

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

Selection has taken place for *RPS International Print 156*, and the winners announced. Allowing digital entries for the first time resulted in a large increase in submissions, making the selectors' job tougher than ever. This is one exhibition you won't want to miss!

RPS *International Print 156* (formerly known as the *International Print Exhibition*) was selected on 4 and 5 June. Described by selector Ray Spence FRPS as, "The jewel in the crown of The Society's calendar", the exhibition has a venerable history. This year marked a significant change however, with the acceptance of digital entries for the first time in addition to prints.

The Society's online exhibitions portal, initially developed for last year's *Celebrate a Summer of Sport*, was used to accept digital submissions. This greatly benefited overseas photographers, and resulted in a year on year increase in entrants of nearly 50%, with submissions from 59 countries, compared to 31 last year.

This year, 1285 photographers entered the competition, of which 1032 entered digital images and 253 entered prints. The selectors were: commercial and fine art photographer Ray Spence FRPS (Chair); Sophie Batterbury, Picture Editor of *The Independent on Sunday*; Anthony Holland Parkin, Director of Editorial Content at Getty Images; contemporary portrait photographer Kate Peters; and fine art photographer Bill Jackson.

The selectors worked well as a team. Their expertise, combined with a flexible attitude and good humour, made the task enjoyable, while the introduction of digital entries meant that a new approach was needed. "The selectors worked hard to ensure equal consideration for prints and digital work", says Ray.

Fellow selector Kate Peters immediately recognised the great responsibility involved in the task, saying she wanted to do justice to all the entrants who had taken the time to submit work.

"I went with my heart", she says, explaining her method of selection. "If something stood out as having integrity, it was in; if it provoked an emotional reaction, it was in; if it told a story or hinted at something more, it was in."

Anthony Holland Parkin said that selecting from the vast range of entries, "... could have been overwhelming, but it was made much



easier through good spirited discussion and the overall high calibre of the entries. Passion for photography was evident from the outset, from both the judges and the entrants."

Previous awardee Bill Jackson says he felt incredibly honoured to be a selector, explaining that, to ensure the judging process was fair, all entries were viewed anonymously, and were seen by every selector.

"We didn't know the gender, age, or country an entrant originated from", says Bill. "Only after all the selections and awards had been made did we find out.

"When looking at photographs, I want more than just an immediate experience. I want to be able to go back time and again, and find more in the image. All three winners give me that particular pleasure.

"I seek integrity and seriousness of intent, something more than just a good shot. There were many images that intrigued me, beguiled me, made me smile or just left me bemused, but in the end I believe the choices we made will leave you with thoughts and ideas beyond the immediacy of the image itself."

117 images were selected for the exhibition, of which 31 were submitted as prints and 86 as digital. The photographers who submitted digital images had the choice of printing them themselves, or having them

printed by sponsors Redcliffe Imaging Ltd.

Redcliffe having already printed the *Celebrate a Summer of Sport* exhibition to a very high standard on Hahnemühle Fine Art paper, we knew we would have a first class print exhibition.

After selecting the exhibition, the judges had the difficult task of selecting the three award winners. "The finalists all had one thing in common – they communicated a story or message in a very direct way", says Ray.

It is an interesting coincidence meanwhile that all three award winners come from Italy. The Gold Award goes to Antonio Busiello, a professional photographer for 15 years. His work has been featured in many publications, including *National Geographic*, *The New York Times*, and *Scuba Diving* magazine.

Speaking of his winning image, entitled *The Cullatore*, taken on a Nikon D3, Antonio says, "The 'cullatori' are men who have tremendous calluses on their shoulders from bearing the weight of huge

Above The judges. Left to right: Ray Spence FRPS, Bill Jackson, Sophie Batterbury, Anthony Holland Parkin, Kate Peters © Andy Moore LRPS.

Right Gold. *The Cullatore* © Antonio Busiello.





wooden structures year after year, at the Festival of the Lillies in Nola, a small town in southern Italy.

“The festival has attracted thousands of visitors each June since 410 AD. I was impressed by how proudly they wear their calluses, as symbols of their sacrifice and devotion to Saint Paulinus, who gave up his freedom and all his possessions to save the citizens of Nola during the Visigoth invasion.”

“*The Cullatore* struck a chord with a number of the judges”, says Anthony. “In a world obsessed with retouched perfection, Antonio’s honest image of a man proudly displaying his huge calluses challenges the viewer, and raises valid and contemporary questions about body image.”

The Under 30s Award and Silver Award go to Michele Palazzi and Mattia Vacca re-

spectively.

“Michele Palazzi’s *Gone with the Dust* shows an understanding of the power of photographic narrative”, says Bill, “and Mattia Vacca’s *S’Ardia* shows an excellent use of the subject’s relationship with the camera – a moment beautifully caught and executed.”

Documentary photographer Michele Palazzi gained a Masters degree in Photography at the Scuola Romana di Fotografia, where some students have recently received exemptions for Society Distinctions.

Since then, he has received several awards, including the Enzo Baldoni prize for his project 3.32am, about the earthquake in Abruzzo, and the Environmental Photographer of the Year Award 2013 – for the same image selected for this exhibition! Taken with a Hasselblad 500C, it was

shot in the Gobi Desert, where pollution and dust are threatening what remains of the traditional pastures.

Michele says, “The pasture, which has been the main livelihood for centuries, is disappearing, as more and more families are moving to urban areas for work, and traditional ways of life, based on ancestral nomadic herding along routes across the steppes, are undergoing a crisis.

“Those left behind are dealing with pollution, dusts that poison the vegetation, and living conditions which get more and more difficult every day. I was living with a nomad family, and took the shot during a sand storm in the desert.”

Silver award winner Mattia Vacca is an Italian photojournalist with a BA in the Science of Communication, and a MS in Cinema and



Far left Gold Under 30. Gone with the Dust. Hovorerden is playing with his sister during the sand storm © Michele Palazzi.
Left Silver. S'Ardia. Introduction to life in Barbagia, a child shoots for the first time © Mattia Vacca.

Journalism. His work has been published in major Italian daily newspapers and international magazines, and honoured with numerous awards, including a Sony World Photography Award, a Unesco Humanity Photo Award, and a Renaissance Prize.

His winning image was taken on a Nikon D200, and features S'Ardia, a race which takes place in Barbagia, Sardinia.

"Every year, in the village of Sedilo, 100 of the most daring and brave horseriders participate in a wild and unrestrained race", says Mattia. "They don't run for money or glory, but to show their devotion to Saint Constantine, a warrior saint.

"The image shows a traditional initiation rite which takes place at the end of the race – the boy shoots for the first time, into the air, to be initiated into 'adult life'. The oldest riflemen are given the honour of shooting into the air to start the race.

"The dust filled air, the smell of gunpowder and the crowd's frenzy, bring Sedilo and its inhabitants back to a time long gone."

The *RPS International Print 156* will have its inaugural showing at Shire Hall Gallery in Stafford, opening on 20 July. It will then move onto Barnsley, Banbury, and Taunton.

An A4 catalogue will accompany the exhibition, featuring all the images, and comments from the selectors and RPS President Roy Robertson HonFRPS, who presided on both selection days, and John Simpson ARPS, Exhibitions Committee Chair.

It has certainly been a successful year for the *RPS International Print*, and we are already looking to the future of this prestigious exhibition.

Says Roy, "I would like to offer my thanks to everyone who entered, and congratulations to those with work selected – with only 117 entries selected from 4905 entries, this was a considerable achievement.

"We must congratulate Italy in particular, for winning all three awards – a most remarkable achievement.

"The exhibition will continue to develop, as we look to make it more accessible to the global photographic audience."

We would like to thank the selectors, who gave their time freely, and had the difficult task of selecting from such a high calibre of entries. It is a privilege to see so many wonderful images that reflect a genuine passion for photography from across the globe.

Lesley Goode, Exhibitions Manager
John Simpson ARPS,
Exhibitions Committee Chair

info

RPS INTERNATIONAL PRINT 156

- Selected images can be viewed on the competition site at www.rps-international.org
- Click on *Competition Finalists* to see the selected images and *Award Winners' Gallery* to see the three winners
- Exhibition venues are listed on the competition by going to *About the Competition* and then *The Exhibition*
- All entrants will receive a copy of the exhibition catalogue by the end of July
- The catalogue will be available to buy from the RPS online shop from the beginning of August
- **Gold** www.bgphotographyandvideo.com
- **Silver** www.mattiavacca.it
- **U30** www.michelepalazziphotographer.com