Guide for Judges, Chairs and Entrants of PSA-recognized Exhibitions with Photojournalism sections, and for all other Photojournalism competition and activities in the PJ Division

Photojournalism Division—effective Jan 1, 2024

This guide should be reviewed by exhibition chairs, PJ section chairs, directors of PJ activities and all PJ judges before any PJ images are judged.

Purpose of the Definition

The PSA Photojournalism Division (PJD) is reality-based, like the PSA Photo Travel and Nature Divisions. The objective of PSA Photojournalism (PJ) is to capture spontaneous moments in our world to make informative images with impact. The purpose of the PJ definition is to guide photojournalism entrants towards showing life as it is, rather than how they would like it to be, to avoid deceiving the viewer and to produce truthful depictions of their observations. This illustrated guide is intended to help everyone gain a clearer understanding of the definition, and to guide judges to accept appropriate PJ images that succeed without violating the definition.

Below are the individual sections of the PJ definition (in red), illustrated with examples to explain each part of the definition and some examples of images that do not meet the definition.

Photojournalism entries are images with informative content

and emotional impact,
reflecting the human presence in our world.

The journalistic (story-telling) value of the image receives priority over pictorial quality.

Images that misrepresent the truth, such as those from events or activities arranged specifically for photography, or of subjects directed or hired for photography, are not eligible.

The image to the left is an honest depiction of a group of people making photographs. The one below is an attempt to deceive the viewer into believing that it was a found moment that was happening spontaneously.

(two examples courtesy of Tom Tauber, APSA, MPSA)
Processing or editing must be limited to making the image look as close to the original scene as possible.

Except that conversion to grayscale monochrome is allowed.

In addition, when Human Interest is SPECIFIED, those images should depict a person or persons in an interactive, emotional or unusual situation,

EXCLUDING sports action.
In summary, the PJ definition:

Photojournalism entries are:

- images with informative content and emotional impact
- reflecting the human presence in our world.
- The journalistic (story-telling) value of the image receives priority over pictorial quality.
- Images that misrepresent the truth, such as those from events or activities arranged specifically for photography, or of subjects directed or hired for photography, are not eligible.

In addition, when Human Interest is specified, those images should depict a person or persons in an interactive, emotional or unusual situation, excluding sports action.

Note: The following editing guidelines were developed by PSA to apply to all entries in photo-travel, photojournalism and nature competition.

- Processing or editing must be limited to making the image look as close to the original scene as possible, except that conversion to grayscale monochrome is allowed.

Allowed editing techniques:
- Cropping, straightening and perspective correction.
- Removal or correction of elements added by the camera or lens, such as dust spots, noise, chromatic aberration and lens distortion.
- Global and selective adjustments such as brightness, hue, saturation and contrast to restore the appearance of the original scene.
- Complete conversion of color images to grayscale monochrome.
- Blending of multiple images of the same subject and combining them in camera or with software (exposure blending or focus stacking);
- Image stitching – combining multiple images with overlapping fields of view that are taken consecutively (panoramas);

Editing techniques that are not allowed:
- Removing, adding to, moving or changing any part of an image, except for cropping and straightening.
- Adding a vignette during processing.
- Blurring parts of the image during processing to hide elements in the original scene.
- Darkening parts of the image during processing to hide elements in the original scene.
- All conversions other than to complete grayscale monochrome.
- Conversion of parts of an image to monochrome, or partial toning, desaturation or over-saturation of color

Note to Entrants:
Entrants to a PJ competition should ask themselves if the image is a true representation that was not influenced by them, or by anyone on their behalf, and was not changed in post processing to reflect anything inaccurately. Otherwise, it should be entered only in Projected Image Division or Pictorial Print Division exhibitions or competitions.

Note to Judges:
Judges of PJ exhibitions should ask themselves if the image meets every aspect of the definition in their opinion. If not, it should be scored lower, regardless of the photographic merit. However, disqualification (DQ) is reserved for a violation that is unambiguous, and not based on opinion.

For more information, contact the PJD Exhibition Standards Director at pjd-esd@psa-photo.org or PJD Image Evaluation at https://psa-photo.org/page/mo-individual-image-evaluation

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