

ENTERING INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS

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This article deals with issues both general and specific to entering prints in International Photography Competitions. However, much of the below may also be helpful for those entering slides or digital files.

The content has been written to assist both Australian and overseas entrants. It is intended to help those who are considering, or have just started, entering international salons.

The internationals can seem pretty daunting at first but are really only time consuming rather than difficult to enter. This scenario should be familiar! Hopefully this article will provide some guidance and encouragement to those treading this path.

THE CHALLENGE (“Raising the Bar”)

If you’re already entering larger local or National competitions and regularly picking up acceptances and a number of Merits or higher, then it’s time to raise the bar! Entering international competitions is both challenging and stimulating. They will push you to improve and to further seek that which will make your image something special.

Exposure to a world full of magnificent images that come from a huge variety of cultural backgrounds and artistic approaches is incredibly enriching. The internationals will broaden your approach to photography. Regardless of your degree of personal success, you will find yourself browsing the images on the websites of the international salons and looking at award winning images in your salon catalogues.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Other than local camera clubs and State or regional organisations, many countries have a National club or organisation. These organisations may undertake various activities, and these often include providing honours recognition for achievements in National and International competitions, and administering/organizing the National component for FIAP. In the case of Australia this organisation is the Australian Photographic Society (APS).

<http://members.optushome.com.au/ausclubs/apsm.htm>

FIAP (International Federation of Photographic Art) is one of the major international organisations. To quote their website:

“FIAP is an international federation which affiliates as ordinary members, the national associations of photography. FIAP counts more than 85 national associations in the five continents and represents the benefits of nearly one million individual photographers.”

Detailed information about this organisation together with a list of all member national associations can be found on their website:

<http://www.fiap.net/>

The PSA (Photographic Society of America) is another major international organisation of which individuals may choose to become a member. Detailed information can be found on their website:

<http://www.psa-photo.org/>

Both FIAP and the PSA have a set of standards for exhibitions that choose to run under their patronage. Many salons/exhibitions will seek approvals from one or both organisations as well as that from their own National association. Successes in these salons can generally be counted towards honours and distinctions within these organisations. Details should be sought from your national organisation in the case of national or FIAP honours. PSA members should seek information directly from the PSA.

PHOTOGRAPHIC HONOURS/DISTINCTIONS

Many national organisations have an honours system that routinely recognises the photographic achievements and services rendered by their individual members.

In the case of photographic achievements, these honours/distinctions are often based upon the individual's exhibition results, ie. acceptances, and possibly awards, in national / international exhibitions. Alternatively, honours applicants may be assessed by a panel assessment on a set of submitted work. Panel assessments may also be done in conjunction with a record of the applicant's exhibition results. Specific requirements vary between nations and are often reviewed at intervals. Details of specific requirements should always be sought from your particular national organisation, and they should be rechecked for changes prior to submitting applications. Membership of other national organisations, and honours within that organisation, can be sought beyond your own national organisation.

FIAP also confer distinctions and service awards for international achievements. The initial administration of distinction applications is usually done by the affiliated national organisation for your country and then they submit it to FIAP. Other arrangements are possible, for countries that have no national FIAP affiliated body. The decision whether to confer honours is made by FIAP and, where awarded, is awarded for life (serious offences can result in cancellation).

The PSA have an honours system for international achievements. Individuals wishing to obtain PSA stars must be a member of the PSA and apply directly to the PSA. See PSA website for detailed information.

Honours/Distinctions, once conferred, entitle the photographer to appendage such honours after their name. However it should be noted that, in the case of national honours, or those relating to some specific organisations, this might only be the case whilst you remain a member of the organisation. Also some national organisations (including the PSA) will only acknowledge international acceptances obtained whilst you are a PSA member.

All entrants intending to seek Honours at some future date should retain all their catalogues from National and International Exhibitions, as the catalogue (NOT the Report Card or Acceptance label) is usually the only accepted format by which you can prove your acceptances and awards. Acceptances and awards may be accumulated over many years and there is often no time limit within which the minimum requirements for honours must be achieved (check this with your nations requirements). Hence ALL catalogues in which you have acceptances should be retained regardless of age.

FINDING THE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS

There are lots of independent competitions run by magazines, websites and various businesses or organisations. You will often come across information about these by reading photography magazines, browsing photography related websites and receiving entry information via photography clubs or photographic organisations. Once you enter these you will usually be sent the entry form for the following year and may well be posted a couple of forms for others in the same envelope.

The main competitions I will be addressing in this article are those that are approved by FIAP, the PSA or both. The internet has made these very easy to find and enter. Many National organisations maintain lists of these competitions on their websites but these lists are often incomplete.

FIAP officially maintains a website with a complete list of all the internationals to which FIAP issue approval. It is frequently updated with the latest approved salons. You will find this at:
<http://webplaza.pt.lu/suyswill/index.html>

For a list of the current year's salons in order of closing date, select the particular year under the heading "Salons sous Patronage FIAP / Salons under FIAP Patronage", "By month". The list provides exhibition information re sections offered, entry fees, relevant dates, contact address and, where available, salon email address and website. These salon websites frequently house a wealth of images in their members galleries, and galleries of winning images from past salons.

It is worth printing off the list however you should keep an eye on the site as exhibitions are constantly being added and very occasionally one is cancelled. Many of the exhibitions have websites of their own and it is often possible to get the entry forms off these sites. Others will post forms to you over email or via airmail if you write to or email them with your address details.

The PSA also maintain a list of PSA approved salons.

<http://www.psa-photo.org/>

Enter the site and head for the heading, "Exhibitions".

The PSA also provide a separate website for obtaining entry forms of salons to which they grant approval. This site houses downloadable entry forms (where available) for International exhibitions that have been approved under the rules of the Photographic Society of America. You will find this at:

<http://www.exhibitionforms.com/>

This is not a complete list but a site where Internationals with PSA approval may provide entry forms for download. Others may only provide entry forms via print and post. To find the full list go to the main PSA site noted above.

It is not uncommon to find many salons on both the FIAP and PSA lists as salons can have approvals from both organisations.

CORRESPONDENCE AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Majority of entry forms for international salons will be provided in English and the language of the host nation. If the salon has FIAP patronage then the salon entry form must be provided in one of the two official FIAP languages, English or French, after which others may be provided at the salon's discretion, German and Spanish are common.

Whilst the entry forms may have been translated into English, this does not mean that the salon organizers speak a language other than their own. Should you need to request entry forms, ask questions or make special requests regarding your entry, then it is best to type the correspondence and keep your text as direct and concise as possible. Sending a self addressed envelope or a typed address that can be cut out and adhered to an envelope is helpful for salons when entry forms are requested. Even where there is no official salon email address, it is ideal to provide yours in any correspondence as a reply may well be forwarded this way via someone on the salon committee.

A large percentage of salons will have access to someone within their team with reasonably good to excellent English however there are also many which don't. Writing an email question that only requires a point form yes/no reply will give you a better chance of a answer and is the best way to avoid misinterpretations.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

These vary from salon to salon. You need to start with the specific entry form as printing requirements, in particular, vary between the comps. Variations may be:

- a) print size - usually have a maximum size of 30x40cm or 40x50cm, some have a minimum size
- b) whether you are required to do your own printing
- c) mount size (if any)
- d) need for archival quality
- e) some sections have restrictions, eg Nature and Photojournalism, may not include manipulations that alter the truth of the image – see specific definitions
- f) definitions for other set subjects

CHOOSING IMAGES FOR ENTRY

It goes without saying that you send your best images, you are up against strong competition. Sending images that have done well at a National level is often a good guide to start. But when sending overseas, images that may be unique to your country will often perform better overseas than when they have been entered locally. It is near impossible to predict which images will do well in which country. My general rule of thumb is don't retire an image from entry unless it has been knocked back at least 3 times across different countries. Also, don't rule out a good image just because it may not have done well at Club or in national competitions. Judging tastes and priorities can vary and it is not uncommon to have certain images perform better overseas.

So how do you choose what to send? Select those images that you yourself are pleased with, along with those that have done well. Anything with obvious technical faults should be avoided; the standard is too high to send anything that clearly has a problem. Keep track of your results and consider retiring images from competition that aren't gaining acceptances.

PRINTING AND LABELING

Print at your best possible quality. I prefer to use prints from a lab but also frequently print from my A3 inkjet printer. International competitions are tough so it is to your advantage to put forward prints of A1 quality in A1 condition!

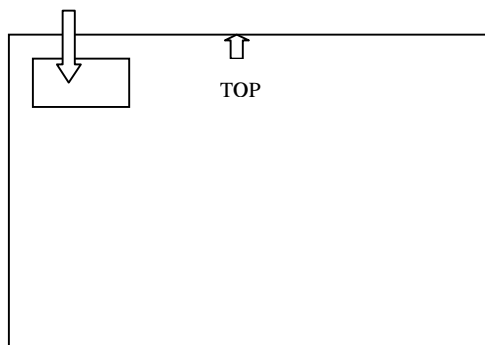
Some international competitions require that you produce your own prints regardless of whether a darkroom or inkjet printer is used. This condition of entry should be printed clearly on the entry form. The most common wording that will appear in this instance is "No trade processed prints permitted" or "No commercial printing permitted".

Gloss versus matt - this is really personal preference. I use both depending on what suits the print. Colours really come up well on gloss, as do images of shiny/reflective subject matter. Skin is not naturally shiny so I often prefer portraits on matt. Gloss paper marks more easily and hence is more vulnerable to scuffing etc in the handling and stacking process at the exhibition.

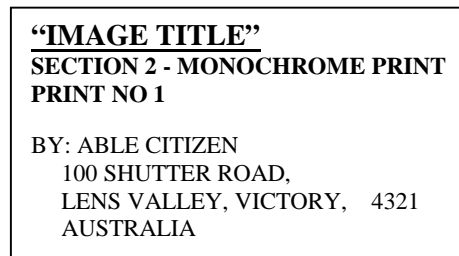
There are usually details you need to place on the rear of the print. Again the exact requirements can vary (read entry form carefully) but most commonly these are:

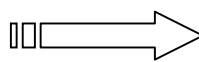
- 1) Image title
- 2) Your name and address (sometimes also email)
- 3) Name and Number of Section entered
- 4) Image number within section as per your completed entry form

Label location on rear of print



Label Detail example



 *Print should be flipped horizontally not vertically for labeling such that the image remains top edge up.*

The above details are often easiest placed on your prints using printed stickers or a very fine tipped spirit based pen, eg pens for marking slide mounts. Block capital letters should be used for all details. If archival prints are required (some comps are acquisitive, ie they purchase the winning images for a predetermined price) then these details should be written on with a soft lead pencil, eg 6B.

It is the usual convention to place these details in the top left corner on the rear of the print but again read the entry requirements.

If your image is such that it could possibly be presented incorrectly, eg sideways, you should indicate the top edge on the rear of the print. A small arrow pointing at the top edge with the word "Top" is clear across all languages.

MOUNTING IMAGES

Generally, if posting to an overseas international, images are sent unmounted, and in many cases salons will specifically request this on their entry form. The cost of international postage on images that have been mounted would be prohibitively expensive both for the entrant and the salon. Some salons ask local entrants (those from their own country) to send mounted images and will then provide mounts, for the accepted international images, for the exhibition. In some cases, salons have reusable frames in which the images are exhibited. Images below a certain size may be required to be provided on a thin backing card or paper of a particular size, but this will be specified on the entry form if applicable.

If entering an international competition in your own country, you may wish to send your images mounted (rules permitting). With the exception of some independent, Acquisitive competitions, that may ask for framed prints, **images should NOT be framed**. Nor should they be mounted on wood or aluminium, as these are bulky and can damage other people's work.

Mounting, where used, should be on thin card, eg Crescent Perfect Mount, Economount (acid free sticky backed card). Avoid the foam core board as it is too thick and becomes bulky for handling and possible framing by the exhibition. Be aware that where mounting is permitted, there is frequently a maximum thickness cited in the salon rules.

You may wish to provide a protective cover for your mounted prints. Inkjet prints, in particular, can stick to the surface of other prints if stacked or packed face to face with another prints (regardless of drying time). A good way to protect your prints (if mounted) is to have a paper cover. Place your print (face down) onto a piece of paper and cut the paper to the same size as the mount. Using a piece of double sided tape (12mm wide), put this on the back of the print at the top, then stick the paper to the tape and fold the paper over the front.

ENTRY FEES/INTERNATIONAL CURRENCY

Entry fees are usually required in cash. They usually ask for fees in US \$, Euros or IRC's (International reply coupons) . If it is your home country holding the salon then the fees will be different (different postage) and can usually be sent as a cheque of your own currency.

International cheques are expensive, both to obtain and to cash at the salon end, and most salons will either not accept them or will charge a fee to get them cashed at their end. By the time you deal with cheque fees you can easily double your entry cost, so I only do this if there is a large group of us posting together where the entry fees total a substantial amount and the cheque fees can be shared. A similar scenario applies to International funds transfers, and I have only seen the option on an entry form once. Given the entry fee was \$16 US for the two entrants combined and the fee to do a fund transfer would have cost \$25 Australian, we sent cash! In Australia, a friend and I buy US \$ together and buy for several competitions at once. We go to Thomas Cooke who charge \$7.50 for any exchange up to \$375 Aus, or 2% if over \$375, plus whatever their current exchange rate is. They have the cash there so this is usually a quick and easy cash for cash exchange. Make sure you get plenty of small denomination notes to cover the different fees. The banks charge more and often have to order the cash in from a major branch.

If there is a group of you some salons will offer a reduction in entry fees. This will be written on entry form where applicable. A group may well choose to share the fee for an international cheque to cover all the entry fees. Given the larger sum of money being sent and the ability to share this one fee it becomes more worthwhile.

International reply coupons (IRC's) are purchased from the post office. The coupons are a set cost per coupon unlike the fluctuating exchange rate, however in my experience to date these work out to be more costly. This may be different for entrants from other countries, and this is the main option for those entrants living in countries with restricted currency exchange.

Some salons are free to enter or may only require you to send return postage. Most of these work on the basis of being able to send to your country's salons on the same terms. At present none of the Australian salons accept reciprocal rights.

PACKING

If a competition requires images to be packed flat, then I pack them between very rigid pieces of cardboard that have about 3cm edge all around the prints to allow for bumps in the post. I use a non-coated paper or tissue paper and put the prints back to back alternating front to front with this tissue paper in between. This prevents any sticking or transfer of address details onto the surface of a neighbouring print. It also only uses the protective paper every second print (keeps your package weight down). Inkjet prints, in particular, are very prone to sticking when packed face on to another print regardless of how this other print was printed.

Carefully pinch the cardboard edges together, ensuring the prints don't slide around, whilst using strips of packing tape across the edges at intervals. I place my entry fees and forms etc in a separate addressed (just in case outer packaging gets torn away in the mail) envelope and attach this envelope to the outside of the cardboard folder. I apply bubble wrap around the folder both directions and place it in a postal bag.

The surface of mounted prints, when provided with covers, (see section on mounting), are well protected when packed face to face and this simplifies the packing for both you and the Exhibition workforce (exhibitions have hundreds of parcels to pack after each Exhibition).

If you have empty boxes in which you purchased your photographic paper, these can also be useful for protecting prints in the post, but again you will need to protect edges and corners. Cardboard corners used on picture frames (usually available from Framers) are good for protecting the corners of mounted prints, and the addition of metal angles from Hardware stores (those used to hold up shelves, about 50mm x 50mm); taped to the cardboard corners, will provide added protection. Alternatively if you have your unmounted prints inside a box these metal corners can be taped on to the box corners for added protection before wrapping.

Bubblewrap is ideal for padding for both national and international entries due to it's light weight in the post. It is also reusable and can be economically purchased in rolls 500mm wide. Office suppliers often stock such rolls, eg Officeworks chain in Australia.

Where entries aren't required to be sent flat, I use a **large diameter** postal tube, which I find is the best way to protect your prints. The large diameter minimizes the curl on the prints, is easier to pack and allows adequate space for the salon catalogue to be enclosed on the return journey. Use of a small

diameter tube will substantially increase the possibility of damage to your prints. In Australia the largest diameter post office tubes are very long, so I saw them in half and make a cardboard bottom to seal the end of the tube. These tubes are very durable and can often be reused a number of times.

I roll my prints facing outwards so that the prints are easier to lay out on tables for the judging (they curve up rather than curl in). I generally roll 4 prints at a time (with cotton gloves on) and have a piece of plain paper/ tissue paper rolled up with the first prints going in the tube to protect the surface of the outer print as it goes in the tube. This also helps when removing the prints from the tube. A little bit of bubblewrap or screwed up paper at the bottom and top of tube to protect the edges and restrict print movement is a good idea. Again fees and forms go in an envelope tucked down the middle of the tube after the prints are packed. I always fully address this envelope as packages can be broken or opened in customs, or tube ends lost. You should secure the tube ends with packing tape.

Some salons require form and fees to be sent separately (often worded - "under separate cover"). Given fees are usually required in cash, I will often place this cash inside a small envelope with the entry forms folded around it, so that the cash cannot be seen, then place this in the main envelope. Carbon paper and aluminium foil are other commonly used methods of concealing cash, however aluminium foil may possibly attract attention from customs or postal officers when x-rayed.

Prints are returned in your own packaging. Don't get too hopeful of receiving them back in perfect condition. Despite the care taken at the comps, they are generally handling/stacking over a 1000 prints, plus mounting/framing them for exhibition. Then there is the post each way. My gloss paper inkjets have never come back in good enough condition for me to be happy sending them out again (I'm pretty pedantic about this though). My lab prints are more durable, especially on lustre paper, and have often made a couple of trips.

POSTING

Fees are often inclusive of return postage by surface mail but not always. Check the entry form carefully for this as, sometimes, return postage needs to be added. It is not uncommon to have an extra fee if you want your prints to come back by airmail. I always send by airmail, but let them come home by surface. Airmail should see your parcel arrive within 1-3 weeks but it is good to allow at least a month, particularly if posting to countries with fewer direct flights, or less reliable postal services.

Teaming up with another entrant and posting your images packed together in the one parcel will often save you a substantial amount in postage.

As there can be a problem with loss/theft, you may wish to insure your package (In Australia you can insure for approx \$100Aus worth for an approx. cost of \$5). Alternatively you can register it in the post. There is always a risk of loss or damage in the mail regardless of where you post from or to, however some countries are considered a little higher risk than others. Among other entrants I speak to, India and South Africa seem to be countries where extra care should be taken when posting, and I would add Spain to this list. I am told packages are often stolen for their stamps, so always get the post office to use postal dockets rather than stamps. I have sent to South Africa and Spain without any problems but sent the form and fees by registered mail.

It would be lovely to send the whole package registered to all salons but in the case of parcels going O/S from Australia this means using international couriers (3-4 times the price of normal airmail).

CIRCUITS

Some salons operate as circuits whereby you send your entry to the first salon and they send it on to the next one for you.

Some of these are done such that the judging for all salons in the circuit are done in the one location across the same set of days with the different teams of judges each going through the entry and making their selections independently of the other teams. The entry form and collective fees, plus reports and catalogues are usually shared in this instance. Each judging team's selections are then exhibited in their respective location on the circuit.

Other circuits are simply arranged such that each salon will courier/deliver the images to the next salon in their group. The salon's run independently of one another such that a separate entry form and fees still need to be sent to each salon to meet your images.

Regardless of which way the salons operate you will save a significant amount in postal costs as you only post once, after which the images are then passed around between the salons.

RESULTS/REPORTS

At the conclusion of judging the salon will send you a report of your results. These are generally sent by airmail but may also be emailed to you. Salon's that have websites will often publish lists of their award winners on their website. Some will also show the acceptance lists and / or pictures of the award winning images.

The amount of detail on the report cards can vary significantly as can the scoring or judging systems. Some salons will judge in rounds whereby images are eliminated each round. Others will get each judge to award a score out of a set maximum, after which scores are tallied and the images with the highest totals are chosen for the exhibition.

Some report cards can be very detailed showing image titles along with scores etc. Others will simply be a card or slip of paper showing number's 1-4 with an "A" for acceptance or an "R" for rejection beside them. A complete list showing the titles will always be in the salon catalogue, but if you want to know which images received the acceptance or award when the report comes, it is good to have an exact record of which images were entered under which print number (eg. Photocopy the entry form).

ACCEPTANCES

Acceptances are those images that are chosen, from the entries, by the team of judges as the top group of images. This is generally the set of images that are being "accepted" for display in the exhibition. Awards are those images chosen by the judges as the best entries among the accepted images. In some salons exhibition space may be very constrained and, whilst there may still be an extensive acceptance list, those images that are displayed may be just those with awards or a sub selection from within the accepted list.

Accepted images often, but not always, receive a small acceptance card or sticker as acknowledgement of being chosen by the exhibition.

Rates of acceptance vary significantly from salon to salon. Some will accept on the basis of choosing the top x% of images entered regardless of entry numbers. Others will select to the maximum capacity of their exhibition space such that the bigger the entry, the lower the percentage accepted. As such, acceptances can vary vastly, and can be as high as 50% of entries or tougher than 10%. Regardless, gaining acceptances at international level is an achievement in itself.

CATALOGUES

Each salon that is FIAP or PSA approved must publish a catalogue. The catalogue contains a list of all the accepted authors together with the accepted image titles, awards list and salon statistics. It will also contain pictures of a number of the accepted images. This is, more often than not, the images that received awards, but this is not a requirement. Hence they may show other accepted images as selected by the salon committee.

These catalogues can be anything from a small booklet to a large book. FIAP actually have a star rating system for the quality of catalogue produced by the salon. This rating is based on the previous year's catalogue and can be found on the FIAP salon list (see web address above). These catalogues are often magnificent books to look at, enjoy and show to those who enjoy photography.

Remember, should you ever consider applying for National or international honours, it is important that you retain your salon catalogues as it is often these, rather than the reports, that are your official proof/record of your acceptances and awards. It is also important that you check the listed acceptances in the catalogue against that on your report card and contact the salon should there be any discrepancies. For honours applications you may require a signed letter on salon letterhead clarifying any acceptances missed in the catalogue. In the unlikely event of you needing such a letter, this should be done as soon as you receive your catalogue, not years later when you are applying for honours.

Catalogues can be either sent with or independently of your returned images. Many circuits have one combined catalogue. If an entry is being forwarded to another salon, then the catalogue is generally posted to you separately. Some salons that have large catalogues, long exhibition times, or receive a package involving multiple entrants, will often post the catalogue separately. Acceptance cards, if applicable, are often tucked inside the front cover of the catalogue.

HAVE A GO!

Take the plunge, and enter some overseas salons. It will push you to work constantly extending the boundaries of your abilities. Yes, there is still the roller coaster ride where you get anything from no acceptances through to awards with the same images, but overall the exposure to photography from all over the world is a driving force - it both inspires and makes you take your images beyond what you formally believed were your limits.

Best of success to you all!

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