

As the juror for the “Art in Nature” exhibition, I had the delight of taking off my journalist glasses and indulging in photography that veered from the wonderfully imaginative to the deeply personal to the downright kooky. Of course, the best photographs come from a combination of passion and vision, the desire to communicate, to share the photographer’s experience. But, what role does interpretation play in making, viewing and understanding images?

I spend my days immersed in storytelling, working to create visual narratives. While reviewing this competition, I took the images as they came, no judgments made for or against digital manipulations, B&W vs. color, content, focus or not. Instead I concentrated on how I was affected on seeing the work, how I reacted to both the photographer’s interpretation of the scene as well as my own. I was deeply moved by the abstractions and patterns that so many photographers see in nature, sometimes in chaos and sometimes in perfect order. I loved the range of color palettes, from the soft pastels of a desert floor to the deep purple of a tulip. I even found myself reacting to photo titles – “Fractal Nature”, “Calligraphy”, “Precipice”. I don’t work in an environment where photographs are named, so the very act of doing so makes it impossible to not bring more to viewing the image.

Oddly enough, the image that I found most evocative didn’t have a name. Yet for me, David Zimmerman’s “Untitled, Desert 60” is an beautiful combination of realism and abstraction. I love the hard edge of the dune, the way the light hits, the grounding of this part of the frame. But, it is the shifting landscape behind the dune that gives this photograph a haunting quality that won me over. When I look back over the photographs that made my cull, I do see a commonality – there is tension between hard and soft, real or not. Maybe that is my interpretation of nature, duality in all it’s beauty and wildness.

Kathy Moran
National Geographic magazine