

NTAPA PHOTOCOMMENTARY

By Jeff Dunn, March Contest, 2018

First of all, I must thank Shirley Shen, PSA, and the North Texas Asian Photographers Association members for the invitation to review the results of *hard work*—the courage to take on monthly challenges that lead to self-improvement.

I really liked your March theme: “Light and Shadow together make the subject come to life.” I took this theme to heart in evaluating your images, and looked for images that “came to life” by use of light and shadow more than any other technique. Aside from the theme focus, I used the aesthetic principles of **Interest, Impact, Composition** and **technique**, in order of importance, in recognizing your most distinctive images. Finally, I chose a number of Basic and Advanced entries to write specific comments about, and regret that time limitations prevented me from commenting on all of your fine images.

1. OVERALL FINDINGS

Overdone shadows. For most of the images, shadows were very prominent, appropriate to the theme. However, far too many of the shadows were too dark or completely black. Except in images where simplicity and abstraction are important, it is best to provide some detail in dark areas. This will increase viewer interest, the most important aesthetic goal of pictorial photography.

Use of titles. I recommend that NTAPA members consider the use of meaningful titles for images on a regular basis. Almost all photographers want people to view their work. Titles help viewers to understand images, initiate eye control, and increase their interest. I am sending NTAPA a copy of my PSA article on titles, which describes their importance in detail.

Regions of focus. I noticed that several images had focus issues. Areas of interest were out of focus relative to other areas, or the portion of an image in focus was too small. NTAPA members should consider ways to maximize focal depth where appropriate and study the art of focus stacking.

Originality. One issue relevant to a number of the images is that of the use of “other people’s art.” In evaluating images of *equal* interest and impact, I then consider their causes. An image where the interest and impact is due solely to the maker’s creativity and point of view will rank higher in my estimation than one where some other artist, architect, set designer, or choreographer has contributed a significant amount to the viewer’s response. Images where much of the interest and impact is due to another artist are more appropriate in Journalism or Travel categories.

2. MOST IMPRESSIVE BEGINNER-GROUP IMAGES

Honorable Mentions.



Willie Xiang



Willie Xiang



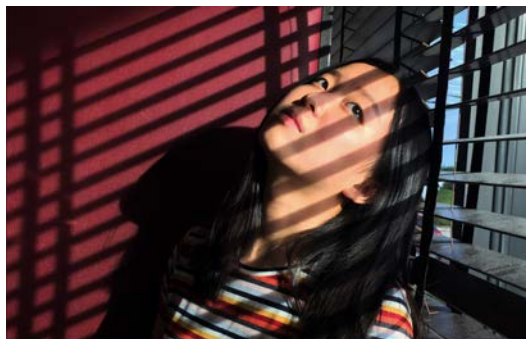
Nock Wong

Two of Willie Xiang's images, **5293** and **4904**, impressed me with their compositions. The coffee cup on a glass table reflecting the triangular skylight offered an intriguing center of interest and celebrated the theme of the competition. The dog looking at the ball was a strong compositional tactic, but I feel the image would have been more powerful in black and white. That way, the dog and ball would have been more integrated with the interesting floor patterns. Both images deserve titles. Nock Wong's **Carnival of America Rock Show** captured the energy of performance while highlighting a panoply of lighting effects. The show's lighting designer and choreographer both contributed to the effect of this image, along with the photographer.

Third Place. The effect of Lijuan Jing's **J003095-s**, a nighttime bridge scene, is due far more to the photographer than the bridge's architect. Sleek serenity was achieved with proper exposure, point of view, and a windless evening. Light and shadow, without being overly extreme, define the image.



Second Place. Siyi Feng's **Tranquility** introduces striking shadows that are mirrored by the black lines of the striped shirt. The red wall nicely brings out the lip tones of the model. I'm not sure her expression is that of tranquility; I sense more a feeling of unease and some kind of psychological confinement. It is wise to ask others what images convey to them before deciding on titles. This image would do well



in a PSA-sponsored exhibition where modifications are allowed. The car and grass could be then removed as distractions, along with other minor defects.

First Place. Xiaoxin's **Portrait** is a great example of light and shadow use without being blatant about it. The impact is less than Siyi Feng's portrait, but the rendition is flawless. Chin shadow draw more attention to the lit face and perfectly made-up eyes. Subtle shadows create a marvelous skin tone. Everything is in focus where it counts.



3. MOST IMPRESSIVE ADVANCED-GROUP IMAGES

Honorable Mentions.



Joe Zhou



Joe Zhou



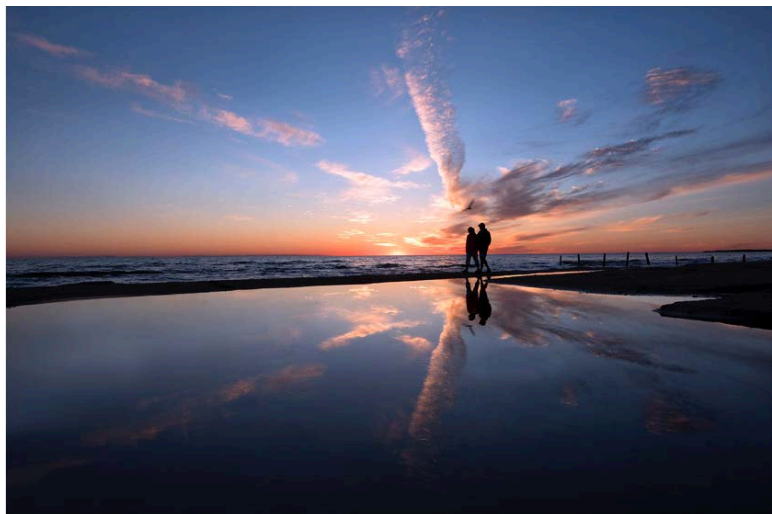
Joe Zhou

Three of Joe Zhou's images impressed me with their delicate and modulated, but powerful uses of light and shadow to evoke different emotions: the necessary subtlety in conveying musical interpretations to an orchestra, the mystery of a mist-shrouded city and its commanding citadel, the cold blue light of nearly impossible-to-reach surfaces that climbers and astronauts strive to conquer.

Third Place. Ming Chen's image of a light tube shows how impressive another's work of art is. But in addition, the photographer added the human element: visitors dancing with the joy of the spectacle, their motion emphasized by the slower exposure time. This electric subject indeed "comes to life."



Second Place. Lijuan Jing's sunset has strong compositional elements and the use of light and shadows as metaphor. The intersection of cloud-lines and their reflection intersecting the silhouette of the walking couple add power to the scene. The posts to the right of the couple add a secondary source of interest. Some may suggest that some of the left portion of the image be cropped, but I disagree. This image is one of the few with a provocative title, "Till We Are Old," suggesting that we should enjoy what the world has to offer before



it's too late. Where is the couple walking? Toward the "unknown region" to the left of the image. The metaphor requires no further cropping, and darkening the left of the image even more might add to the symbolic effectiveness of the concept. This image will linger in my memory.

First Place. To me, Lei Zhang's untitled image of an egret in flight sparkles with joy and originality. Is this a bird, or the Starship Enterprise flying through a galaxy of flowers? The shadows articulate the life of the wings, and obscure the background in a way to heighten the mystery of what might be a spiritual existence. The vertical aspect ratio emphasizes the height rather than the flight direction of its subject, the elevated



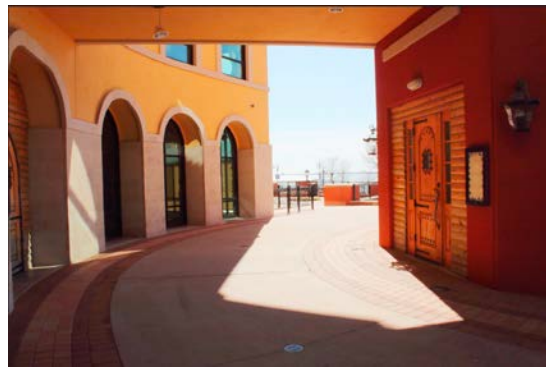
possibilities of interpreting the image. Is the background flowers, leaves, or stars? Or, if resolved in a powerful telescope, would the flowers turn out to be distant egrets themselves, soaring through the universe? This is one of the few images that might not benefit from a title—as long as its viewers use their imaginations.

4. COMMENTS ON OTHER IMAGES

I am sorry I do not have the time to comment in writing on all of NTAPA’s fine images, but I hope the comments so far and the ones to follow provide some food for thought and suggestions for improvement to all readers.

Centers of Interest. In my opinion, the following images presented issues with respective centers of interest.

This one, with the building arches, has a bright, eye-attracting area in the center, but to my eyes, it’s overexposed. Taking two images from a tripod at different exposures and merging them would correct that problem and attract more interest to the entire image; nevertheless, there is little in the center of the image, such as a person or clouds, to attract the eye.



This night street scene offers two areas of interest: trees on the right, shops on the left. But the street in between seems too large. The exposure time was too long to capture any cars other than a wisp of light. To me it’s really two separate images. A double exposure with a car at high ISO might have helped.



This image of a loggia does have a center of interest, the person sitting on the ledge. But his expression is so bland it may discourage viewers from exploring the rest of the image. The image does have the advantage of following the line of arches toward the left, but the deadpan center of interest lingers in a negative way. Here is one example of where a title would help, such as “School BORES me!”



The setting here of a patio, perhaps at a museum or office park, offers a bright architectural feature pointing to the extreme left. The would-be center of interest, a pillar with a serpentine tree, is so dark that it cedes any attraction. Perhaps the intended center of interest is the pattern of shadows on the tiles. If so, that part of the image should be brightened, and the arch darkened.



I think the intention here was to portray the interplay of light and shadow in a park pond, and the contrast between the horizontality of the ripples and the verticality of the trees. On a large scale, those patterns on the whole might provide a global center of interest. Unfortunately, a leaning branch or pipe occupies the center line of the image at the pond boundary, becoming a distraction from the intention. If possible, the photographer should have captured a different part of the pond, or have gone to the other side and removed the distraction.



The shadows in this intriguing image do provide a dispersed center of interest. Such would be even stronger if the lower part of the image were brightened, and the upper part darkened. But these shadows generate in the viewer a big question: What *are* they? Here is another example of where a title would be a great help, such as “[Name of Trestle] Shadows at Morning.” At least I *think* it’s a trestle! Or is it afternoon?



Excessive Darkness. I know the monthly theme was “light and shadow,” but shadows do not necessarily have to be deadly dark. The goal of any image should be to generate interest and impact. Stark shadows can have impact, but for *interest* to be generated—that is, for viewers to want to spend time with an image—oftentimes it’s advantageous to brighten shadows enough so that an interior texture emerges, or that an object within a shadow becomes apparent, providing multiple areas of interest for the viewer to explore.

In my opinion, most of the dark areas in the following images are too dark, and should have been brightened in post-processing (which I understand was not forbidden) or handled by combining multiple exposures in HD.

I'd like to see more of the banks in these nicely composed images. The one on the left has what I feel is a distraction with the National Cheerleaders Association letters projected on the building. The bluish version deemphasizes those letters more.



The underside of this bridge and the upper left of the building with the intriguing fountains of light are vast areas of darkness that could use a little illumination. The composition of leading lines of the fountains is attractive, but more the doing of the architect than the photographer. Architecture is a hybrid genre of photography that lies more in the journalistic than pictorial field. The "fountains" themselves, however, are nicely captured.



The shadows in this shot of the Grand Canyon, one of the most photographed parks on the planet, obscure rock details. Unfortunately, there were no clouds at the time that would have added interest to the sky. Too much of the lower right in this image is devoid of light.



The wing details of the dragonfly are interesting, but I'd really like to see a little something of its body. A tighter cropping would also help.



Focal Depth. These four images have interesting subjects, but only part of the subject is in focus. I would like to see all of green fruiting body in focus, all of the central geranium, all of the blossoming branch, and the three B&W flowers in sharp focus. The light on the stem of the geranium attracts the eye more than the flower itself. I doubt that such attraction was the photographer's intention.



Complexity. While large areas of darkness may provide not enough detail to sustain viewer interest, complex images may provide too *much* detail to invite interest. The high contrast of the image of the reflected man on the catwalk emphasizes the lines in the image, but there are too many of them, going too many different directions for my taste. Furthermore, the rock or trunk in front of the man does not fit with the overall texture, seeming alien and unnecessary. Lowering the contrast may help, along with darkening out the "rock."



I am grateful for the maker titling "Contrast" for the strange image of glass balls on what seems to be a hunk of raw opal, but I'm not sure what the "contrast" is about. Rough vs. smooth? I'm not convinced by the title



that the image has anything to do with light or shadow. I find the complexity of the rock, unstructured as it is, to not provide much interest.

Eye Paths. I would like to with remarking on two images with promise that send viewers' eyes in the wrong direction. It is an excellent exercise to ask friends "What do you see?" in your images before declaring them ready for competition. Ask them also "Where do your eyes travel?"

I find the child's expression in the fountain to be delightful. Although there is no expression of shadow, the water is a stand-in for light. But the girl dashing off to the left takes eyes out of the image. A shallower depth of focus would have helped increase attention on the boy.



There are beautiful colors in this pond image. The dark area at the base is not so large that it demands to have had a longer exposure time, though it probably wouldn't have hurt. The figures add a lot of human interest. But the left figure, perhaps a boy, is pointing to the left, directing eyes into the dark blue area and out of the frame to the left. If the maker were posing the image, directing the models to point to the right, into the sunset yellow-orange, would have helped. When the "Creative" month comes along, one might consider flipping the pair of figures, cloning in blue as appropriate, and having the pointing be to the right.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

Overall, I was very impressed by NTAPA's wide range of subjects, many of them striking, and the club's willingness to allow my participation. I enjoyed experiencing your work, and wish all success in the future!

Handwritten signature of Jeff Dunn

Jeff Dunn

Jeff Dunn, Ph. D., QPSA

Photographer, Composer and Critic

Certified Judge, Northern California Council of Camera Clubs

PSA Gallery at <https://psa-photo.org/index.php?jeff-dunn-0520#ad-image-0>.

I was born in Hollywood, CA, where my father, Lloyd W. Dunn, a former commercial artist, was running an advertising agency. Creative relatives exposed me to the arts at an early age. My aunt, Patricia Barry, was a well-known actress in TV soap-operas. My uncle, Linwood G. Dunn, won two Oscars® for special effects photography. Both my father and uncle were musicians as well—my father eventually retired as an executive with Capitol Records.



Although beginning my studies in music, I decided to pursue a career related to my love for the outdoors, i.e., geology. During the summers of the eight years I spent in graduate school earning an M.S. in Geosciences and a Ph.D. in Geologic Education, I was a Naturalist with the National Park Service in Grand Teton National Park, WY. It was during those years that I developed an ardent affection for outdoor photography. Career moves since brought me away from the oil business in Texas to IT programming and project management in New York, North Carolina, and California.

I have been a professional music critic for the last ten years, writing for San Francisco Classical Voice (www.sfcv.org). I began my interest in graphic arts in 2007, when I became one of the few music critics ever to illustrate my own reviews, focusing on ironic commentary via photocollage.

Exhibitions

Alameda on Camera Exhibitions, Frank Bette Center for the Arts, Alameda CA 2010-18

Alameda Photographic Society Exhibitions, Alameda Museum 2013-15

2015 Frank Bette Satellite Gallery Exhibition at Eyewise, Alameda, CA

2015 Photographic Society of Alameda Exhibition, Alameda Museum

Acceptances and medals in numerous international photo salons in association with the Photographic Society of America.

Prizes

Creative Digital Arts Award, Frank Bette Center Alameda on Camera 2012

Publications

1. *Big, Bad, Beautiful: Death Valley*: MusicMemory Publishers, Alameda, CA. 2013.
2. Numerous illustrations for online and print journals in the San Francisco Bay Area, especially San Francisco Classical Voice (www.sfcv.org)

3. "Titles Are Worth Thinking About," *PSA Journal*, v. 83, no. 6, June 2017.