

## Juried Photo Competitions & Exhibitions

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Make no mistake about it: most photographic competitions and exhibits exist to grow the business and bank account of the host/sponsor(s). With some exceptions, they rarely exist as altruistic enterprises for the advancement of photographer's careers. You shouldn't let this stop you from entering them, but you should carefully select only the competitions and exhibitions which might advance your career or current project. Small cash and gear prizes are nice, but competitions and exhibitions that increase your brand exposure and put your work in front of important persons (museum curators; book publishers; gallery owners...) and potential buyers should receive more of your attention.

Given the weak economy and slowing of art sales, I've seen an unusual explosion of new photo competitions and exhibitions over the last year or so; some worth entering, some only worth it to those collecting the fees. With so many artists clamoring and competing for exposure, resume growth, and sales, it's a good time to be on the receiving end of those entry fees. Most of the exhibitions/competitions I enter have seen a similarly recent explosion in the number of entries as well as countries represented.

Let's do some very basic math: assuming an entry fee of \$25 for two images (which is somewhat average although on the low end of the fee scale) with 500 entrants (also on the low end of the scale for a prestigious competition), this equals a \$12,500 take for the host, minus the small amount they'll spend on administering the competition, advertising, and hosting an opening night reception. It's a virtual no-brainer: if you're a gallery that is not selling much art, selling exhibition space to eager entrants makes sense in difficult times.

As there are very few fee-less competitions (and those generally come with glaring caveats; see *Rights Grabbing?* below), I encourage photographers to carefully investigate juried exhibitions/competitions before submitting fees and shipping work.

I enter more than a handful each year; what is my criteria for entry?

**Prestige:** how well known is the competition? Is the work of consistently high caliber? Is it a respected competition?;

**Longevity:** has the competition been in existence for a while or is brand new? Brand new competitions are less likely to be helpful to your resume and career;

**Jurors:** a well respected juror likely indicates a higher caliber competition, and being successfully juried by a well-respected juror can do wonders for your

career and ego (not to mention a nice addition to your resume);

**Exposure:** is the exhibition held in a respected space? Will your work be seen by many or few? Will the work be seen by buyers or by lookie-loo's who enjoy the free wine and cheese? Is the exhibition held in Los Angeles or New York, or is it being held in Bismarck or Topeka? (no offense intended to the latter cities, but exhibition location matters);

**Fees:** are the entry fees reasonable? Are the entry fees consistent with the caliber of the exhibition? Do the entry fees cover only ONE entry or multiple entries?;

**Rights Grabbing?:** you'd be amazed at just how ballsy the Terms & Conditions can be for some competitions:

*"By entering the Contest, each contestant grants to Sponsor an exclusive, royalty-free and irrevocable right and license to publish, print, edit or otherwise use the contestant's submitted entry, in whole or in part, for any purpose and in any manner or media (including, without limitation, the Internet) throughout the world in perpetuity, and to license others to do so, all without limitation or further compensation."*

Please read the Terms & Conditions carefully, and if the sponsor/host plans to use your image forever without paying you, you may want to reconsider that competition. Photographer attorney Carolyn E. Wright has been covering this issue on her blog; you may want to start following it.

Here are a few of the competitions that I enter each year:

**B&W Magazine:** hosts both a *Single Image Contest* and a *Portfolio Contest*

**Art of Photography Show,** San Diego, CA

**International Photography Awards**

**Black & White Spider Awards**

**Prix de la Photographie, Paris (Px3)**

**The Center for Fine Art Photography:** hosts a number of juried exhibitions each year.



If I am considering entering a competition that I have not previously, I research the juror (their background; their taste in photographs; and the type of photographs that they have previously awarded) and view winning entries from past years. If I am nature photographer working in exclusively in color, there is little chance that I'll be accepted into a competition that typically awards b/w photography with an emphasis on social commentary. Save your money and time, and find the competitions and jurors that are a better fit for your work.

*Michael E. Gordon is an award-winning fine art landscape photographer and respected digital print maker. Michael leads photographic workshops and tours and provides printing services and custom printer/paper profiles for photographers. He lives in Southern California with his wife Shauna and their menagerie of rescued animals.*