

Judging UPY

by Tobias Friedrich

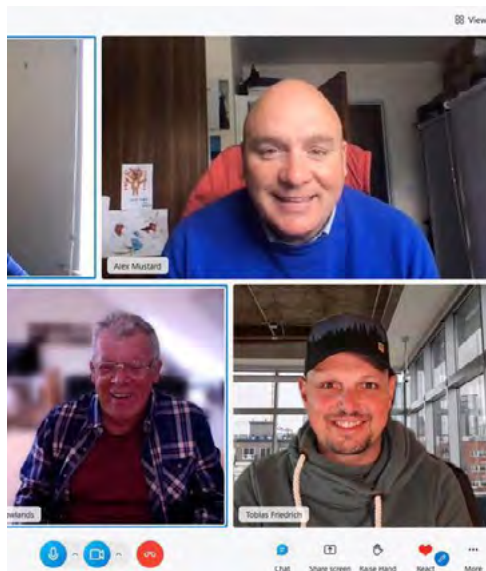
As a photographer it is not always easy to find out how good (or bad) our images really are. Our own shots are quite subjective and we tend to overrate them if a lot of effort went into creating them. The more effort we put in to an image the more we tend to like it afterwards.

Asking the opinion of other people who are usually friends or family will most likely result in a positive answer. Getting honest feedback is therefore not too easy.

I started competing in underwater photo competitions very soon after I bought my first decent camera. It was not so much about the glory but mainly to get a feeling how good my images are in comparison to other photographers. This really helped me in the beginning of my career to be more selective and to see what works and what does not.

Although I won a lot of competitions in the past there was also frustration about losing. But it never made me miserable - it was a motivation to do better next time.

One of my biggest achievements so far was the title of the UPY Underwater Photographer of the Year 2018. This award was not only



Due to covid restrictions UPY 2022 was judged remotely but for UPY 2023 we will all be together once again.

good for the heart and glory, but also brought my career a big step forward resulting in a contract with Red Bull for two coffee table books.

Judging competitions is always very subjective. In a 100 meter run the first person to reach the line is the winner - measured and compared by time. Photographs can't be measured and are only subject to the emotion and knowledge of the viewer. So it is not unusual for one image to get a good result in one competition and in another one not even have a placing. It all comes down to the opinion of a few people, how much time they will invest and how good they are skilled in underwater photography.



When Alex Mustard approached me to ask if I would be interested to step in for Martin Edge in the judging panel of UPY it was of course a huge honour for me. It was not the first competition which I had judged so I knew about the other side. But UPY was for me always known as a competition which puts a lot of effort in their selections. When I was finally judging together with Peter Rowlands and Alex Mustard I found out that this was understatement.

In most of the other competitions the judges would get a pre selection of the best images to choose from to save some time - which makes sense. But at UPY we looked at every single

image that had been entered into the competition - with the effect that there was no chance to miss out a good image under our three pairs of eyes.

Of course, the selection is quicker at the beginning and will very much slow down at the final top ten of each category. And of course we were not always in the same opinion - which is a good thing.

Everyone of us was looking in a different way on images, depending what we have seen already in the past, what we have experienced by ourselves and where we were coming from in terms of digital or analog photography. But what combined



us was the passion for underwater photography and the ability to clearly distinguish between good and superior images.

What I really liked about the judging was to be able to favour a particular image with good arguments to the other judges. With that, all three of us were able to bring in a personal note to the judging and final ranking.

Last but not least I would like to mention that it's really special that the first ten images of each category will also receive a personal comment from one of the judges. This should really make a difference not only to present the final results but also to explain why in particular we like the image - and usually the judge who favoured an image the most would also write

the comment.

It was a great experience for me to be part of the judging team and to witness how much effort and thinking in detail went into the final decisions to be able to present a result to the photographers and the public which is absolutely solid and 100%

anonymous to us. Of course these are still personal opinions, but we tried to make them as obvious as possible - for everybody.

I'm already looking forward to see all the entries for this year and to travel to London to personally judge them with Peter and Alex together - with one or two beers - after work.

Last shoutout goes to Dan and Saeed which do tremendous work behind the scenes managing all entries, databases and sponsors prizes. Thanks so much !

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www.underwaterphotographeroftheyear.com