

Open letter to the Australian Institute of Professional Photography Awards Committee.

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Firstly this is not about analogue or digital capture although most of the changes to imagery have come about because of the new system or more importantly because of the software that processes images these days.

There is no doubting that the ability of photoshop is quite remarkable. We would all holler and scream if it was taken away from us. Even I, which might surprise some. So this is not an attack on photoshop, but the use of it in some areas.

Those areas that mainly concern me are in the natural world, but it could also be directed to other areas that are assumed to be "real". In the area of the natural world though I think some things need to be considered.

My and many others view of landscape photography, is capturing the Landscape that is presented to us. Having the ability to see past the normal and isolate the incredible that this world offers is the thing that landscape photographers offer to the medium. As a photographic treatise it is as spontaneous as a photojournalist's recording of a human scene that depicts the world we live. We respond to what we see.

But what of the Australian Institute of Professional Photography Awards that allow fabricated landscapes that have never existed in their pure and raw form to be judged in a category that is LANDSCAPE. And to add insult to injury have been awarded winners in that category on a few occasions. Scenes that never existed. Scenes that were created by the aid of PHOTOSHOP. To me this is a gross misrepresentation of nature.

And I am not referring to enhancements of the image. I am referring to additions and subtractions. Skies added, boats put into lakes, birds flying across the sunset sky, houses and cars removed, and on it goes.

Whenever I mention this usually the name Frank Hurley is thrown back at me. For it was he who in the early 20th century "added" things to his black and white landscapes. So did many other photographers of that time and later, but why should that make it right? The one point overlooked in that argument is that there were many photographers who didn't and wouldn't and wouldn't even conceive of it.

And just for the record dodging and burning in a traditional darkroom is not akin to "photoshopping" an image on the computer. If one understood the inadequacies of photographic paper then one would know what is required to eke out all the information from a negative. Most images that are captured digitally, either Raw or in Jpeg format require some treatment or adjustments after being downloaded to the computer.

So if Photoshop creations are allowed to continue in the APPAs when it comes to Landscape photography, photojournalism of the natural world, are we not excluding a substrate that is beyond the power of anything that humanity can deliver up?

It is time for APPA to segregate this category and recognize that nature has its own photoshop and any fabrications of our natural world should be moved to Illustrative and Landscape should remain as a species captured.

It appears that natural photography that most of us grew up on has no place, or very little, anymore in most categories at the APPA's. Sure there are separate divisions under some categories, but they seem to be token when it comes to the final result.

And why is it that those who are photoshop savvy and heavily into digital are always called upon to judge any kind of traditional photography, yet the same courtesy is not given to those who remain faithful to photography of yesterday. The argument here is that you have to be digital savvy to be able to judge it. Does not the same argument apply the other way as well?

Within photographic circles there is always talk about raising the bar to lift the standards of photography. The fabrication of photographs is setting standards and precedents that will become the norm in the future and by allowing this to persist no photograph will have any validity at all in the future.

As a photographic body we owe it to ourselves to set a standard that encompasses ALL photographic genres whether new or old so as the integrity of photographic images is maintained.

I think it is time that the APPA committee look at the two sides of photography and make a system that is fair and equitable for all, otherwise they run the risk of a one sided event. How unfortunate would that be for such a wonderful medium that is all about discovery and the ability to see far more than most could ever hope to.

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