

AWARDED, ACCEPTED, REJECTED

MY BPE SALON JOURNEY



DAVID TRAVIS

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I entered my first photographic salon in October 2020, after listening to a presentation by Brian Stephenson at Rolls Royce Derby Photographic Society. Before that, I'd only heard about salons in passing — and to be honest, the very name, “salon”, sounded a bit pretentious. It conjured up an image of French Existentialists, reclining on *chaise longues* and debating conceptual art in a fog of Gauloises smoke. But after Brian's talk, I realised that a salon is simply a photographic competition — or “exhibition,” as salon organisers prefer to call it — for people in photography clubs. The idea is that each salon showcases the very best in British club photography.

For me, competition nights are one of the highlights of being in a photography club, so the idea of salons immediately piqued my interest. It felt like the natural next step — like a club competition, but this time I'd be going up against photographers from all over the UK, not just the regulars at my local club.

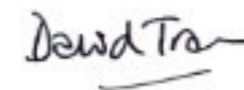
There are about 15 salons run throughout the year, each hosted by a different photography club that has been anointed (“awarded patronage,” as they put it) by the Photographic Alliance of Great Britain (PAGB). Every salon includes core sections like Colour, Monochrome, and Nature, along with a confusingly named “Creative” section. I'm still not 100% sure what “Creative” means (each salon appears to view it slightly differently) but my working definition is that it means fantasy images created in Photoshop. Some salons include additional sections for landscapes and portraits.

Of course, entering salons isn't free. Entering a salon will typically set you back £20-£30 depending on how many sections you enter. And with some of the more popular sections (like Colour) attracting over 400 photographers, it's

safe to say the competition is fierce. So why do people bother? Well, there's the satisfaction of knowing you're a good club photographer — especially when you consider that nearly 80% of images get rejected. But mostly, it's about collecting points. For every image selected, you earn 1 BPE point. Rack up 25 points and you can put “BPE1” after your name. At 50 points, you become “BPE2,” and so on, all the way to 300 points for the coveted BPE5.

When I entered my first salon (Frome) in 2020, I had modest ambitions: I'd get to BPE3 (100 points) and call it a day. But it turns out that salons are far more addictive than I imagined. In 2022, I was at 98 points when I entered what I thought would be my final salon. But then I got 9 acceptances at Robin Hood and found myself on 107 points. It seemed a shame to leave those points on the table so before I knew it, I found myself chasing the goal of 300 points. I finally hit that milestone at the Shrewsbury salon in 2024 where I got to 308 points. If you're trying to do the maths in your head, I'll save you the trouble — it cost me £1,075. Turns out that pursuing your passion can come with a price tag I hadn't quite anticipated.

To mark the occasion, I decided to put this book together, featuring the photographs that made the cut — and a few that didn't. The first section showcases images that won awards: these are the “best of the best” in a salon. Section 2 highlights images with a high acceptance rate (over 50%); and section 4 shows my other accepted images. In Section 3, I've included some landscape images that never got accepted, no matter how many times I entered them — but ones I still hold dear, because the connection you feel with an image goes beyond what judges think.



SECTION 1: AWARDED

Salon organisers award the very best images with honours, ranging from “Best in Class” to a BPE Ribbon. This section contains 21 of my images that managed to catch the judges' eye and win at least one award. Four of these images (‘The Commuter’, ‘Martincova Returns’, ‘First Light, Hamnøy’ and ‘Walkie Talkie Building’) received 15 marks (the highest possible score) in at least one salon. It means they were deemed faultless — at least by that set of judges (other salons tell a different story).

These awards also show I've made significant progress in a section I once struggled with: nature photography. When I started my BPE journey, my success rate with nature images was so poor that I stopped entering that section entirely. I took time out to improve, and

I'm particularly proud of ‘Busy goldfinch’, which as well as receiving an award was accepted by all 13 salons I submitted it to. It shows I've really moved forward and developed a clearer sense of what ‘good’ looks like in nature photography.

Awards are a way to recognise standout work, and for me, they represent moments when all the pieces — the planning, composition, and execution — fell into place.

And if you're wondering, there is another level after BPE5, called Associateship of British Photographic Exhibitions. To get there, I would need 100 more acceptances and 20 more awards. Am I going for it? Absolutely not — but then again, I said that about achieving BPE5...



In my beginning

Selector's Award, Basingstoke, 2021. Highly Commended, PAGB Ribbon, Vale of Evesham, 2021. Commended, Beyond Group, 2021. Highly Commended, PAGB Ribbon, Shrewsbury, 2021. BPE Ribbon, South Birmingham, 2023. 13 acceptances in 17 salons.



Crossing over

Selector's Award, Vale of Evesham, 2023. BPE Ribbon, Southport, 2024. 8 acceptances in 11 salons.



Uphill struggle

Commended, Robin Hood, 2021. 10 acceptances in 15 salons.

The Commuter

PAGB Bronze, Southport, 2022. *Best in Class (Monochrome)*, Clay Cross, 2022. *Commended*, *BPE Ribbon*, Vale of Evesham, 2022. *Judges' Commendation*, Winchester, 2022. *Silver Medal (Monochrome Class)*, Frome, 2022. 13 acceptances in 14 salons. This image scored 15 at Clay Cross.





Walkie Talkie Building

Highly Commended, Dingwall, 2023. *Certificate of Merit*, Winchester, 2024. 9 acceptances in 13 salons. This image scored 15 at Winchester.



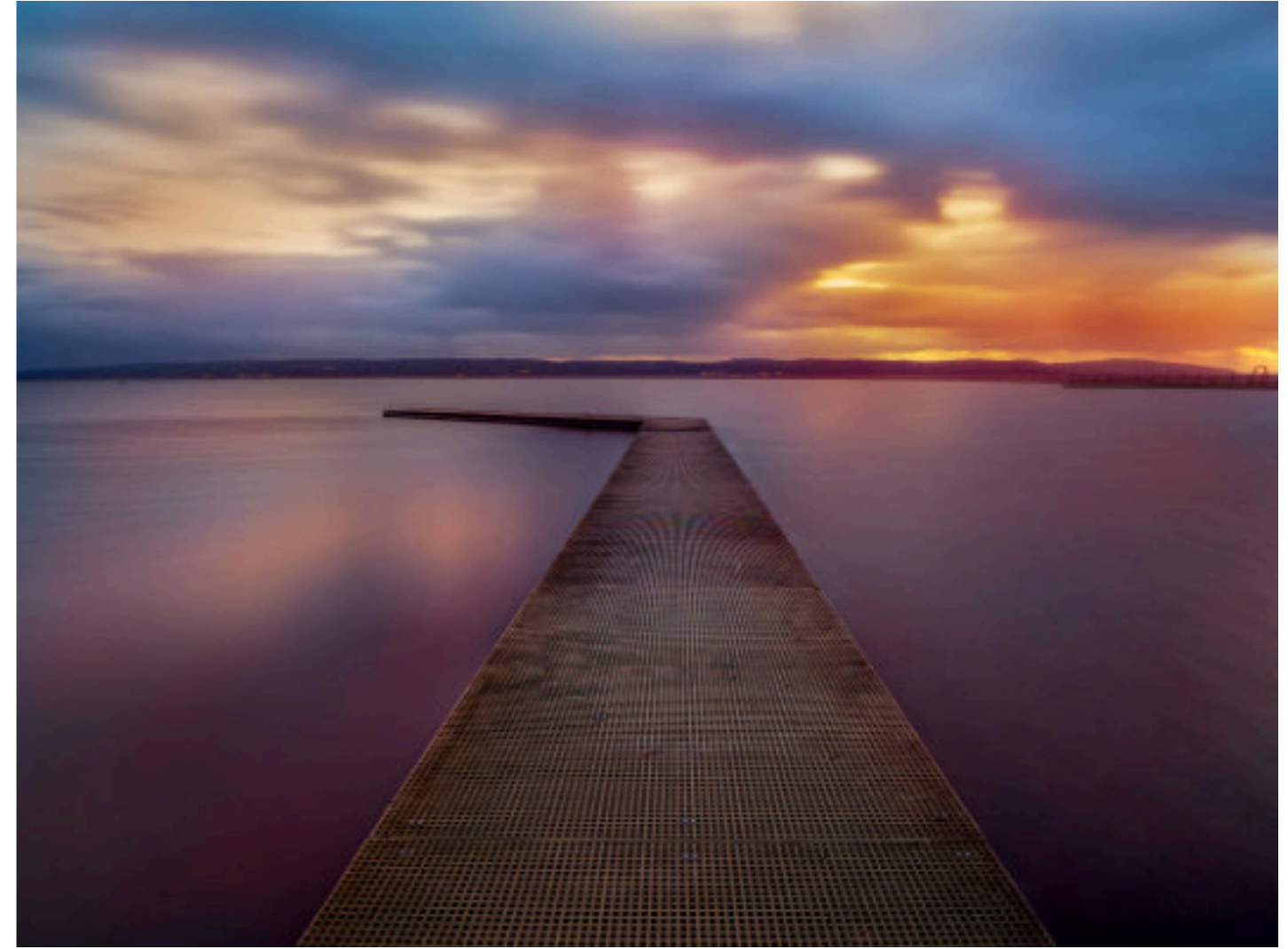
Spinningfields

Commended, Basingstoke, 2024. 3 acceptances in 6 salons.



Torside Reservoir Overspill

Selector's Choice, First Place (Scapes), Frome 2020. 1 acceptance in 4 salons.



Jetty at sunset

BPE Ribbon, Rushden, 2022. 2 acceptances in 2 salons. (A version with a less dramatic sky: 6 acceptances in 11 salons).



Lone tree

Selector's BPE Ribbon, Neath, 2023. 4 acceptances in 6 salons.



Railings to Nowhere

Highly Commended, Basingstoke, 2021. Certificate of Merit, Winchester, 2021. SPS Certificate, Southport, 2022. 9 acceptances in 11 salons.



First light, Hamnøy

Silver Medal (Scapes Class), Rushden, 2023. Certificate of Merit, Winchester, 2024. PAGB Ribbon, South Birmingham, 2023 (Portrait version). 10 acceptances in 10 salons. A portrait version of this image had 3 acceptances in 4 salons. This image scored 15 at Rushden and at Winchester.



Nordic steps

Commended, Dingwall, 2023. 10 acceptances in 12 salons.



Long-tailed tit on scarlet elf cup fungus

*Highly Commended, Shrewsbury, 2024, Commended, Basingstoke, 2024, Certificate of Merit, Winchester, 2024.
5 acceptances in 7 salons.*



Seascape at dusk

Highly Commended, Rushden, 2023. 2 acceptances in 3 salons.



Marble White on Yellow Rattle

Certificate of Merit, Winchester, 2024. 2 acceptances in 2 salons.



Busy goldfinch

Certificate of Merit, Winchester, 2024. 13 acceptances in 13 salons.



Martincova returns

Highly Commended, Basingstoke, 2023. 12 acceptances in 14 salons. This image scored 15 at Basingstoke.



Male Banded Demoiselle

Selector's BPE Ribbon, Neath, 2024. 12 acceptances in 15 salons.



Eyes on the ball

Commended, Neath, 2022. Highly Commended, Basingstoke, 2023. 5 acceptances in 16 salons.



Worker bee feeding larvae

Commended, Clay Cross, 2022. Highly Commended, Rushden, 2022. 8 acceptances in 16 salons.



The Winning Moment

Certificate of Merit, Winchester, 2024. 5 acceptances in 6 salons.

SECTION 2: ACCEPTED

The images in this section show my 'dependables'. While they didn't always win awards, they consistently struck a chord with the judges. These images were accepted in at least half of the salons where I entered them. These are the reliable ones — the images that stood the test of competition time after time.

I'll admit that 50% may seem like a low threshold for dependability, but in the competitive and subjective world of BPE salons, it's an achievement. Judging can be inconsistent, and it's rare to have an image that

always gets accepted. Even award-winning images can still face rejection in different salons. For example, 'The Commuter' picked up five awards across multiple salons and was accepted into 13 salons overall, but still got rejected by one (damn you, Beyond Group!)

There's something satisfying about having work that repeatedly makes the cut, even if it doesn't always take home a ribbon. It's a reminder that in salon exhibitions, steady performance can be just as valuable as an award.



Above: I won't take it anymore

2 acceptances in 3 salons.



Right: The GI's farewell

3 acceptances in 6 salons.



*Above: **Calling time***

9 acceptances in 15 salons.



*Right: **Let me help you with that***

10 acceptances in 14 salons.



Lloyds Building

1 acceptance in 2 salons.

Lambda

5 acceptances in 9 salons.





The morning after

4 acceptances in 4 salons.



No Planet B

9 acceptances in 10 salons.



Keep back

1 acceptance in 1 salon.



Powering through

2 acceptances in 2 salons.



Male woodpecker feeding young

1 acceptance in 2 salons.



Exhausted parent feeding fledgling

4 acceptances in 7 salons.



Summer's end

8 acceptances in 14 salons.

Next page (left): Learning to fly

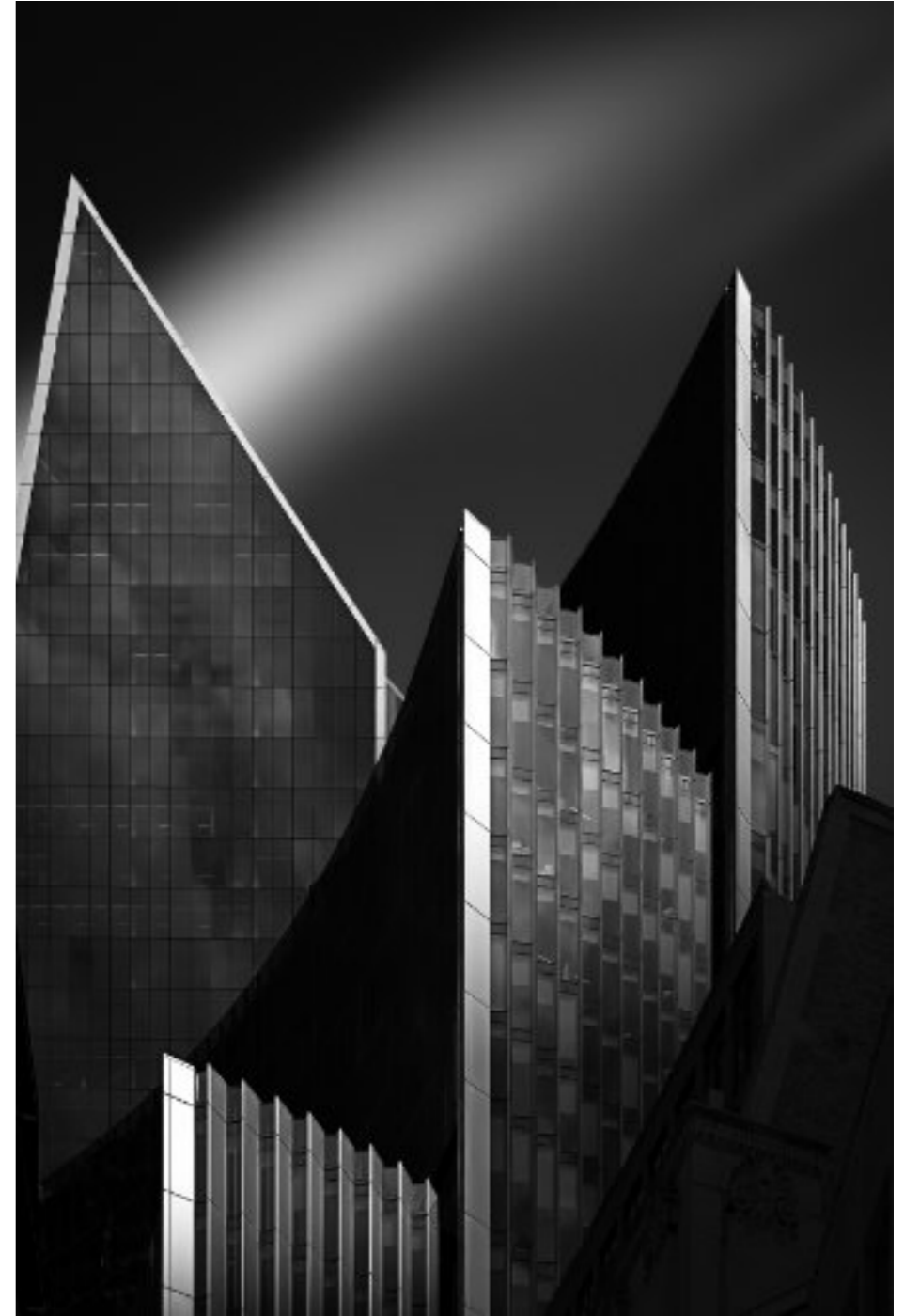
1 acceptance in 2 salons.

Next page (right): The beachcomber's treasure

1 acceptance in 2 salons.

Steel and shadow

3 acceptances in 4 salons.







Left: Storm passing over Loch Awe

1 acceptance in 1 salon.

Above: Northland

5 acceptances in 6 salons.



No way through

1 acceptance in 1 salon.



Match point

3 acceptances in 5 salons.



Padley Gorge Icicles

1 acceptance in 2 salons.



Burnet moth

1 acceptance in 1 salon.



*Above: **Power of the past***

3 acceptances in 5 salons.



*Right: **Paddy's Wigwam***

2 acceptances in 3 salons.



Gotham

3 acceptances in 6 salons.

SECTION 3: REJECTED

None of the images in this section got accepted into any salon. Admittedly, I only entered most of them once, and the statistician in me knows that's not exactly a fair test. With hindsight, I've realised you need to give an image at least four outings before putting it in the 'reject' pile because BPE judging can be so capricious. Take 'Torside Reservoir Overspill' for example — it was accepted (and even awarded!) the first time I entered it, only to get rejected three times in a row after that. Maybe some of these images would have been recognised by a salon if I'd kept plugging away.

You'll notice that all of these images are landscapes. I wanted to showcase landscapes in this section because (after Nature) this was the genre where I found it most difficult to gain acceptances. This is embarrassing since I consider myself primarily a landscape

photographer. Over time, I learned what types of landscapes 'work' in a BPE salon. By studying successful entries, I found that dramatic, wide-angle landscapes — particularly those featuring mountains and water — were more likely to be accepted than the quieter, more subtle landscapes I tend to shoot. Once I changed my entries to suit this pattern (for example, entering the more dramatic landscapes encountered in Lofoten), I started seeing better results.

Rejection has a way of changing how you feel about an image. It's like someone pointing out your child's wonky nose when you thought they were beautiful. I wanted to include these images to remind myself that competition success isn't everything. An image's value doesn't always depend on the approval of judges.



Moonrise over Mow Cop

Entered into 1 salon.



No Passage Landward

Entered into 2 salons.



Wave Study #4

Entered into 1 salon.



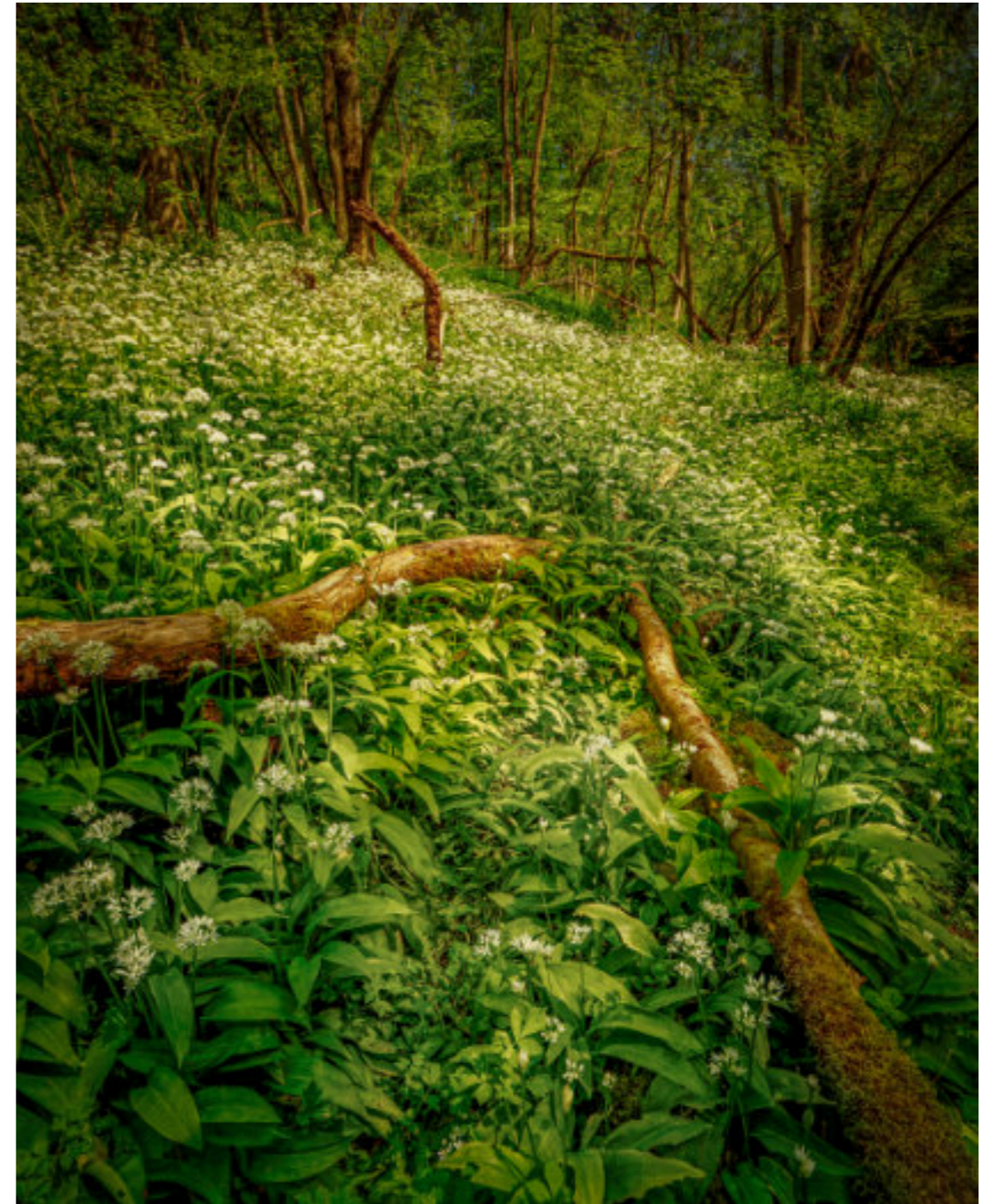
Sunrise on the Great Ridge

Entered into 1 salon.



Above: Rainbow over Ben A'an

Entered into 1 salon.



Right: Garlic Wood

Entered into 1 salon.



Sunrise over Doxey Pool

Entered into 1 salon.

Autumn leaves, Loch Achray

Entered into 2 salons.





Left: Kelly Hall Tarn

Entered into 2 salons.

Above: Seat with a view

Entered into 1 salon.



Three tufts

Entered into 2 salons.

White Nancy

Entered into 1 salon.





Mother Cap Sunset

Entered into 2 salons.

Downstream from Kinder

Entered into 1 salon.





Wye wrecks

Entered into 2 salons.

Last light at Gib Torr

Entered into 2 salons.





Left: Ramshaw Rocks at sunset

Entered into 3 salons.

Above: Hoar frost, first light

Entered into 1 salon.



Broken

Entered into 2 salons.



Seven Sisters at sunrise

Entered into 2 salons.



On the march

Entered into 1 salon.

SECTION 4: LAGGARDS

This section shows images that were more often rejected than selected, but still contributed to my BPE5. For example, I entered 'Head in the clouds' 11 times and it got just one acceptance.

It was only later in my BPE journey that I got all 'Moneyball' about things and started to focus on the statistics rather than my gut instinct. Once I had some data to work with I could select images based on their performance in previous salons rather than on my intuitive judgement of quality.

Sadly, I didn't adopt this approach until very late. If I'd paid attention to the statistics earlier, I wouldn't have kept entering many of the images in this section. Instead, I fell into the trap of giving the judges what I thought they

liked. It's only now, looking at the number of rejections in the cold light of day, that I can see I wasted my entry money on a few of these.

As well as ignoring the data, some of these images show that I also ignored my photographic values. For example, some of the Photoshop composites aren't really a reflection of my true style. Instead, I was trying to second-guess the judges' preferences, and in doing so, I strayed from my photographic North Star.

These laggards have taught me valuable lessons about the nuances of salon judging and the importance of aligning my instincts with the data. But most of all, they reminded me to stay true to my own vision, rather than chasing what I think other people want.



Left: Dipper feeding fledgling

4 acceptances in 11 salons.

Above: Dipper with grubs

2 acceptances in 6 salons.



7-spot ladybirds hibernating

1 acceptance in 3 salons.

Family of three

2 acceptances in 7 salons.





Patriot

1 acceptance in 3 salons.



Party of One

2 acceptances in 7 salons.



Virtual Reality

1 acceptance in 8 salons.



Red soldier beetle

1 acceptance in 3 salons.



Left: Spider trap

1 acceptance in 3 salons.

Above: Female Banded Demoiselle

6 acceptances in 16 salons.



Above: Frozen Moment

1 acceptance in 6 salons.



Right: Head in the clouds

1 acceptance in 11 salons.



Mr Brown's Loans on Valuable Property

4 acceptances in 11 salons.



Bright Lights, Big City

1 acceptance in 6 salons.



Grit and Grapple

1 acceptance in 4 salons.



Fatherly advice

3 acceptances in 8 salons.



Left: Ceremony of innocence

1 acceptance in 5 salons.

Above: Old Copper

2 acceptances in 6 salons.



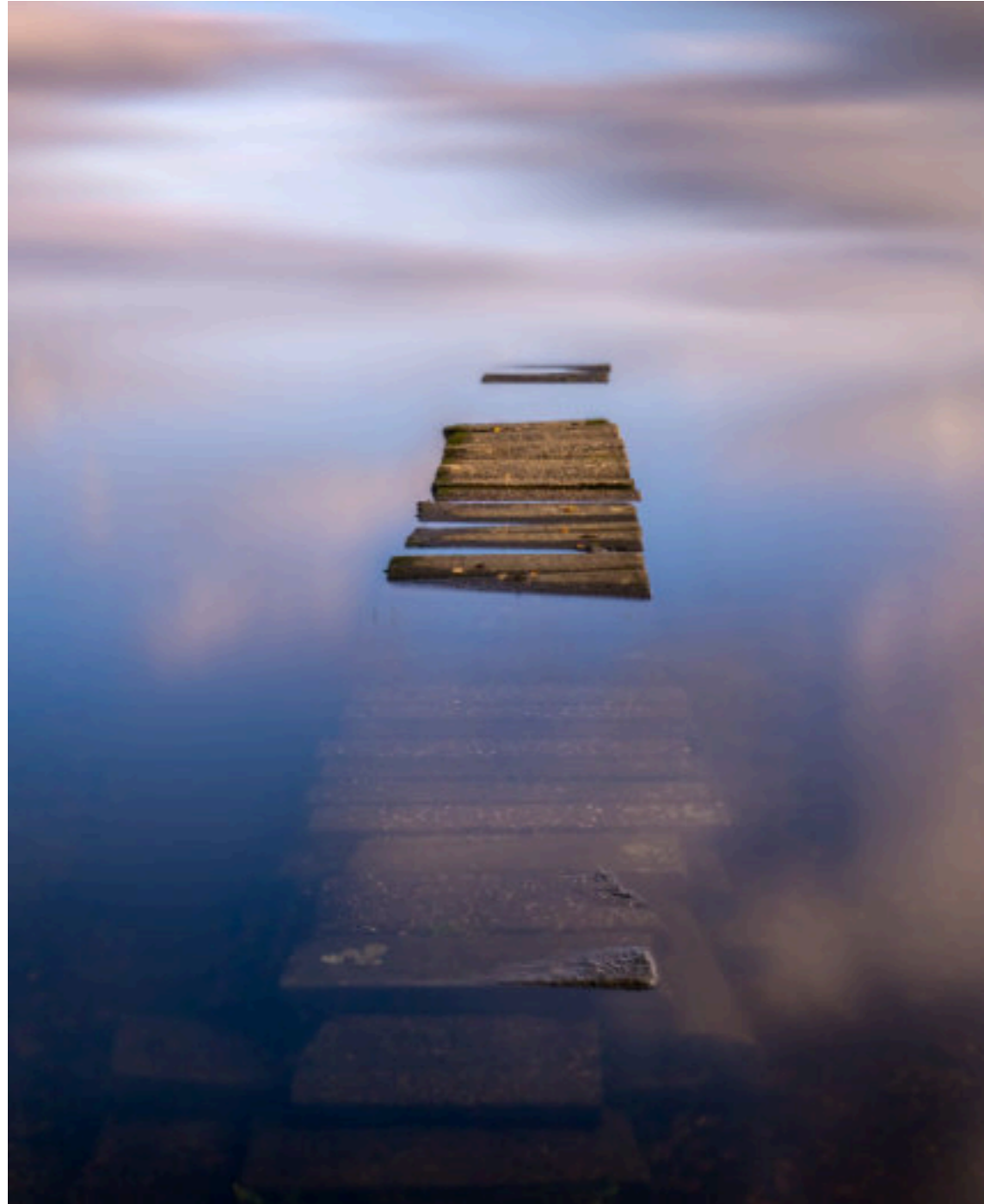
Llanrwst Bridge

1 acceptance in 3 salons.



First light at Mam Tor

1 acceptance in 3 salons.



Old Stone Jetty

1 acceptance in 3 salons.



Path to Nowhere

2 acceptances in 6 salons.

Next page (left): **The sexton keeps the key**

3 acceptances in 8 salons.

Next page (right): **One More Rep**

2 acceptances in 6 salons.





Windswept

3 acceptances in 7 salons.



Unmasked

2 acceptances in 5 salons.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Brian Stephenson, whose presentation at Rolls Royce Derby Photographic Society sparked my interest in salons and set me on this journey. Brian's insights, and his detailed comments on some of these images, were invaluable.

I also want to thank the judges at the 47 salons I entered over the past four years. While their scores weren't always what I hoped for, their rejections helped shape my photography and pushed me to improve in ways I hadn't anticipated.