

BWEA PHOTO COMPETITION 2008

We have a winner!

While visitors to the Christmas Connect event filled the stately dining room on the first floor of the Institute of Civil Engineers in London, the serious business of judging BWEA's 2008 Photo Competition started in the McKenzie room in the basement. Nick Medic reports on the intense process of choosing the winner.

As the catering trolley wheeled in sandwiches, tea and coffee for what turned out to be a long evening of careful deliberations, the three judges started flicking through the 175 photographs entered into the competition.

The competition was advertised to BWEA members and open to all photographers under the condition that images show a wind, wave or tidal energy project in the UK. Entries were limited to five per person and given numbers in sequential order as they came in, so that the contest remained anonymous. The entries ranged from images documenting construction, to group shots at wind farms, to fashion photography and portraits.

The judging panel comprised of three professional photographers of many years standing, whose different occupations within the business brought different perspectives on what makes a winning image.

The judging panel for BWEA's 2008 photo competition decided that 'Lynn the Cow' supplied by Sara Ragan, PR and Communications Manager with TNEI Services Ltd, was a worthy first prize winner.

Second prize went to Andrew Harmsworth, of the The Leys School in Cambridge and the third prize to the image supplied by Alan O'Neil of Charles Hodge Photography and Video Services.

Sara Ragan said: "We commissioned Sasa Savic, a Newcastle on Tyne based photographer to produce some images for us about two years ago. We wanted them to be quirky and engaging – which is exactly what Lynn the cow provided. TNEI is an energy consultancy and we always try to get strong visual images of the diverse range of renewable energy and power projects we are working on – the aim is to bring the projects to life!"

The judges thought that "the winning image admirably fulfils the brief of the competition in showing how renewable energy installations can work within a natural environment." They have also praised the colour, composition and framing of the winning photograph.

1st prize

The winning photograph supplied by Sarah Ragan, TNEI Services



THE JUDGES

Our judges were selected to the panel due to their experience and excellence in the field of photography. Annalee Mather, the Deputy Features Picture Editor at the Independent, chooses images to accompany stories in a busy news room of a national daily newspaper. Sherry Cutler, a Lecturer in Photography at the City and Islington College, agreed to add to the panel an academic perspective and experience in working to get the best out of budding photographers; while Carlos Reyes-Manzo of the Andes Picture Agency came to the table wearing both his hats on (figuratively speaking): that of a picture agency owner and documentary photographer.

Giving a brief introduction to the judges on the work done by the BWEA, I also summed up the competition rules: open to everyone sending an image of a wind, wave and tidal project in the UK with the aim of showing how these have integrated within a landscape or seascape, or a local community. I was also at hand to answer questions as the three judges settled in for the first run through of all the images entered.

As the many marine device, hilltop and offshore turbine flashed across the screen in front of them, the question was raised whether to someone from outside the sector all the images looked a bit 'samey'. The answer was: 'not at all'. As the judges explained, looking from a standpoint of a professional photographer the images varied in terms of quality of composition, contrast, perspective, balance of colour, not to mention innumerable differences in 'excitement', 'narrative' and ability to 'grab attention'.

CHOOSING THE SHORTLIST

Around 8pm, an hour after the judging started, the panellists took a short break to take in some of the busy networking atmosphere in the main hall, by then the Connect event was in full swing, but they retreated soon after downstairs. There was a lot of work to be done and the first step was to choose a shortlist of between 10 and 12 images, which could then yield the winner and the runners up. **RealPower** left them to their job coming back an hour later – and entered an atmosphere of intense concentration and an occasional quiet remark in photo-speak regarding crop, blur and touch up.

It was apparent that the panel had by this time divided according to qualities which each judge was expecting from an image. Reyes-Manzo emphasised that he liked to see an intimation of movement, of things being captured as they happened. For instance, a good turbine shot was for him one which arrested the image by longer exposition times so that the blades blurred as they moved. He also proved to be the most enthusiastic supporter of slightly quirky and experimental images.

Cutler stood up for values of the pure untouched image, which demonstrated a clear eye, quick finger, and skill and precision on behalf of the photographer – in other words, of an image untainted by the dreaded Photoshop. Mather, meanwhile, phrased her judgements in terms of opportunities which the photographer was able to capitalise on, and how well he managed to show what was going on in the picture.

It looked for an instant the evening might descend into one of those interminable Turner or Booker Prize scenarios, with judges outvoting one another before reaching an 11th hour compromise – literally, as we had to be out of the room by 11. Yet, it seems that there are some objective criteria in judging photographs: the shortlists drawn by each of the panellists were remarkably similar and indicated a consensus could be reached soon on the winners.

WE HAVE A WINNER

At this point, I also provided some additional explanations as to what the photographs showed, mainly indicating scale and purpose. It is said that a picture is worth a 1000 words, but we are yet to see the death of the caption – and for a good reason.

Another brief pause followed as the judges pushed away the festive claret and asked for coffee. It was time to have a look at the shortlist with a clear head. The shortlisted entries went into a separate folder and as they came up time and again on screen a few proved to be clear favourites. The distinct feeling at this point was that, though images with clear abstract lines solicited much admiration, all three judges preferred pictures showing how technology

THE SHORTLIST



Paul Anderson



Helen Barnes, BWEA



Tony Edwards of Siemens



Mike Brookes - Roper



Simon Clarke of Eyebox



Hugo House, Good Energy





3rd prize

Alan O'Neil of Charles Hodge Photography and Video Services

interacts with the world around it. Or rather, how our pursuit of technological achievement should be put in perspective of the importance of the living world.

The photograph that eventually won by acclamation and graces the front cover of this issue (as part of the prize) was supplied by Sara Ragan, PR and Communications Manager of TNEI Services. Explaining the choice of 'Lynn the Cow', as the photograph affectionately came to be known amongst the judges, Mather said: "The composition of the photograph draws you in. It is a very natural looking image, nicely framed, that doesn't seem too worked on. The colours work very well as does the way the turbine sits in the composition. It also admirably fulfils the brief of the competition in showing how renewable energy installations can work within a natural environment."

Sara Ragan speaking on behalf of competition winner TNEI said: "We have specially commissioned this image and we are delighted it won. The Newcastle based photographer Sasa Savic was sent a brief to get some quirky and engaging photographs. He took a shot of 'Lynn the Cow' around two years ago. TNEI is an energy consultancy and images are very important in what we do. We use them extensively in communicating with clients and bringing our projects to life."

Second prize went to Andrew Harmsworth of The Leys School in Cambridge and third prize was supplied by Alan O'Neil of Charles Hodge Photography and Video Services.

WRAPPING UP FOR THE DAY

The hard business of judging over, it was time to reflect on the work done. I took the liberty of drawing attention to an entry that I thought

deserved special mention. But the judges were firm in their opinion. Andrew Harmsworth's entry won recognition as it shows the children moving towards the turbine, which is also our energy future. It shows a generation for whom renewable energy will simply be a fact of life, sitting in the background.

The third prize, with its Sistine Chapel ceiling references (as I saw it), showing a hand reaching out towards a long turbine blade was singled out for clarity of composition and sense of movement. We also glanced again on the shortlist which BWEA

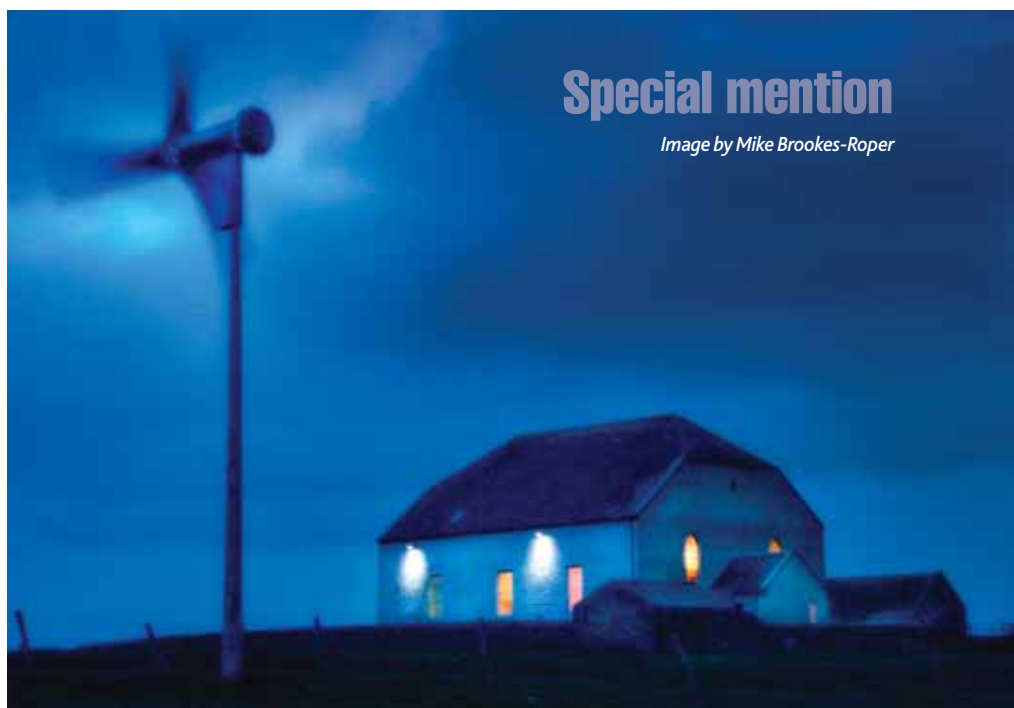
plans to make available for viewing on the Embrace the Revolution web site. I couldn't resist holding forth on the significance of some of the photographs, which might not be immediately obvious to industry outsiders, explaining in greater detail what was going on in each. This competition once more brought home, after seeing similar images many times before, the sheer wonder and the ingenuity of these 21st century machines.

Thinking of the competition and the intense judging process I was reminded of titles such as 'How to look at photographs' and 'On Photography'. I realised that this immediate, yet complex art form, like any other is open to interpretation and inspires a sense of mystery and beauty. At BWEA we are already looking forward to next year and a bigger competition advertised to a wider audience, with different categories. The many stunning images we have received this time gave us a new perspective on our sector and a wish to do it all again next year. How to look at photographs? Carefully, with appreciation for the art of the snapper.

As it turned out, two of Mike Brookes-Roper's images were shortlisted by the judges, but the one below which did not make it to the shortlist, in my opinion, deserves special mention.

There is something very immediate in the juxtaposition of the whirling turbine and the brightly lit building. You could almost sense that this very turbine provides electricity to the house and powers the lights. It is a very self contained photograph with a clever narrative. It seems to say that the gathering clouds and the darkness can not dim this radiant little house – in fact, the stormier it is, the brighter and cosier the house will be.

The colours also work well with the white to orange light standing in contrast to the darker hues of the clouds and the hills.



Special mention

Image by Mike Brookes-Roper