

# “Da Hui’s Got Talent!”

## A Synopsis of Douglas Peebles’ Photo Critique on November 15, 2011

By Chalsa M. Loo, Ph.D.

Playing off of “American Idol” and “America’s Got Talent” – two television shows in which three judges critique contestants -- Hui Wa’a featured a new program event in which professional photographer and Hui member, Douglas Peebles, critiqued no more than five photo contributions per member at its November 15, 2011 event. Doug designated himself as “Simon” – normally considered the toughest of all judges! Non-professional photographers Rusty Lillico and Chalsa Loo played “Randy” and “Paula” respectively to round out the three panelists, but Doug was clearly the featured speaker.

Entries submitted anonymously formed the platform in which Hui Wa’a members learned from a Master Photographer about the components of what makes a great or better photograph. This was a great opportunity, held one month before the Hui Wa’a annual Photo Contest at the Christmas Party, for members to start selecting (or taking) photos that would raise their personal and the Hui’s collective bar of quality photographs submitted for this year and future years. Doug critiqued roughly 54 slides submitted.

Several elements can define a great photograph –a subject matter that is rare to see or very difficult to shoot, good composition, and/or capturing a moment that evokes a pleasing or significant emotional response, or any or all of the above.

**Compositional Rules and Tips:** Good composition pertains to how shapes, forms, colors, and tone interact with one another in a way that often makes a photograph look visually appealing. What compositional rules and tips might give “life” and “appeal” to a photograph? Here were some of the elements mentioned by Doug Peebles at our November presentation.

***The Rule of Thirds*** was frequently pointed to as a useful compositional tool in photography. It originated in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century among landscape artists but was adopted by photographers for its value in providing better composition. Imagine the photo frame drawn with a grid where the lines divide the scene into thirds, both horizontally and vertically.

While a novice photographer’s first inclination might be to put the horizon in the center of a photograph, the composition of the photograph can often be more dynamic and interesting if the horizon was either on the 1/3 line or the 2/3 line instead of at the middle.

So, if you are shooting a scene that includes the horizon line, try raising it to the top 1/3 line or the bottom 1/3 line rather than the mid-point. If you push the horizon to the top 1/3 line, you can focus more effectively on the contents of the foreground (assuming those contents are interesting). In this photo by Doug Peebles, the horizon is at the top 1/3, not in the middle, and the kayaker's shoes and the bottom edges of the cage are at the bottom 1/3 of the photo. This composition allows the viewer to see a foreground, mid-ground, and background, adding interest and depth of field.



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**Fill the Frame** is another compositional guideline. The photo Cynthia Ranjani took of a monk seal in which the frame was entirely filled with the seal's head and flipper is a good example of filling the frame. Photographed by with a telephoto lens, filling the frame can give maximum impact, especially when there are unwanted or distracting backgrounds.

A photographic composition of a competitive kayaking event, for example, might capture the moment or scene in a way that recreates the emotions, excitement, or adrenalin of that moment. Capturing the splashing surf or swirling ocean water, the expressions of excitement laced with confusion or joy on a kayaker's face can make for a great photograph. This impact can be enhanced where the photographer focuses tightly on the kayaker's actions, filling the frame with only that which is essential to convey that feeling or experience.

**Clear Focus on Subject Matter** was another element described by Doug. If a photograph seems to have a collection of disparate persons or objects without a clear sense of what the photograph is about or where the focus is, or if there are extraneous people or objects, the purpose is more unclear or the composition not as strong. This can be sometimes reflected, noted Doug, when a viewer says or thinks: "I'm not sure what this photo is about."

Another aspect to attend to is the direction in which a person(s) in a photo are looking. If the person is looking to the left and is positioned in the middle of the frame, and it is unclear what the person is looking at, you might want to consider a different angle or composition. Otherwise, the viewer's eye will go right off the frame. The viewer will be left with the query: "What is this person looking at?"

**Frame Within a Frame.** This is a technique in which the photographer shoots a scene where some object(s) frame part of the subject matter, which is often centered in the photograph. Frame within a frame can often give the photograph more depth of field or focus greater importance on the subject matter, which is often centered in the photograph. Frame within a frame can often give the photograph more depth of field or focus greater importance on the subject matter. In these two photographs by Doug Peebles, this element is illustrated.



In the first photo, a frame within a frame is created by the window of a kayak and also by the yellow kayak itself.

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In this second photo, a frame within a frame is created by the contours of a dark cave, giving a sense of depth.



*Consider composing shots with a foreground, mid-ground, and background.* This can better project depth of field, if this is what you are seeking to capture. Also, think about shooting things *on the diagonal*, Doug advised. In short, think in different dimensions than the usual and use the dimension or angle that creates the best depiction of the subject matter.

This is just the beginning of what was, and can continue to be, an incredibly great opportunity of photographic learning for Hui Wa’a members. Thank you, Doug, for sharing your knowledge, skill, and insight with us! Hopefully members can use the tips presented in Doug’s talk, with slides offered by members, to improve our photography, to select the best of those photographs you have taken in the last year for future contests, and to make us better judges of photographs that are entered.

So... “Got” or “No got” talent?

*Try Shooting on the Vertical, not just on the Horizontal.* Doug also encouraged photographers to not restrict themselves to horizontal shots but to *consider taking vertical shots, where you hold your camera 90 degrees one-way or the other. Vertical shots can convey greater depth of field and can capture certain subjects much more effectively than shooting on the horizontal.*

This photo by Doug demonstrates both the Rule of Thirds (the horizon is on the top 1/3 horizontal line, not in the middle) as well as the element of Shooting on the Vertical, which allows the viewer to see the boats and mountains in the background, with two kayakers in bright colors in the foreground near the bottom 1/3 of the photo.



"Note: No photo that might be entered in the 2011 Christmas Party Photo Contest were included in this article, as entries in the contest are anonymous. Photos in this article are not ones that would be entered and therefore the photographers are identified. "