

## paradox place

Keith Philpott's blog about photography, communication and "why not".



### Defenders of truth vs. the manipulators

The latest skirmish between the defenders of truth and the opposing, manipulators of reality is the disqualification of a High Dynamic Range (HDR) image submitted to a Smithsonian photography contest. The TWIP guys weighed in on the topic during their weekly podcast (April 27 show).

In a nutshell, a manipulated photograph depicting Times Square at night was disqualified because the HDR technique was determined to be too much manipulation (even though the category included manipulated images). Personally, I think the image is closer to what we actually see (in some situations) but because we're not conditioned to believe a camera could capture such a wide range of light, it looks strange.

Expect these discussions to continue as viewers recalibrate expectations about still photography. Similar to individual technology horizons, consumers of photography will gradually accept the idea that all imagery is manipulation. The advent of digital imaging has only accelerated and compressed the process.

From the beginning, photography as a truth vehicle was a fundamentally flawed idea. The two most glaring reasons are the photographer and the viewer, both add respective interpretations of the what they see.

"It's a fact of neuroscience that everything we experience is actually a figment of an imagination. Although your sensations feel accurate and truthful they do not necessarily reproduce the reality of the world," write Stephen Macknik and Suzana Martinez-Gonde in the Oct-Sept issue of *Scientific Mind*.

The move from film to digital has compounded this. Wide use of digital cameras in phones and tiny point-and-shoots has meant that more people take pictures more often using web tools to distribute to a world-wide audience. This has created a sophisticated body of photography consumers that is well aware of how images can be manipulated. Simultaneously, cameras have evolved to the point that "post processing" -once only possible with a computer- is now carried out during initial capture (including HDR images).

So, while the defenders of truth huddle in shrinking refuges like legacy print media the manipulators march on....redefining photography. Stop frowning, this is going to be fun.

~ by keithphilpott on May 2, 2009.

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