

BLACK & WHITE SPIDER AWARDS

By Alice B. Miller

"Spectacular selection. Almost too difficult to select my favorites." That was my reaction as the 2008 Black and White Spider Awards winners were revealed live online this past October. As a juror in 2005 and 2006, I found the 2008 competition the most diverse and bountiful collection yet. I watched with awe as each photo category filled my MacBook Pro screen, led by the top winners, honorable mentions and nominees.

Months prior to the Winners Show, almost 7000 uploaded photographs from hundreds of world-class and up-and-coming photographers were judged by an international panel of curators, auctioneers, editors and dealers of black-and-white photography, including executives from Sotheby's, VII, Tate Gallery, The Armory Show, *Communication Arts*, *Photo District News*, Fratelli Alinari and Heffel Fine Arts. In the online voting galleries, film and digital entries were exhibited anonymously by 12 theme categories, under professional or amateur, and were evaluated on artistic merit, originality, subject and style.

The number of people logging on to watch the live winners ceremony has grown each year. "In 2005, we had a live audience of 1800 viewers. By 2007, we had over 10,000 viewers. This was really a benchmark year for the live show," says Spider Awards Creative Director Basil O'Brien. "It was one of those golden moments when you feel your dreams are being realized!" The online audience for the 2008 exhibition was 15,033.

Winners Circle 2008

Last year's panel of judges awarded top honors to professional photographer Maleonn Ma, People's Republic of China, for the fine art image "Chinese Story, No. 2" (see right) which also earned first place for Photograph of the Year-Professional. Says Ma, "The image shows a woman standing close to the river's edge contemplating life, with arrows in her back. It describes a sense of pain from the Chinese culture losing its life force, with the historic revolution."

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Working the Spider's Web

Industry veterans Basil O'Brien and Michelle Hill founded the Black and White Spider Awards program in 2004. Recalls O'Brien, "At the time, the whole industry was talking about going digital. Michelle and I knew the time was right to present a photography program on the Internet that would showcase talent from an international perspective. It pushed the boundaries of digital versus print, but the industry was changing and the digital revolution made it more acceptable to judge images on a screen." With a nod to the World Wide Web, the Spider Awards were born.

Three years ago, the company became part of the World Photographic Arts Corporation (WPA), which is comprised of the Spiders Awards; International Color Awards, which holds the Photography Masters Cup competition; and book|BASIL Publishing, which produced *The World's Greatest Black and White Photography No. 1*, a collection of photographs from the

Black and White Spider Awards, featuring winning and nominated images from 2005–07. The company plans to publish *The World's Greatest Black and White Photography No. 2*, featuring 2008–09 images.

Since 2004, the program has benefited Amnesty International and Art For Disabled Children, and in 2007, launched its "International Charity Exhibition" in Brazil, a star-studded affair that drew coverage by CNN and resulted in over \$30,000 in funds raised from sales of donated prize-winning works by Spider Fellows.

Professional photographers who enter the annual Black and White Spider Awards competition are primarily commercial photographers who relish the chance to express a creative side they typically can't exercise on their daily shoots. Amateur photographers are drawn to the competition to gain confidence and make the leap into professional work.

Previous Photograph of the Year winners explain how the competition has graced their careers:

Jeff Zaruba, first place winner in 2006, says the award has given him the confidence to really push forward with his art. "I sent a direct-mail piece to a large group

Opposite: First place, Professional, Fine Art, Photograph of the Year, Maleonn Ma, China. "Chinese Story" is one of my few black-and-white works. Shot in 2005, it describes a sense of pain because Chinese culture is losing its life force. It also marks a change in my personal style from simplicity to diversity. The work is my typical style—sad and mysterious. This series led me to love black-and-white photography."

of collectors, art gallery consultants, museums and magazines; and followed up with an email campaign. I was accepted by five new galleries, participated in four gallery and museum shows, sold a number of prints and had work published." Cole Thompson, second place winner in 2006, adds, "I have gained stature and credibility in the black-and-white art world. My work has been featured in several magazines, and I have been introduced to new buyers from Europe and the United States. Being featured in publications in Poland and Romania, the countries of my ancestors, is a highlight." Happy Walters,

Above left: First place, Professional, Fashion, Dennis Mecham, USA. "Parasols 9" from a series of figurative and fashion work created in the Great Salt Lake and surrounding desert areas, explores the female form with the parasol in an austere, minimalist environment. I wanted to create images that integrate the surreal and the beautiful as a first step to a deeper, inner dimension. While typical of my work, it is my only image with a clothed figure, as I felt it would work best in this composition."

third place winner in 2005, loves the freedom photography gives him to interpret the world. "Several U.S. galleries have bought photographs from me and my website has had a great response, enabling me to travel and shoot around the world," says Walters.

How About You?

Thinking of entering the Fifth Annual Black and White Spider Awards competition? Entries will be accepted through May 31, 2009. For details, visit www.thespiderawards.com. I again plan to be a juror for this year's competition and hope to see you

Above: First place, Professional, Silhouette, Milos Bicanski, Serbia and Montenegro. "Belgrade" was taken at noon in July, when the sun is bright and contrast is high. I was downtown, looking for an image for a story about Belgrade when I noticed these shadows on the street. While thinking about how to use them, I saw a girl with a big, white hat approaching. The image is meaningful to me because it was just the right time, right place, right girl, with only two seconds to react and shoot."

in the Winners Circle!

Spider Awards photos from 2005–2007 are featured in the book *The World's Greatest Black and White Photography, No. 1*, available at www.thespiderawards.com.

Alice B. Miller is the owner of Plum Communications Inc. (www.plumcomm.com), a Long Island, NY, editorial services and marketing communications company that supports the photo industry. Previously the editor of *Studio Photography* magazine, Alice has a growing clientele that includes photographers, manufacturers, publications and associations. She is director of public relations for the International Photographic Council and an advisory board member for NyghtFalcon photography studios.

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Top: First place, Abstract, Professional, Andy Steward, U.K. "Cups" is just 19 polystyrene cups, some glue, a bit of light, and some film, but I never get bored looking at this graphically simple image. The basic ingredients are fairly typical of my personal work, which I try to incorporate into my commissioned work, when given the chance."

Bottom: First place, Professional, Advertising, Jimmy Williams, USA. "John Dee Holeman" is a self-taught blues singer, storyteller and one of the few guitarists today performing classic Piedmont blues. Meeting him, I was hit with the genuineness of his talent and his understated personality. I wanted to portray that authenticity and show my admiration. Part of my 'Music Makers' series, this portrait graces the cover of Holeman's newest CD."

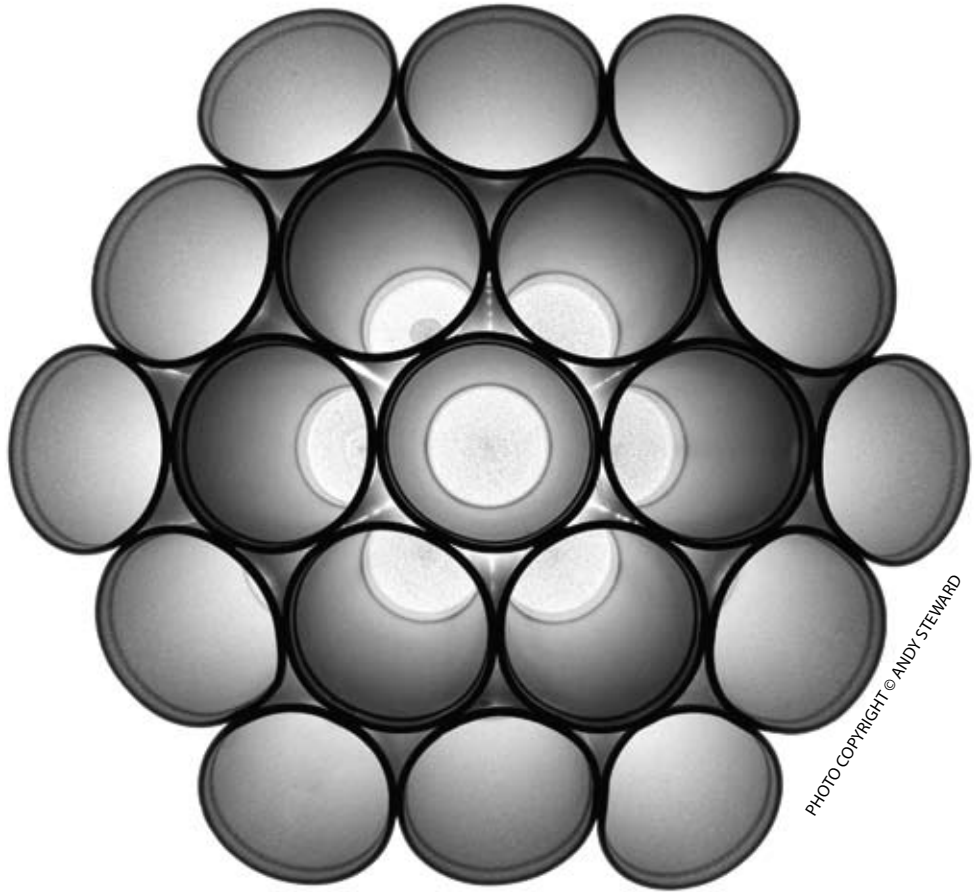


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Above left: First place, Professional, Sports, Mel Lindstrom, USA. " 'Box 03' captures the Muay Thai Kickboxing place around the corner from my studio. When I checked it out, instantly I could tell this was not your average gym. The hard bodies in there were getting prepped for their next fight. From prison guards to ex-inmates to club bouncers to semi-pro fighters, seeing so many subjects like that in one place, I had to create a series of images."

Above right: First place, Professional, Still Life, Giles Angel, U.K. " 'Bulb' aims to convey how precious energy is in our society. A lit bulb in cupped hands provides the perfect metaphor for the release and nurture of energy. This image typifies the work I strive for, namely, conceptual photography with surrealism at its core."

Left: First place, Professional, People, Marc Asnin, USA. " 'Big A: Winter Horseracing' represents the bond between man and animal that underlies the social customs and interactions of the winter horse racing culture. This image captures a moment of reprieve for rider and horse. Free from the constraints of competition, the two share a moment of understanding and mutual appreciation."



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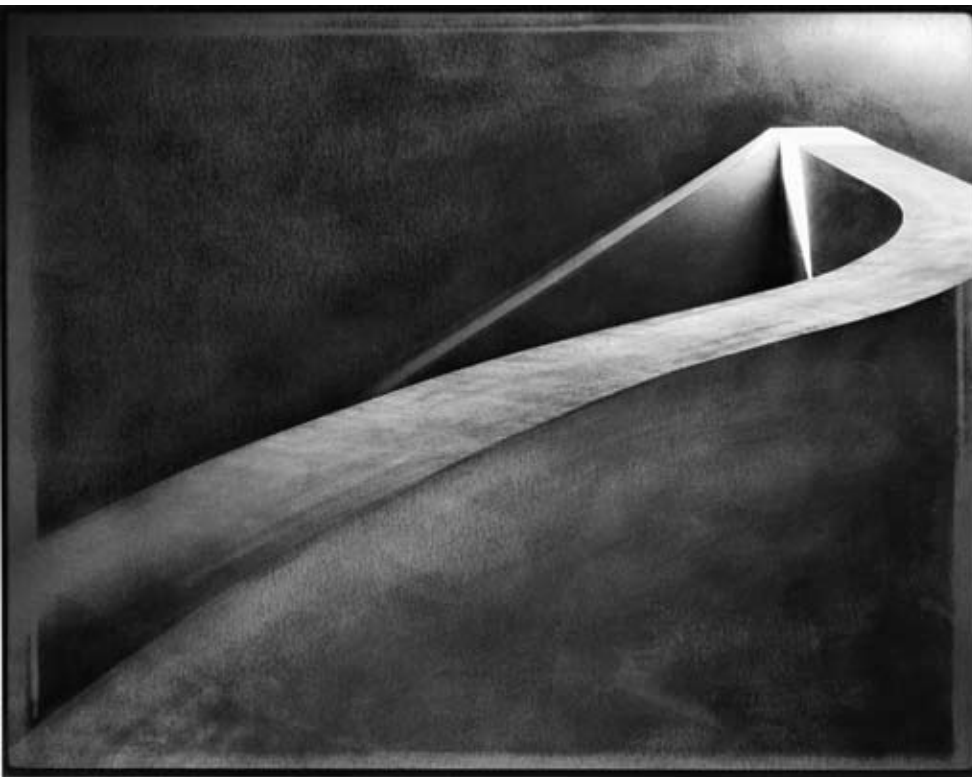


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Above: *First place, Professional, Nature, Ruud Peters, Netherlands. "Sweet Dreams" is part of a series of black-and-white portraits in which I try to display the animal's character. I approach the subject as if it is human. Dark lighting, simple, strong composition, and monochrome are my tools for creating a peaceful, distinctive atmosphere."*

Left: *First place, Professional, Architecture, Barry Brukoff, USA. "Capp Street 3" is part of a series on a San Francisco project created by artist David Ireland, called The Capp Street Project. I wanted to represent how light falling on a three-dimensional interior space would be transformed into a two-dimensional art form, rendering the sculptural space an abstract series of images. This is typical of my work in that it represents my interest in architecture and light, which I have pursued for years."*



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Above: Third place, Professional, Photograph of the Year, Photojournalism, Natan Dvir, Israel. "Amona" is a Jewish settlement in the West Bank. My intention was to express the surreal feeling of the day's events, which resembled a Dark Ages battle between the Israeli police and Jewish settlers. Over 200 people were injured before police completed the destruction of nine illegal houses, according to a decision by the Israeli Supreme Court. This is a signature image from my body of work about belief."



Left: Second place, Professional, Photograph of the year, Nude, Pierre Lautier, France. "Effeillée," part of my Alchemia triptych, symbolizes the evolution of human consciousness. The naked woman lying on dead leaves symbolizes natural, regenerating sleep, suggesting the nakedness of a baby in the womb. I love the contrast between the texture of the skin and that of the dead leaves. The image is one of the most representative in my triptych."

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