doesn't lead the viewer into the rest of the image. Looking at this, I feel like I would if I was under the weather after a night out. That's not to criticise you for experimenting, I applaud that, because without experimentation nothing would progress. All the advances in photography have happened either because of accident, or experimentation. I'm thinking of things such as solarisation, and colour film, as just tow.
I suggest you go back and see if by changing the opacity of the layers can make this a better image.
Not Accepted

Lean on Me
The simplicity of this image is good. I like the moody stormy look of this, which adds to the appearance of the couple.
Muting the colours to a near monochrome image with the only real colour on the people and the tops of the lights adds to the mood.
I would adjust the shadows slightly to provide a little separation at the bottom left especially.
This image reminds me of images in London taken during foggy periods.
There really aren't many improvements needed here.
Honours

Light Painting

Another good abstract here. The colours are good. This appears for me to be a digital take on the coloured string abstracts from days gone by and is a good take on this.

Personally, I would play with the processing to enhance the colours against the black background. I would look at exposure and the Blacks.

I suggest that you look at the amount of black around the lights. I feel that if the black was cropped somewhat this would help the image. It would make the light painting more dominant; I feel.

With some adjustments I think this would make a good wall image if it were large.

Just for fun I suggest you try the targeted luminance. Go to the luminance panel in Lightroom and click on the icon at the left with the up and down arrows. Left click on the colour you want to change and keeping the left button down move the mouse up or down to change the luminance.

Merit

Mapua

This is a nice peaceful scene.

I suggest that you have another look at the processing. Even though there appears to be white in the image on the boats, if you look at the readings they are nowhere near white.

For me this needs the exposure to be increased as it appears as underexposed. The image appears to have been taken in spring or summer by the sky, but it appears very flat and lacking contrast.

I would also look at the cropping. I would crop the bottom off the where the beach meets the water at the left. Also, I think you can crop off the right to remove most of the bush. Then I would clone out the remains of the bush or darken that area to reduce its brightness. I feel this would make the river more dominant and this will lead the viewer across the image more. As it is the beach leads the viewer along the right side of the image and not into the rest of the image.

I believe that if you apply the ideas, I have suggested you will have a more dynamic image.

Accepted

Nomad Girl

I like the way you have presented this image. Focus is great.

The way you have darkened everything around the face helps to make it the centre of attention and creates some mystery!

While the lighting and pose is different this reminds me of Steve McCurry's Afghan Girl.

Composition is good.

About the only thing I would change is darken the face slightly which I think will add to an air of mystery. This is my personal opinion.

A very nice image.

Merit

Okains Bay Library

Composition is good here and I like the fact that you have shot this image from an angle as it shows the shape of the building which wouldn't happen if you shot it square on like Robin Morrison did.

I find that the metal gate at the right is distracting as it belongs to a different era! If you could remove it, I feel it would definitely help. If you had managed to move to the right a little then reframed the image, you may have been able to remove the gate. The other option would have been to lower the camera position, so the fence hides it.

While the histogram shows clipped highlights which are on the left end of the roof, I feel that this image still needs some further processing. As it is presented here, it looks as though it needs a bit more contrast.

Cropping is good with no changes needed. Cropping to remove the metal gate wouldn't work as it would upset the balance.

I would suggest going back the RAW file if you have it and convert it to black and white in Lightroom then adjust the luminance of the green to lighten the hills a little.

I would also suggest that you increase the light in the shadows to lighten the detail in the doors and windows a little. It will help show up the glass more.

Accepted

Otematata Wild Stallion

You have captured this pose nicely with the low angle helping show the size and power of this horse.

I would suggest cropping a little here. I would crop the left a little to remove the bit of the bush standing up as pointing to the left it can draw the viewer out of the image.

I would also crop the right a little, while still having more space in front of the horse for it to move into. You could also possibly crop a little off the top.

I'm not sure about the tones of the horse. They don't look natural and judging by the white line around horse suggests that some major adjustments have been made. The line can be removed quite easily and there are plenty of videos on then net that can show you how to do it.

I suggest you go back and have a look at reprocessing this and look at increasing the contrast, especially in the grass and gorse etc.

Not Accepted

Our Country

I like the rich colours here. It shows the textures of the building well.

Exposure and processing is good and doesn't need any adjustments really.

I feel that some cropping could help this image. If you crop some off the bottom and the left the horses and building will become more dominate and as they are the subject this will help!

I would keep the proportions that are here, but just tighten it.

I suggest that you look at reducing the saturation especially of the greens as they seem too much. It reminds me of the Fuji greens of the 70s and 80s! Playing with the saturation and vibrance sliders will fix this.

The image appears to be leaning backwards and you can correct it easily in Lightroom.

Even if the building does lean back it looks a little unnatural and I feels it needs correcting.

This image may work in black and white with some sort of toning and an aged look.

Merit

Paint by Light

Good imagination here. This is well thought out to incorporate the guitar, music, smoke and background.

The composition is good with the guitar being in the centre and the music symbols being near the top third.

For me this image is a little dark. I feel it needs somewhere between half and one stop in brightness and a very slight increase in contrast to bring out everything in the image to its best. As it is presented here there is a lot of detail lost which is a pity as this is a good image which has the potential to be even better!

If you look at the histogram there is nothing in the right part of it where the highlights should be. You may have intended it to be like this, but for me it doesn't work. I suggest going back and having another look at the processing and see if you can improve it. Is your monitor calibrated as this is very important? Remember that if your monitor isn't calibrated then very likely what you see and what the judge sees will be different!

Accepted

Pipe Patterns

Another good abstract here. I like the way everything radiates out from the centre with a vague circle that fills the square. The streaks that extend the pipe work nicely.

The minimal colour in the image works well as the coloured dot in the middle forces the viewer to there and then move out to the rest of the image. I get the feeling that if the viewer were to stare at the dot for too long then the image might start to appear as if it is moving. The symmetry of the image will help this.

Exposure is generally good although I would like to see the silver a little brighter. Adjusting the whites in processing should do this.

Presenting this on a screen really doesn't do it justice, and I feel if it was much larger the viewer would get the feeling of looking down into the pipes. I'm assuming they are pipes from a pipe organ.

Merit

Rest Break

Some imagination has been used here.

The idea is good; however, I feel some changes could make this much better.

The placement of the woman in the frame is good, however she looks decidedly uncomfortable! It gives me the impression that she is trying to push her chest out! I assume the bright patch at the waist is supposed to be caused by the light from the end of the walkway, but realistically being that far away it wouldn't add that much light.

The bright area at the end of the walkway draws the viewer because it is so bright. Also, the area behind her arm, being bright tends to also draw the viewer as does the bright area on her skirt.

It appears that the girl has been added to the background image after taking it. The area especially around the arm and hand especially show this up.

I would lighten up the main picture somewhat while reducing the brightness of the light at the end.

Not Accepted

Sacred Kingfisher with Crab
This is well captured. Capturing wildlife needs plenty of practice. Because it is mostly done with long lenses depth of field is always very limited. Also, in most cases some cropping is needed. In this case I feel that cropping would help this image. There is too much empty space especially at the top and left. You could crop some of this off while still retaining the proportions as presented here. Just make sure that the is more space on the left for the Kingfisher to look into.
It looks to me that the focus point is on the branch, which with the very limited depth of field means that the head is very slightly out of focus. The beak certainly is not sharp. To me the tail seems sharper than the head. Sharpening should help this image.
Exposure is ok, however have a look at reprocessing after you have cropped this. I feel that you with a few minor changes you could get the colours of the bird to pop more.
Accepted

Steam Punk. Punked
The idea here is good, however I think with some changes it would work even better.
For me there isn't any part of the image for my eye to settle on really.
I feel that if the main image was more dominant and there were not so many images on top of it, then things would work better. As it is it is far too busy.
If you had increased the opacity of the main image, then perhaps used less images on top with reduced opacity it would work better.
I'm guessing that the image is meant to be a representation of being jolted along the rails, however I still feel it needs the original frame to anchor it more.
Framing is good as is exposure.
Another option would be if you could manage to make the engine not have any images on top of it this would help provide an anchor to the image.
I suggest that unless this was made totally in camera, you go back and see if you can improve it on the computer.
Not Accepted

Student Outing
Use of black and white works well here as it is in some ways a photojournalism image. I suspect if it was in colour then the colours would be a distraction.
Exposure is good although some minor adjustments to the blacks and whites help.
As the subject is the couple at the bottom, I suggest some cropping. Ideally including the whole of the guy's foot is going to help. If it is in the original image, then include it. As it is it looks strange.
I would keep the original shape of the image but crop it so the legs at the top and the right side are removed. They don't add anything to the image and are distracting. You could leave just the front of the top foot in when cropping then clone it out. Also clone out or darken the can lid at the left.
I suggest that you look all around the viewfinder before you take an image to see if moving would improve the image. Also, shooting wide open may have helped by rendering the top of the image out of focus. As it is presented here everything is sharp.
Have another look at this in your processing software as there are things you could do to improve this. Although strictly speaking a PJ image shouldn't have any adjustments apart from cropping and processing adjustments.
Accepted

The Beggars Pose

This is framed well. The placement of the man at the right with the sack and can beside him works well. The addition of a white frame around this helps provide a closure to the image.

I feel that this could benefit from some slight adjustments. I would lighten the image slightly so there is some separation between the subject and the background. As it is presented there is almost no separation between the man, the sack and the background. Even just lightening the blacks will help this without losing effect of the image. Also, the fact that there is a lot of just black at the left tends to draw the viewer there. You could try cropping some off the left side to reduce the amount of black.

I like the fact that you haven't moved the begging cup as it provides an anchor point and leads the viewer up to the man.

The use of black and white helps reveal the textures in the man and the sack which is good. I don't think colour would work here as it would dominate.

Merit

The Welding

You have controlled exposure well here. With a very bright area as in the welding, there is a great potential for the meter to underexpose extensively!

I would increase exposure by around half a stop here to just brighten it a little and increase the light in the shadows. Also, you could look at reducing the highlights as this introduces a little more colour in the area being welded. Finally have a look at the vibrance.

Next, I would look at the cropping. It appears that the whole of the frame has been used and I feel it would benefit from cropping some off the bottom. I would crop to just below the top of the vice handle. By doing this I feel that the image has more impact. The rest of the framing is good.

Well done!

Merit

Til Death us do Part

The idea is good here. I like the strong red of the leaf against the mostly gray of the rest of the image. The way you have composed this is also good.

There are a few things I feel that would improve the image here though. The out of focus area at the left doesn't work for me. It tends to draw my eye away from the subject and I feel that if it was in focus the image would work better.

I'm not sure if the leaf is supposed to be in front of or behind the lattice. The leaf stem makes me think it is supposed to be behind the lattice but the fact that the lattice is an orange colour where the leaf is makes me think it could be meant to be in front.

Also, the red patch at the right lacks enough opacity to really add anything to the image. I would remove it.

I suggest you go back and have another look at this on the computer and see if any changes will help this. Personally, I would lay with the contrast and the whites.

The idea is worth working on.

Not Accepted

Welcome Willow
A great close in image taken in a fast-moving situation.
Composition is good, and the use of black and white works well. The insipid green of surgical scrubs doesn't tend to work well sometimes.
You could look at cropping a little off the left and right to make the baby more dominant.
Black and white adds to the grittiness of the situation without making people squeamish with the sight of blood.
I suggest you look at lessening the vignette here. Ideally a vignette should almost be not visible, but also help to make the middle more dominant. I feel that in this case the dark vignette actually creates too much contrast. I would also look at reducing the contrast around the subject.
There is good use of depth of field here, with the background being out of focus and therefore not distracting.
If you were there to document the birth you have done a god job. If you were one of the parents, you have done an even better job given the stress you must have been under!
You can be rightly proud of what you have achieved.
Merit

White-necked Jacobin Hummingbird
This is well captured, which with birds can be very difficult as they move so fast!
I like the fact that everything in the background is totally out of focus, yet the bird is sharp.
I would go back and have another look at the cropping here. While there is plenty of space for the bird to look into, I feel there is too much. Also, the thorn at the left tends to draw the viewer away from the subject. I would crop the left to just right of the branch stump below the branch. This will turn it into a vertical, but I feel this suits the image better.
Exposure is good generally; however, I suggest you investigate brightening the bird while keeping the background the same tone. You could do this in Lightroom by using a radial filter and putting it on top of the bird. Other ways are to use a brush in Lightroom and using the range mask.
As you have captured this so well it is worth going back and seeing how you can make this even better.
Accepted

Young Raptor
This is nicely cropped and sharp. You have captured this well.
The fact that the background is completely out of focus means that it isn't distracting at all.
I feel there are a few things you could do to make this even better. I would tone down the highlights especially around the beak because they are distracting and tend to draw the viewer away from the rest of the image. I suggest using the Auto button in the develop module in Lightroom then working from there. Sometimes the Auto button does a great job, but not always.
I suggest you lighten the dark area on the birds back.
You could look at cropping a little of the right side to balance the image up. Ideally, the area at the left should be greater to allow space for the bird to look into.
The fact that you have managed to get such a close-up image is credit to you. The bird must be fairly tame!
Merit

Prints

Enter The Flow
This is a well executed image. Obviously, some thought has gone into this to ensure the person is placed upright without being distorted. Of course, the person could have been placed in the image in post-production.

The use of square cropping and framing works well with the round aspect of the image.

Print quality is good and the use of a semi matt paper doesn't cause distracting reflections everywhere, while not taking anything away from the image.

The fact that the image has a circular subject creates the effect of looking into a tube and draws the viewer into it. I feel that the brown and tan tones help this, as I feel this wouldn't work so well if the image consisted of black and white.

Depth of field is good, extending all the way from front to back.

Excellent!

Honours

Fluidity
This is a nice abstract. I have no idea what it is, but that is fine as it is a pleasing image.

The use of black and white and a minimal tonal range all help here.

I would suggest weighting the bottom of the mat, so it is heavier than the top so as to not cause the illusion of the top being bigger.

For me this is reminiscent of 1970s psychedelic art as this sort of stuff was prominent then!

Lots of interpretations can be taken from this. For me sides look like a birds wings, but the middle has another meaning altogether. But that's fine as it is an abstract and the title works well with it.

Print quality is good with good blacks and whites.

I suspect this wouldn't be an image one would want to look at after a night drinking as it may do crazy things to the brain and possibly stomach!

Well done!

Merit

Room with a View
This place has certainly seen better days and they were a long time ago by the looks of it!

A well-executed HDR image. There is no other way this could have been created with the dynamic range! However, I feel that it could do with a little more contrast. There are no real blacks here at all which I feel it needs, even if just a little.

Personally, I would look again at the cropping. Have you visited the possibility of cropping the top to remove the ceiling joist at the top? Don't remove the falling ceiling material but crop just above that. Also, I feel that some lens distortion correction could help. Also, I suggest that you have a look at the right side. The shape of the tube and the window at the right edge and the bright area there draws my eye away from the subject.

Also, the blue thing in the middle right draws my eye. This is because it is a different colour from the rest of the scene which mostly consists of brown tones, so the blue stands out because it is a completely different tone. If you changed the colour that would be better.

Exposure blending is good, apart from the afore mentioned contrast.

To me, it looks as if the camera was pointed slightly up as opposed to level. With wide angles, or panoramic images even if the camera is only slightly off the level it can become very obvious. It can be corrected easily in Lightroom though!
Accepted

Gotcha
A well captured image here!
The use of a necessarily long lens with minimal depth of field has ensured the water is completely out of focus apart from the area under the bird being sharper.
The bird is well captured and sharp. The movement on the right side wing helps show the speed it is flying at.
The blue water helps make the bird stand out which is great.
You have got a good exposure with some detail in the shadow area on the right side. This is helped by the water and what appears to be fairly soft light.
Cropping is good with the frame being well filled by the subject. If this is full frame even better.
Possibly the use of a dark mat would make this image stand out even more.
Well done!
Honours

New Brighton Pier
I like the way you have managed to line up the end of the pier with the horizon. That works well.
I feel that the shot would worked better if it was taken a little later when the sky was darker. The other option would have been to darken the whole image in processing which would be fairly easy.
There appears to be a fair bit of noise (grain) in the image. Not sure if it is meant as a texture or the image has been underexposed.
I feel that the image would work better if it was cropped to a vertical to reflect the pier. This is because the left side is really devoid of anything that add to the image. I wouldn't crop everything off only around two thirds off.
Print quality has some problems. It appears that the printer has some clogging issues with regular lines down the image which show up especially in the sky area. Time to either clean the print heads or get it looked at. This lets the image down.
I suggest you go back and see if you can improve this through processing and maybe try to get a commercial print done.
Not Accepted

Grandad's Old Bed
I pity Grandad if that is all you gave him to sleep on! It looks decidedly prickly!!
I'd like to see a little more space at the left and right sides here to show more of the surrounding area.
The image shows good depth of field with everything in focus and the textures of the sacking and straw showing up well.
The image has a bit too much contrast. I'd like to see some detail in the area under the bed. I feel there is too much black in the image which like bright areas tends to draw the viewer.
The white balance is too warm here. Usually, the sacks are much more a muted beige tone.
I suggest that you go back and have another go at processing to see if you can improve this. If nothing else, it will help for future images.
Not Accepted

Naughty Kea
You have got in nice and close here, mind you Keas are fairly tame and destructive.
It looks like you have focused on the bag as it appears to be slightly sharper than the bird.
Also being red the bag tends to dominate. Red always does dominate. I would have a look at whether you can crop some of the bag out to make the image tighter. The other option would be to convert this to black and white where the red won't be a problem.
Exposure isn't bad however I would have a look and see if more contrast would help the image.
The background is good being wood and shingle as it keeps with the nature theme.
Not Accepted

The Café
You have captured this well. You have seen an image and taken it. Have you got other images taken at the same time?
The interaction between the two customers is good.
I feel that some changes could be made to improve the image.
I would crop the left to the door jamb and the right to the jamb. The space at both ends being light and with posters etc distract the viewer way from the subject. If you try placing some framing Ls at both ends, I think you will see an improvement.
I feel that some processing changes could be made. The print lacks contrast. The blacks are not there, they are muddy. I suspect that the image is underexposed. I would try to raise the light in the shadows so that the inside of the café shows up more. Also, add some contrast to the image. If you look at the black of the matt, and then compare it with the image, there isn't any real black there. If you don't know how to do this get someone to show you what can be achieved because it is worth it.
Not Accepted

Southland Bush Scene
This is a nice image. It's well printed and manages to reveal the mist in the background.
I would have a look at the cropping. The colours of this are superb as is the print quality.
For me, the greenery at the bottom being fairly light in tone it is too much. Also, it leads the viewer across the bottom as opposed to into the image, which is what is needed. Maybe if the foreground was darkened it would work. Have a look at removing some of that to draw the viewer into the image more. Also look at whether the image would work better as a vertical. These are all options that you could look at.
The subject I feel is the mist and the trees, and if you had pointed the camera up a little to accentuate the length of the tree trunks against the mist, this would work better.
The black mat works well here, but I would weight the bottom more as without it the top looks heavier than the bottom.

Accepted

Orchid
There is nice fine detail here on the edges of the leaves etc.
The use of square framing works well, however the white at the bottom of the mat is distracting.
The point of focus appears to be behind the central part which is a pity. When shooting close ups such as this I suggest stopping down one or two stops more than you think is enough as the DoF is minimal.
Print quality is excellent with nice rich colours and detail that shows the dust below the orchid leaves. The exposure is good in general, though there are a few areas of blown out highlights. I suspect they could be recovered in processing.
The lighting is ok and I like the fact that the black background is able to show off the dust at the bottom. Getting a real black background can be a hard thing to do.
I suspect this is a little over sharpened and maybe you have done this to help the DoF.
Accepted

Serenity
This is a peaceful image.
Depth of field is good with everything from front to back sharp.
The limited tonal range works well as does the minimalism if the image.
I feel that some minor changes could be made to help this.
I would suggest cropping some off the sky to shift the horizon away from the centre of the image more. I feel it's too near the centre. Also, it looks as if the sky occupies more of the image than the sea, yet the sky is fairly featureless.
I would look at the white balance and maybe exposure. I feel the exposure could be increased without losing the effect of the image.
I would suggest looking at this as a high key image, but that is a personal choice. Even just look at lifting the blacks a little.
Maybe go back and have a look at this on the computer and see if playing with it will change things and improve it.
Accepted

Pholiota mutabilis – Changeable photiota
A well exposed image with good colour and depth of field.
The depth of field manages to extend enough for the fungi to be in good focus and then falls off after that.
I suggest that you maybe go back and look at the cropping. The subject is vertical, yet the composition is horizontal. The shape of the stalk leads the viewer out of the tree and upwards to the heads of the fungi, so crop the image to enhance this.
 I would leave some on the right of the fungi to show the branch texture. I would crop that out as well as some off the right side to enhance the fact that the fungi growing upwards. I feel this would help with the attention on the subject.
I feel that the empty out of focus area to the left is distracting and unnecessary.
Accepted

Whirlwind
An excellent abstract here.
The light blue colour works well with the white and pink and the little bit of gray helps ground the image. Exposure is good and the lightness works well.
Placement of the centre of the whirlwind is good and ensures the viewer is lead across the image. Actually, the viewer should be lead from the bottom right corner into the image to the centre the out through the other branches. Possibly, you could flip this so that the viewer is lead from the bottom left corner, as western people read from left to right, so being led in from the left and across to the right feels better. Arabic people read from right to left so it would be ok for them.
While the print quality ok, the print heads need to be cleaned as there are regular lines on the print which is a pity.
For someone looking at this close up they are annoying. I suggest either getting a commercial print done and cleaning the printheads.
Merit

Sisters
This works well in black and white with all the textures of the wood etc. I also suspect that the colours of the girls' dresses and the left girls top would take attention away from the textures. The light is nice.
The way you have frames this works well with the door helping to show the height of the girls. Exposure is excellent with good detail in the shadows at the bottom of the girls. You can even see the dirty legs on the girl on the left!
I suggest you try tone down the highlights in the window at the left. Being bright it tends to draw the viewer away from the subject and out of the frame. If you could clone the texture of the right window that would be good.
If you had got the girl on the left to look at the camera like the smaller girl that would have been good. Because she is looking to the right the viewer tends to follow to and out of the frame. Also she looks a bit vacant!
The use of a dark gray mat is good, though maybe a black mat would help the image even more.
Merit

Aiesha
The girl had a lovely expression here. The colours and exposure are good.
If you look closely at the image, you can see that it is starting to break up. I think this is because you have either cropped in too much, or the file didn't have enough resolution in the first place. It helps if you can fill the frame when taking the image so you can use all the resolution the camera has.
Have another look at the cropping. Because it is cropped into a horizontal the top of her head and the chin are chopped off and it doesn't look natural.
I feel that if it was cropped as a vertical this would help the shape of her face. You could still include that lovely hair.
Focus appears to be good from what I can tell.
I suggest that you darken the teeth a little, as being very white they stand out and tend to draw the viewer away from the rest of the image somewhat.

Very nice and if you look at the things I have mentioned you will have a winner.
Accepted

Albatross
The composition is ok here and the colours are nice and rich.
Ideally there should be more space at both the left and right, with more on the left for the Albatross to move into to look balanced.
Watch out for halos around the subject. They are fairly easy to fix and there are numerous videos on the net showing how to fix this. With the dark background they tend to show up more.
Printing this large gives it impact but on further examination, the image is let down by the lack of sharpness. Maybe if it was printed smaller this wouldn't be so obvious but this large it definitely is.
Capturing birds in flight is extremely difficult and takes lots of practice. Use of auto focus tracking is necessary and depth of field with long lenses is usually minimal at best.
Keep practicing with this as practice will make you better.
If this had been sharp it would have been a very nice image.
Not Accepted.