

Newsletter of the Hermanus Photographic Society

October 2023

## Oh no, our scores are so low!

What can  
we do  
when  
we think  
judging is  
too strict?



*The top-scoring image at our club's October monthly meeting – "Turbine sentinel" by Phil Sturgess. The score was "only" 26/30.*

The generally low scores for our members' entries in the October monthly evaluation of images was quite a talking point at our club meeting on Wednesday the 4<sup>th</sup>.

Maybe we were particularly gloomy and negative because of the disruptions to roads, electricity and water supply, and the cancellation of social events, all caused by the worst rainstorm in 200 years that had hit Hermanus about ten days before the meeting.

But the scores were really low.

For example, only 8 images received a score of 24/30 (a Gold on senior levels) or higher. That is 18% of the total of 44 images entered, which is less than half the average of 48% for the previous six monthly meetings.

The top-scoring October image did receive a decent 26/30. But that was still lower than any top score of the previous six months.

So what should we make of that?

A search on the internet confirms that inconsistent scoring is not a rare phenomenon in the evaluation of images, and that judges are aware of it.

“Many judges stress the subjective nature of photography as art,” writes one Bill Katzenstein on [iconicphoto.com](http://iconicphoto.com). “Some admit to certain biases in assessing photographs, such as a dislike of utterly abstract, digitally conceived imagery.”

Being a judge for camera clubs is a humbling experience, writes JM Lobert on [blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com), “as everyone in the audience is expecting you to give them useful feedback, a consistent score and you are expected to be an expert of sorts, be it for bird, nature, creative, portrait, street, journalistic or any speciality kind of photography”.



*An example of how scoring can vary, even on the high level of photographic salons. This image, "Nyala youngster", was entered for 16 different salons over a period of more than a year. Half the expert judging panels gave it a score of less than 30/45. Eventually it was accepted for exhibition by three salons, with scores of 37, 35 and 34.*

All judges have their own artistic focus and cannot possibly be an expert at every specialty that the

hobby provides, he argues. “On top of that, all judges have their personal likes and dislikes, which makes any feedback ultimately not objective and in many cases highly subjective.

“Camera clubs (at least in the US) tend to have that notion that nobody should be assigned a low score as to not discourage them to enter competitions. This is truly misguided, in my opinion.

“Nobody is served when everyone is considered ‘average’ or everyone is ‘good’; it is not reality. If you don't want low scores to be assigned, why do you have them in your scale?”

The importance of scores is underlined by Donna Brok of the Northern American Nature Photography Association, on its website: “The job of a

photography judge is, of course, to provide expert feedback. The first and most basic level of feedback is scoring, based on the judge's analysis of the work."

But scoring is only one part of feedback: "Ideally, the judge will also give a second level of feedback with helpful advice for improvement or explanations of why an image was or was not successful."

None of these commentators really touches on the issue of general low scoring by a particular judge. A contributing factor could be that a judge who usually scores out of a total of 15, as is the most common scale in South Africa, has some difficulty in adjusting to a scale where the maximum is 30, which is used by our club and some others in the Western Cape.

We may have been spoilt by our club committee's success in finding judges from all over the country for our monthly evaluations during the past year. Generally their contribution of a variety of viewpoints, expertise and critique is like a fresh breeze. But even before the low October scores, their scoring has varied by as much as 18 percentage points.

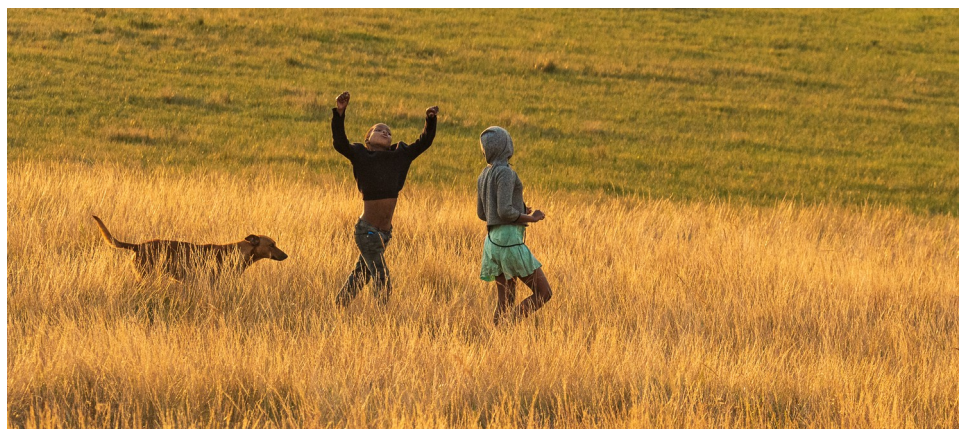
Even in the case of salons, where panels of three experts are appointed to judge each entry in order to improve consistency, the scores for a specific image can vary substantially from salon to salon. (See the example of the Nyala image above.)

Maybe we should just accept that that's life – like variations in annual rainfall and in the occurrence of heavy rainstorms all over the world.

**Charles Naudé**

## Breakthrough by Hermies members

Two members of Hermies, the camera club of Hermanus High School, have started entering images for the monthly competition for individual members of the Photographic Society of South Africa (PSSA).



*"Why walk when you can dance" by Judy Armstrong, our club's junior image of the month of October, which was entered for the monthly junior club competition organized by the PSSA. Our club's entry for the senior competition is the one by Phil Sturgess on page one.*





They entered their first images for the September competition – “Colour blind” (left, 28/45) by Mine Prodehl, and “Cape spurfowl” (right, 26/45) by Margot Scheepers.



The two are competing there with senior and junior photographers from all over the country, including David Wilson from our club.

In the monthly senior competition our club is lying 6<sup>th</sup> in the Western Cape and 38<sup>th</sup> nationally, and in the junior competition 7<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>.



*“Madonna and child on a windy day” by Jane McMorran, our entry for the September club competition for junior members, which received a score of 30/45.*



*“Dutch iris” by Daniel Reddie, club image of the month of September, and our entry for the PSSA’s club competition for senior members, where it was also awarded a score of 30/45.*

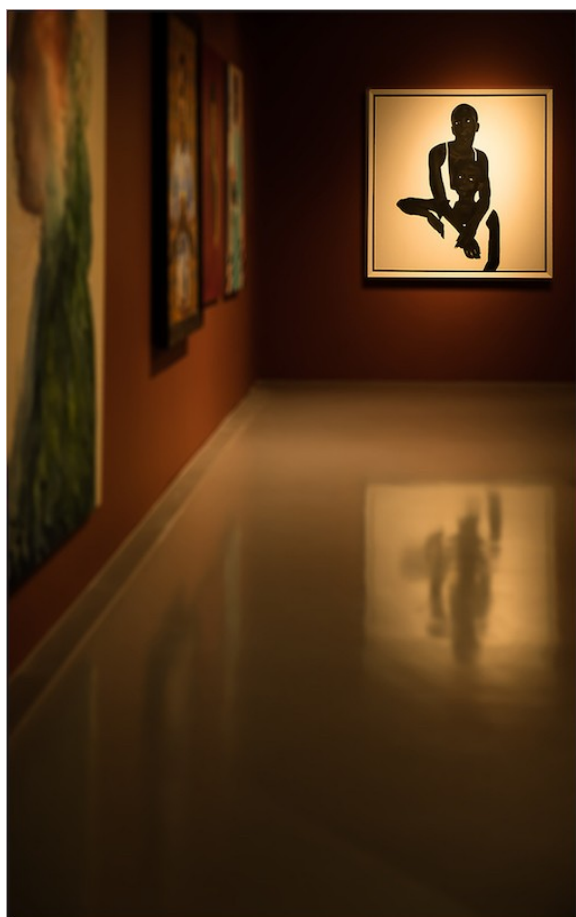
## Western Cape stars shine at Congress

Our club was the top performer from the Western Cape in the senior section of the annual national interclub competition of the PSSA (Photographic Society of South Africa), for photographers on 4-Star level or higher.

We ended 1<sup>st</sup> among the seven participating Western Cape clubs and 12<sup>th</sup> nationally – the only Western Cape club in the national top 20. Cape Town was 2<sup>nd</sup> regionally and 23<sup>rd</sup> nationally, and Swartland 3<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>.

Our combined score of juniors and seniors placed us 3<sup>rd</sup> regionally, behind Cape Town and Swartland, and 18<sup>th</sup> nationally. In the junior section, for 3-Star level or lower, we ended 5<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The results were announced at the PSSA 2023 congress at Drakensville in the northern Drakensberg area.



Among individual stars from the Western Cape at congress were André Stipp of Swartland with “Africa on Display” (above left) and Kim Stevens of Cape Town with “Calatrava Graphics” (right) who won PSSA Gold medals for, respectively, the best colour digital image and the best print entered in a salon during the year from July 2022 to June 2023.

## Salon results of the new year

Participation by our club members in national and international salons in the new year, which began in July, has started slowly but surely.

### Midlens national salon

David Wilson – 1 image accepted for exhibition

### Maritzburg national salon

Charles Naudé – 1 Merit award and 2 acceptances



*"Dusty show-off" by Charles Naudé – certificate of merit in category Nature (no birds) of Maritzburg salon.*

### International salons

David Wilson – 4 Honourable mentions, 2 diplomas and various acceptances from various salons

## Forthcoming events

**Our November monthly meeting** will be in the Hermanus Dutch Reformed Church Hall on Wednesday the 1<sup>st</sup> at 19:00. Members may enter up to three images of their choice, and one on the Set Subject, "Urban regeneration or decay" / "Stedelike herontwikkeling of verval", all for evaluation. All submissions must be done via Photo Vault Online, and by Wednesday 25 October. All scores will count for advancement.

**The guest judge** will be Peter Hardcastle of Swartland club.

**The set subjects and judges** for the next two months are

December – An equine subject / 'n Onderwerp wat met perde te doen het (Robbie Aspeling from Sandton)

February 2024 – Reflections / Weerkaatsing

More information can be found on the club website under Club Notices.

**The First Friday Art Walk** is from 17:00 to 20:00 on the first Friday of the month. Our club print exhibition which forms part of this is at Hermanus FotoFirst.

### **Forthcoming salons**

October 21 – Westville Camera Club national digital salon

November 4 – Vanderbijlpark national digital salon and print salon

November 11 – Amber international audio-visual salon

November 18 – Sasol Highveld national digital salon

Brochures and more information on salon participation can be found on the PSSA website.

## Committee

Carina de Klerk – President/Chair

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David Wilson – Vice chair, art exhibitions and media

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Phil Sturgess – Treasurer, membership and judge co-ordinator

083 272 2022 ([hermanusphoto@gmail.com](mailto:hermanusphoto@gmail.com))

Kobus Botes – Secretary

084 941 1175 ([hermanusphoto@gmail.com](mailto:hermanusphoto@gmail.com))

Judy Armstrong – PhotoVault administrator, advancement and website

([hermanusphoto@gmail.com](mailto:hermanusphoto@gmail.com))

Daniel Reddie – Venue management and club outings

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All of them are available to assist you with your queries.

## Snapshot

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