

SOHO PHOTO GALLERY

2005 National Photography Competition

This year's competition drew 340 entrants from 37 states. They submitted 1,700 slides for judging from which 32 images were chosen for exhibition. Soho Photo Gallery asked the juror Richard B. Woodward if he would write a statement that reflected his impressions about judging this year's competition. His statement is as follows:

When I have been asked in the past to judge a photography exhibition or prize, I have done so in coordination with other judges and invariably to reward a body of work. So it was both daunting and peculiar to organize this show by myself and to choose from among the many worthy entries only the best single images.

My inability to check my opinion with others was at first a bit scary and then thoroughly enjoyable.

As Mel Brooks says, "it's good to be the king". But I still don't believe that one photograph is the optimal way to represent artistic accomplishment. The need to create the right mix for a room means that some deserving work is excluded simply because there would otherwise be an overabundance of a particular style or subject matter. My compromise solution to this dilemma was to allow more than one image for my top three picks.

Every exhibition inevitably reflects the tastes of the person who selects the material. I was for several years editor-at-large for DoubleTake, a magazine best known for sponsoring the documentary style. Several of my choices no doubt reflect that upbringing.

But I surprised myself by gravitating strongly toward non-documentary work, although the human element still characterizes many of my selections. I did not choose many (or any?) photographs that could be called nature studies, although that category was perhaps the largest among the submissions. Next year or the year after there is bound to be a judge whose eye will be more sympathetic to that style.

It was gracious of the Soho Photo Gallery to permit me to be, however briefly, a dictator of artistic taste; but I am no less grateful to the many photographers who allowed me to rule over, "or just to look over" their work.

--Richard B. Woodward

