



Appraising Workshop Photography – Updated 2023

Introduction and Summary

This discussion summarises a collective Judges' view on the perceived issue of 'workshop' or guided images in club competitions. This was first discussed at the SCPF Judges' Forum in March 2020.

2023 Update: includes 'Remote Shooting' for which the same recommendations apply.

Workshop images are those made, or of the type that are typically made, on tutored workshops and photography events.

Concern over 'workshop photography' in competitions was first raised a couple of years ago by an SCPF club. There was disquiet among their membership about such images on the grounds that they are sometimes not 'wholly the work of the photographer'.

Our intention is to:

- a) Understand the issue from a judging perspective
- b) Define a common approach that judges can take
- c) Encourage clubs to think about the issue

This paper is a statement of principle issued by the judging community, such that clubs understand the difficulties presented to us and can guide their photographers accordingly. It is as much for clubs as for judges.

SCPF Judges are expected to adopt this approach but, in practice, little changes for us.

We already have a robust methodology for appraising all images based on what we see, and we should be using it consistently. The types of images under consideration here should not be appraised differently solely because they may have been made under workshop conditions.

A reminder to all judges: There is no mandate from SCPF to 'mark down' such images, because we cannot know the circumstance of how they were made. We will simply appraise the image as seen.

We continue to recommend that clubs consider whether images made at workshop-type events should be permitted into their competitions, based on the question: 'To what extent is this image the photographer's own work?'

We recognise that workshops provide valuable learning and great social experiences, and that club photographers have freedom to pursue any kinds of photography for their own enjoyment.

The question is only whether it is fair and reasonable to enter an image into competition as your own if someone else has played a significant role in its production.

... Ken Scott

SCPF Judging Adviser

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Background Discussion

We – and many club photographers – have come to recognise certain workshop-type images. A concern was first raised a couple of years ago by an SCPF club, on the grounds that such images are not ‘wholly the work of the photographer’ and ‘should not be entered into competitions’.

The disquiet has also been picked up by PAGB. An article in PAGB E-News 246 in January 2020 <http://www.pagbnews.co.uk/newsletter/issue-246> rightly makes a distinction between workshops where photographers have significant creative freedom and input, and those where the tutor does everything except press the button. It also rightly asserts the photographer’s freedom to indulge their hobby in whichever way they choose.

In addition:

- The PSA (Photographic Society of America) has included in its definitions for Travel photography the line “*Images from events or activities arranged specifically for photography, or of subjects directed or hired for photography are not appropriate.*”
- There is also refocused attention on wild vs captive, and on the welfare of animals in nature photography – see [RPS The Nature Photographer’s Code of Practice](#) – following the rapid growth of kingfishers diving into tanks and staged studio setups involving mice.

Defining ‘Workshop Photography’

What is a ‘workshop image’? A not-exhaustive list might include:

1. ‘Display’ nature: usually birds flying for the benefit of paying photographers;
2. Sports, theatricals, dance or any other events staged specifically or solely for photography;
3. Tutored studio shoots with hired models or animals or still-life subjects, sometimes in the club environment;
4. Guided location shoots for e.g. landscape, people, wildlife or travel-style photography;
5. **Remote shoots: where a model or subject can be photographed remotely, using the studio camera and lighting, by a ‘photographer’ in the comfort of their own home;**

Workshops do provide valuable learning and great social experiences. So it is important to distinguish ‘training’, where a tutor provides ‘How To’ instruction and then allows photographers their own creative space, from a photography event where at the other extreme everything is set up for photographers to achieve consistently a predetermined result or effect.

The following scenarios are not in question:

- Where three or four photographers “share costs” for a model and studio and collaborate together and with the model and a studio tech on objectives and setup;
- Where images made on a workshop in any circumstances are layered into a composite;

We also have to understand that workshops may provide the only opportunity for photographers to work with rare and unusual animals, or experienced models or other subject matter that would be otherwise difficult or expensive to access.



What IS in question is when the staging is presented on a plate and the photographer has little or no creative or technical input to the final image. The question is whether it is fair and reasonable to enter an image into competition as your own if someone else has played a significant role in its production.

What constitutes the ‘photographer’s own work’ ? The following have to be taken into account:

- Selection of the setup and staging of the subject and subject matter;
- Choice of, set up and / or response to lighting (which outdoors is mostly uncontrolled);
- Setting of camera controls – aperture, shutter speed, ISO, focus etc.
- Choice of framing and composition and timing;

Any image made with significant third-party input to two or more of these aspects cannot be considered ‘wholly the work of the photographer’.

Consider these examples:

- a) An image made at a reptile or butterfly vivarium, where an animal is placed, consistently lit with their studio lighting rig, your camera is placed in the pre-set prime position, you’re guided as to the optimum aperture for the flash, and you press the shutter.
- b) An image made at a theatrical or dance workshop where lighting and staging are pre-set for you to achieve a specific predetermined effect.
- c) An image made of the famed Camargue Horses, or other popular nature species, which are run to order for photography groups. You are guided as to where to stand, with some technical guidance, but you make your own decisions on framing, timing, aperture and shutter speeds.
- d) An image made on a butterfly workshop in the wild, where you are guided to the subjects and, maybe, given some tuition as to the technical requirements. Thereafter, it’s down to you to make your own decisions.
- e) An image made of a common subject in response to a magazine article, or inspired by a demonstration you had at the club. You follow the guidance but you make all the decisions.
- f) A remote shoot of a model in their studio, where the you direct the imagery by video link and control camera and lighting via software tethered between the studio camera and your home device.

Example a) - not the photographer’s own work unless they have free choice of subjects and framing, even if there is some assistance with lighting.

Example b) - could be the photographer’s own work if they have directed the model on pose, movement, setting and use of props and costume, even if under tuition; if they are in full control of the camera for framing, timing and effects when photographing a pre-staged movement or set; or if they had control over the lighting and staging.

Examples c), d) and e) - largely the photographer’s own work, at least on technical and craft fronts.

Example f) - as b) would depend on the degree of control the remote ‘photographer’ has. Needless to say that collaboration between model and photographer has always been essential.



The Judge's Perspective

Workshop images do present a difficulty for judges.

The underlying assumption is that there is more intrinsic Expressive Quality (EQ) in an image that is wholly the photographer's own work than in one that is guided or staged by a third party, however technically accomplished it may be. Notably, the E-News article makes no mention of EQ.

The craft value, however good it appears, is also limited if the setup, staging and lighting are controlled by someone else.

The difficulty for judges is that we cannot know for certain how an image has been produced.

If the image was made on a workshop with little input from the photographer and it attracts a high-mark, other photographers grumble. If it attracts a low mark, on the basis of any suspicion, then the whole question of value is opened up.

We are expected simply to appraise the image before us. We have learned not to make assumptions; if we do, we invariably fall into a hole. If we make the wrong call, we attract criticism. For example we must not assume that a dress-portrait is made on a 'workshop', since the photographer might work, set up and direct such images from their own studio.

We are damned if we do and damned if we don't. It is unfair on us to be asked to assess a photograph on the basis that it is the photographer's own work if it is not.

In the end, we have to remember that most club photographers are seeking feedback (aside from hoping to win, of course). So we have to be able to competently and fairly appraise all photographs, which includes being able to say when a photograph is very well made but not as expressive as others.

Therefore:

1. We will continue not to make assumptions. No image should be appraised differently solely because it may have been made under workshop conditions. We will assume that that any image presented to us IS eligible and 'largely the photographer's own work'.
2. Instead we will use our already robust methodology for appraisal: that is to assess all images on the basis of Technical, Craft and Expressive Quality (EQ), with EQ carrying the credit weight. If many people make similar images on repeated workshop events, they quickly become fashionable and unavoidably cliché*.
3. If we feel that EQ is limited for whatever reason, including (in advanced classes) cliché, then we will appraise and mark appropriately on that basis. We will do so subjectively and without bias.

And we recommend that:

4. Clubs consider whether images made at workshop-type events should be permitted into their competitions, based on the question: 'To what extent is this image the photographer's own work?'

*Cliché can be defined "*an idea or expression that has lost much of its force through overexposure*"



Appraising Workshop Images - Principles

The following principles are deemed to be practical and reasonable.

Principles

1. We recognise that club photographers must continue to have freedom to pursue any kinds of photography for their own enjoyment.
2. We understand that images are often made on workshops and will deal with them sensitively. We will not denigrate or differentiate solely on whether an image was or is believed to have been made on a workshop. There is no mandate from SCPF to ‘mark down’ such images because we cannot know – See Point 5.
3. We will assume that that any image presented to us IS eligible and ‘largely the photographer’s own work’.
4. It is beholden on us to be familiar with the types of images that are often or typically made on workshops and organised events.
5. We will continue to assess all images on the basis of Technical, Craft and Expressive Quality (EQ), with EQ carrying the credit weight. We will do so subjectively and without bias. If we feel that EQ is limited for whatever reason, then we appraise and mark appropriately on that basis.
6. In Advanced classes we may take into account the idea of cliché when assessing EQ. Cliché affects all popular styles and subjects after a period of time.

Recommendations for clubs

7. Clubs might consider whether images made at workshop-type events should be permitted into their competitions, based on the question: ‘To what extent is this image the photographer’s own work?’* This might be in the form of a voluntary code.
8. Clubs might consider guiding photographers to title their images appropriately and honestly as to the location and circumstances of the image.

*Below is an example of a club competition rule in use:

“The content of a print or digital image must be entirely the work and copyright of the author [...] Where parties other than the photographer have made a significant creative contribution to the image, we encourage the photographer to consider whether their own contribution is sufficient to claim the image as their own work”.

In the August 2023 edition of PAGB E-news

<https://www.pagbnews.co.uk/sites/default/files/newsletters/en338%20extra%20AI%2012%20August%202023.pdf> Rod Wheelans appeals to photographers’ consciences by stating “Only you can know” and asking the question “If you haven’t made the INPUT, can you claim the OUTPUT?”