

## *Getting a PSA qualification or what some of those letters after your name actually mean!*

**By Diana Magor EFIAP EPSA LRPS BPE2\* of Hoylake PS and L&CPU Executive Committee**

When we retired, we started seriously entering International competitions, mostly in Europe, which were FIAP sponsored and we noticed that some were also PSA, which stands for Photographic Society of America. In a moment of curiosity one day, my husband clicked on the PSA web site and discovered that we were named in their 'Who's Who in Photography' as having lots of acceptances in PSA competitions in different Divisions. We investigated and discovered that they run a star system of awards, depending on how many acceptances you acquire in PSA sponsored competitions. This meant that we were working our way towards both FIAP and PSA awards in the same competitions without even knowing it— this looked promising! We joined the PSA and immediately we were able to use past acceptances to apply for our first star in CPID.

A little explanation is needed here. There are basically seven divisions – CPID, EID, ND, PT and PJ as well as Pictorial print and 3D. The first stands for Colour Projected Image which started out as colour slides in the dim and distant past, and has morphed into digital. Usually it only accepts colour images but sometimes they allow mono so you need to read the rules carefully. EID stands for Electronic Image Division and this was initiated when digital took off. The images can be either colour or mono and often they go for the slightly weird and wonderful. ND is the Nature section and can be Open where Zoo shots, geology etc are accepted or Wildlife where they must be free specimens. When entering for either, there must be no hint of anything manmade and the judges are instructed to look for the story telling as much as the quality of the image and alterations are not permitted. PT is Photo Travel and is meant to represent the culture and characteristics of the World. A landscape could do well if it is an iconic, easily recognised place but generally speaking, pictures with people are going to do well as long as they are not close up portraits. PJ is Photo Journalism and is what I call 'People doing things'. Very often it comes from a grab shot but must still have quality and neither PT nor PJ can have been altered in any way – which is what Newspaper photographers have to abide by. The Pictorial Print Division is exactly what it says, so you are sending in either A4 or A3 prints to competitions and the 3D is a very small, specialised group. If the salon is both FIAP and PSA then you have to obey the rules for both, but there are many which are just PSA sponsored and they aren't all in the States.

So, having sorted all that out, we found we could go back through our acceptances – this calls for excellent record keeping- and allocate them into the various Divisions according to what the Exhibition was specified as. For your first star you can use old acceptances, but thereafter you have to use only from the date of joining the PSA. You need 18 acceptances with 6 different titles for the First Star and you send off a list according to the specifications which usually means including the date of the exhibition, its name, which country it was, the titles and how many you are including. We soon found that sometimes catalogues were not yet officially published so couldn't be used, or there were errors in our titles so they weren't

acceptable. It became clear that we needed to send more than the required number since the list would inevitably come back with titles crossed out for one reason or another. You can see why the record keeping is so important – to know what the division is, precisely what your titles are- and don't even think of changing them-, when the catalogue is produced and whether it was correct for your images. The lists get sent back to you so they are there when you want to apply for the next star, which requires another 18 acceptances from 12 new titles. The requirements go up in multiples of 12, so that 5\* needs 288 with 96 new titles. Beyond that we are looking at Galaxy, which is 25 new titles with three acceptances for each and this has 10 levels with increasing amounts needed. Once you have 5 stars in 1 division you can apply for the first of their Distinctions – the PPSA which stands for Proficiency and then up to EPSA (Excellence) which needs 700 acceptances. Again there are other levels above this called Master and Grandmaster which is going into the realms of thousands rather than hundreds of acceptances. There is a small fee for each application.

As you can see, it is perfectly possible to spend hundreds of Pounds/Dollars/Euros entering ever more exhibitions, although you soon find that some don't like your style of photography and some are easier to get acceptances than others. I have no intention of falling foul of the laws of libel so I shan't tell you which they are. There are those which seem inordinately expensive until you realise they are circuits so there could be 4 or 5 separate salons with different judges and the cost per image comes down. The ones which use the PSA direct entry are a doddle to enter whereas some devise their own peculiar entry system which is often long winded. Most have the same rules for entry and expect files to be at 1024x768 or nowadays 1400x1050, but there are always a few which demand odd pixel sizes or different resolutions because they are producing a printed catalogue rather than an electronic one. The most important thing if you decide to go for these awards is to keep a spread sheet with all the data from the very start and a list of images with their titles so you don't forget what you last entered them as. Obviously you can't enter one image for the same Salon year after year but it is possible to find you have a very successful image and keep entering it in different salons. I know of one entrant very close to home who has over 100 acceptances for one shot. I get bored very quickly and I am constantly entering new images so I end up with more titles than acceptances while my husband is the opposite. We are now at different levels in the Divisions, partly because there are fewer PT and PJ competitions so it is harder to rise in them although this could also be because we are not so good at them.

Finally, beware, once started on the competition treadmill, it becomes addictive as there is always another salon to enter. Have a look at the PSA website and see what you think. <http://psa-photo.org/about-psa/>. The PSA also offers other benefits such as in-house competitions, study groups, critiques of images as well as a very readable monthly Journal. We have just come back from this year's Conference held in Colorado Springs with a wealth of information gleaned from talks and demos. Meeting people we only knew from email contacts is great too. Next year's conference? – San Francisco.

*Diana Magor, November 2011*