



Distinctive Image

featuring...

Susan Cowles, APSA, EPSA
California

By
Sue Marrugi



Latrice—Curly Hair, Black Hat

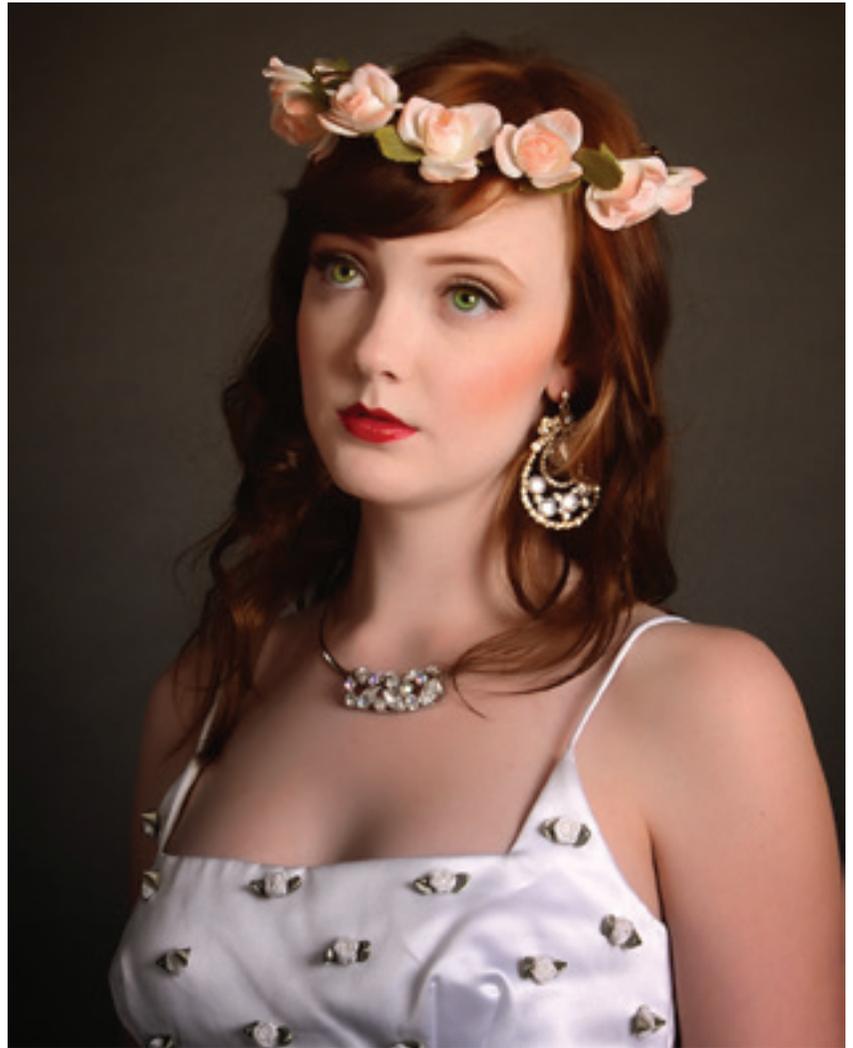
Susan Cowles, APSA, EPSA, is a wonderful choice for the Distinguished Image Artist feature in this issue. Susan lives in Corona, California with her husband, Larry Cowles, FPSA, GMPSA. Susan's portraits have been in competitions worldwide, earning her over 250 awards, which include approximately 100 Gold Medals. She has created a distinctive portrait style that is easily recognizable. Her portraits go beyond the usual. Susan strives for

perfection and views her work as fine art, utilizing a combination of studio lighting, makeup, costuming and post-processing to create strikingly beautiful portraits. She has been professionally trained in applying makeup and has a large inventory of costumes and jewelry that she uses for her shoots. Susan draws from pools of models in her area for her subjects. They are eager to receive finished prints from the shoot as their compensation.



Jasmeet with Golden Jewelry, B+W

Susan joined PSA in January of 2007 as a brand new, enthusiastic photographer. Along with taking courses at the Tri-Community Photo School to develop her skills, she became very active in both PSA volunteer positions and competitions, earning the Early Achievement Award in 2009. Her Honors and Distinctions include APSA, which was granted in 2014, PPSA, earned in 2009 and EPSA, earned in 2014. In addition she has Star Ratings of a Galaxy 6 in the Projected Image Division (PID), one star in the Nature Division (ND) and two stars in Small Color Prints in the Pictorial Print Division (PPD). She is a member of PSA's Roundup Chapter and the Exploring Light Camera Club for which she has served as President since the club's founding about five years ago. Her club is part of the Southern California Council of Camera Clubs (S4C) where she has earned a DFS4C.



Kacie—Flowers in Her Hair

Susan has an Associate Degree of Applied Science and is a retired Registered Nurse. Portraiture, pets and hummingbirds are her favorite subjects to photograph. Her versatility and excellence have been recognized by her being listed among the top exhibitors in PID, PPD, PTD (Photo Travel Division) and ND in PSA's *Who's Who in Photography* for several years.

She has held many positions in PSA, including Chairman of the Color Projected Image Division (CPID), 2011-2012. She started the Individual Portrait Competition and still assists the Director with it. Susan got involved with PPD in 2009 and is currently PPD's 1st Vice Chairman. She also designed the 75th Anniversary gift (a lens cloth in a decorated self-contained bag) that was given to PSA members at the Yellowstone Conference.

Susan passed the PSA judging course and is on the official judges' list. She is always willing to judge and has performed this function for clubs, councils, and many international exhibitions. She is the instructor for the PSA available light course offered free to members. Those of you who attended the recent conference in Albuquerque may have had the opportunity to attend Susan's excellent program on post-processing portraits.

Any mention of products or services in this article or anywhere else in the *PSA Journal* does not constitute an endorsement or approval of those items.



Taylor Noel Perky in Red

Ashley T. Saying
Her Prayers



Photos © Susan
Cowles, APSA, EPSA



Nyaa in Flapper Hat

Artist's Statement



My love for photography started at the Baltimore PSA Conference where my husband, Larry, loaned me one of his old digital cameras. I attended the model shoot and at that moment I fell in love with portraiture. Before that, I had no idea I could take portraits as part of photography. After attending two years of adult education at Tri-Community photo school

and much practice, I am now able to teach portrait classes to camera clubs and at PSA conferences and to teach PSA's *Portraits in Available Light* online course. Doing this gives me great satisfaction and allows me to share my love of portraiture.

My goal in photography is to create a beautiful image totally from scratch. I enjoy the ability to have complete control over the process. Working in a studio is very comfortable for me. I know every inch of it and know where to place the subject to get the golden light. A goal for me is to create an image that the viewer can relate to and can enjoy the beauty of and feel that they know something about the subject. One of my greatest joys is when I can create an image that the subject is thrilled with. I just love taking an average looking girl and turning her into an amazingly beautiful model.



Belen Golden Necklace



Ashley—Red Tam on Red

Technique Statement

Portraits are made, not just taken. There is a lot of planning that goes into creating portraits. Before the model arrives, the lighting must be set-up and tested. My studio is relatively small, so I am not able to put a hair light above the model. Instead, there are two strobes against the background pointing toward the model at a 45 degree angle. These are set to approximately F4. To the right (or left) of the model, depending on which side our main light is that day, is a six-foot tall reflector. The light off the reflector should read about F5.6 and is put on the side opposite the main light. The main light is set to F8 or F9. I always use a light meter to make sure the lighting is correct.

When the model arrives, she signs a simple model release. A before picture and test target image is taken to verify that the lighting is correct. Next, I have the model try on clothes, check the fit, and select accessories and hats. Makeup application follows and is one of the most important steps in creating a top-notch portrait. Unless you have taken a makeup class, I suggest you hire a makeup artist unless you know that the model has the skills to do good looking makeup. The last step is to take one last image to see if there are any areas that have a shine and if there is enough blush, etc.

I generally start with my least favorite of the selected outfits as it takes one round for the model to relax and get used to the shooting and to learn what I am looking for. Don't forget the jewelry. Pick out jewelry that is large and bold so it can be easily seen and adds to the outfit rather than detracts from it. This pre-shoot preparation takes up to 1½ hours before the model is ready to have her pictures taken.

After the shoot, the next step is final adjusting through post-processing with photo editing software. My main tool is Photoshop® CS6 but I also use Color Efex Pro 4® filters from Nik® and Imagenomic Portraiture®. First, I remove specular highlights out of the corner of the eyes by using the patch tool. Next, remove pimples, uneven skin tones and loose hairs using the patch tool. These initial steps are an important part of the process. The spot healing, healing brushes and clone tool can also be used for achieving similar effects.

Changing the color of eyes or eye shadow and adding blush or adjusting hue and saturation can enhance an image and can be done in post-processing. These days, skin softening is important to any portrait. While this can be accomplished in Photoshop or other photo editors, one of the many skin-softening programs available that makes the job much easier, and is my favorite, is Portraiture from Imagenomics.

Since I am a PSA Mentor for Portrait Enhancement, you can ask me for help in this area by going to: <http://www.psa-photo.org/index.php?myspa-login-member-education-mentor-services-computer-portrait-enhancement>.