



Copying Other People's Photos: What *IS* the Big Deal?

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If you parse the artwork requirements listed in our exhibition prospectuses, you will see there are really only four major elements that are specified and defined:

- **the materials you may use for the artwork and its presentation;**
- **how long ago the artwork was created;**
- **whether you may collaborate;** and
- **the image source(s) from which you may work.**

While we get questions from time to time concerning acceptable materials, I would estimate that at least a third of the questions center on that last element: *whether and how artists may use photographs that they themselves did not take as reference for their own artwork.*

It certainly seems to be the hardest for us to explain, but we also know from experience that the pain and anguish endured by artists who misunderstand that issue is particularly acute. That's because disqualifications based on other prospectus requirements usually happen in our initial review of submitted images, before they are even seen by the juror.

However, disqualifications for using someone else's artwork or photographs often happen *after* a piece has been selected for the exhibition, or shipped and hung in the venue, or even after it has received an award, because now a lot more eyes are seeing it. And that's heartbreak for everyone.

So why is this issue so important to CPSA?

Why do we insist that submitting artists must use their own photo references, and why are we going to such lengths to reinforce this requirement?

Because the medium of colored pencil—despite all our hard work over the past 30 years to raise its profile as a fine art medium—is still viewed in some

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important quarters as second-class, suitable only for children, coloring book enthusiasts, and people making fan art from celebrities' photos. One reviewer of last year's International Exhibition in Brea, in fact, made it clear he thought most of the work had been "copied" and was therefore not worthy of respect. Not true, of course, but another example of the mindset.

When that happens, it's a blow to *all* of us, not just to the artists whose work was in that show. The only way we can make progress against those accusations and perceptions is to place a *very* high premium on originality, both in conception and execution. Copying other people's photos is simply copying someone else's creative idea. Someone else has chosen the subject and how it is depicted. Someone else has chosen the lighting, composition, color palette, message, and mood. That is, *every creative decision has already been made by someone who is not you.* That's why we insist the creative concept must be your own.

It's not absolute, though.

If you want to use an online photo reference, get the correct gesture of a bird in flight for the background, or to

see how a cat's front left paw should look when extended (because in your photo, your cat is sitting on hers), or to get the color and value of a distant mountain just right, go right ahead.

Small, incidental images like that, when used to correct minor details or to embellish, are fine. But if the central and primary image and focus of your work—a human figure, a building, an animal, a sculpture, a landscape, etc.—is copied directly from someone else's photograph with only minor or no alterations, then it's not your original creation.

Clarifications made

Therefore, we have taken another hard look at how we explain what is acceptable and what is not with regard to reference images. The prospectus for ET! 16 (posted last September) took a few steps in that direction. Specifications in the prospectus for the International Exhibition (posted December 1) have been extensively rewritten.

We have separated the requirements concerning the "execution" or physical attributes of the artwork—its age, constituent materials, presentation, etc.—from those concerning the act of "ideation"—the development of the artist's creative concept and the formation of a mental image. Be sure to also read Anda Chance's "CPSA Exhibition Entry Tips for CaFÉ" article on page 14.

In Anda's article, you will also learn that there is a new statement and button on the CaFÉ website that must be checked before you can complete your submission.

It is our hope that the submitting artist, if required to read and check this box before proceeding, will take that moment to evaluate one last time where the true creative impulse behind their work originated and whether it was substantially theirs—or someone else's.