



Early snow on Wyoming range

Going for My BPSA



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Greg Duncan explains
his approach to creating
his BPSA Panel.

The Challenge

When the PSA announced that they were introducing a new portfolio distinction based on a panel of images, that became an instant challenge. Whereas the acceptance-based distinctions such as PPSA and EPSA can be achieved bit by bit and failures just slow down the process, this is not the case with a panel distinction. A failing image stops the process and you need to start again. As a consequence, it is essential to understand and follow the five basic concepts of a PSA panel—theme, quality, cohesion, overview and statement.

Theme

In a portfolio, all of the images are viewed together as a unit. They must, therefore, have a common explicit theme which you are required to express in words as well as images. I have a very broad approach to photography and do not tend to specialize in any one field. With respect to producing a panel, this meant trying to find a group of images which could be viewed as all

being different aspects of the same topic. Having been on a very productive photographic trip to “The Hideout”—a large working ranch in Shell, Wyoming—I chose cowboys as my theme. This reduced the image base to a manageable set.

Quality

We have all had situations in which we have produced that “winning image,” only to find that no one else agrees. In an acceptance type distinction, no one needs to know about your catastrophic failures. But not so in a panel distinction where each image counts and therefore each image must be of the very best quality. Quality here entails both composition and technical presentation. It is strongly recommended that you obtain reliable second opinions. In this situation, I chose not to ask any particular person, but rather to see what the international judges had felt. That narrowed the scope down to 19 cowboy-based images, each of which had obtained at least two international acceptances.

Cohesion

It is not sufficient that the images are all on the same theme and all of good quality. They must also demonstrate cohesion with respect to colour balance, exposure, size, format and approach. That does not mean they all need to be the same but rather that they work together. This excluded some of my favourite and successful images because although fine in their own right, they did not work with the others. For example, when you compare the image *Bringing Them Home* with the set that I did choose, you can see that this picture is more about the environment than is the case with the other images. Its inclusion would have destroyed the sense of cohesion.

The Overview

The portfolio process for the BPSA distinction states that you need ten images—in fact you will have eleven. The Overview showing thumbnails of all of the submitted images is not merely a “hanging plan” but is assessed and judged on its own at the beginning as a separate image. It is therefore very important that the Overview image is well structured and laid out. This is particularly important when submitting a digital application since it is the only time the judges will see the full set of images together and be able to assess the balance and cohesiveness of the submission as one unit.

Although my actual digital images did not all have identical dimensions, I made sure that the images in the Overview were positioned so that they were perfectly balanced and aligned. You will notice that the background is dark (36%) but not black—black would make the images appear to float

in space whereas white would be too bright and overpower the thumbnails. Attention to detail at this point is critical as the Overview sets the tone for the subsequent examination of the individual images.

Statement

In an international salon, the pictures must speak for themselves. Sometimes the title may be read out but basically each image stands alone and rises or falls on its own as an image. Not so with a panel. Part of the panel submission is a statement about your reason for seeing the panel as a cohesive group and what you are trying to say with your images. The statement should not contain



Horse in a winter blizzard



Wet cold snow



Keeping up



The cowboy's dog

details about the technical aspects of the pictures or the processes involved. You should see your statement as a verbal précis—a marketing enticer to have the judges want to view your images knowing what you are trying to achieve.

In my statement, I chose a rather unusual approach of including three stanzas from a poem I wrote about the cowboys and their work (*With the Sun on my Back—A Cowboy's Tale*). The pictures were arranged so that each line of the Overview image was associated with a specific verse.

The first stanza and line of images emphasized snow.

*When the wind starts to blow
And there's blizzard and snow
And the cattle all need to be found
In spite of the cold*



Me, my dog and my shadow

*We do what we're told
Though the snow is thick on the ground*

The second verse and line of the Overview included the cowboy's all-important dog.

*With a dog and a horse
I follow the course
That leads to the mountains and streams
For to be on my own
Yet not be alone
Is enough to fill up my dreams*

The final verse:

*At the end of the day
When the sun's going away
And I'm warming my hands by the fire
I haven't a care
For I'll go anywhere
As a cowboy looking for hire*

The close-up of the cowboy in the bottom line provided a strong focal point tying both the statement and the images into a cohesive unit and showing the cowboy to be a person rather than an object.



Riding high



Last lasso of the day



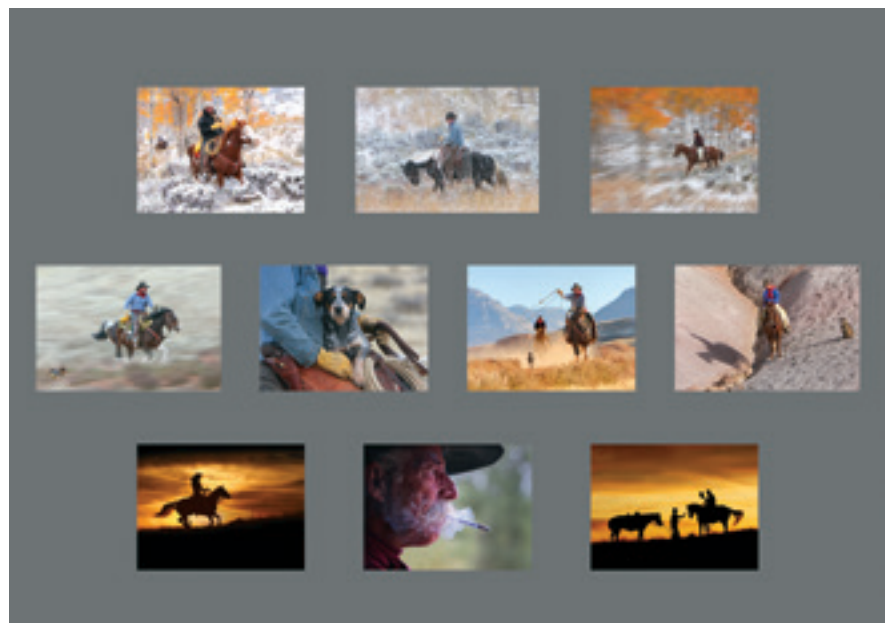
Sunset rendezvous

The Wait

And after all this preparation, you wait. You wait hoping you will receive that welcome email using your name followed by BPSA and it all becomes worthwhile. This then means planning all over again for the next level. ■



I like a good smoke



Overview