



**National Photography Exhibit
October/November 2020
David Helfer Wells – Jurist**

When I was asked to be the juror for the Wickford Art Association's Annual Photography Exhibition, I was excited to be able to pass on to my community of over twenty years, some of my experience. As I looked through the entire set of images I noted how some of the work was derived from something that was in front of the camera. A nearly equal section of the work was clearly set up to create a narrative that existed in the author's mind. Although I am a documentary photographer in my practice, I appreciate those two divergent approaches, noting one is not better than the other.

I also noted the incredible range of ways that people used digital imaging technology and especially post-production techniques to add layers of visual meaning, such as collaging, or other techniques to create deeper, multi-layered narratives. The range of work that I saw jurying the Wickford Art Association's Annual Photography Exhibition was also a reminder of how digital imaging has brought new and different perspectives into the world of photography.

One of the downsides of digital imaging is the idea that “everything we have seen has already been photographed.” So, making a photograph that sticks out is an ever more difficult challenge. Looking for images that had something new or different guided me in viewing the work. I tried to avoid getting drawn into images that were using digital imaging techniques for their own sake. I was also struck by the relative lack of imagery involving a response to Covid-19.

Whether I'm editing a set of my own images or during a competition like this, I tend to work in waves. I'll look at the work overall. Then I will pause, and then return to look at the work, running through the entire set one last time and then start selecting the “ins, outs” and “maybes.” Then I take another break and come back to the work another day to resume my editing. Taking time between “cuts” means I bring fresh eyes to the process each time.

The imagery that I was drawn to tended to have interesting content and an additional layer. That might be the use of light or the post-production. If there is an image in the set that you look at and you think, “Oh, I've seen that before,” I encourage you to look a little harder. Look for the uniqueness of the subject, or the light or the gesture or some other element that goes beyond what you might have seen before. The way that thing is newly utilized, that is what caught my eye and elevated that particular image into the extraordinary.

One of the things that I enjoyed as I was seeing the world through the eyes of so many different photographers via this jurying process is the sheer pleasure of creating photographs. Especially

in this pandemic moment, this feeling seems to have only become more pronounced as the world has become more digital and more virtual.

When I actually was in the Wickford Art Association's gallery space to select the award winners, after doing the initial journeying online, I was reminded of the difference between looking at images online and seeing them as final matted and framed exhibition quality artwork. Some of the images that I had gravitated towards during my initial on-line review were a bit disappointing in person. On the other hand, some images that I had juried into the larger show with slight hesitation, some of those same images amazed me as final prints. Their quality and beauty exceeded my previous estimation and I appreciated them even more.

The images that I selected for the final awards were beautifully printed, perfectly matted and framed! If you are fortunate enough to see the show in person you will be able to better appreciate that fact. If you only view the final exhibition online, remember that the final printing, matting and framing made some of the difference.

The images that earned the awards ran the full gamut from being documentary derived to being controlled/posed situations all the way through to images that were collage together using the latest imaging technology. Together they exemplified the wide range of contemporary photography in all its many forms. And that is why, for me as a juror, the whole process was incredibly educational and satisfying.