

## WHAT'S A MERIT WORTH?

### PPA's Merit and Degree Program

Launched in 1937, the PPA Merit and Degree Program was established to recognize photographers' technical knowledge, skills, achievements, and service to others in the profession.

The program is structured to ensure the photographer's knowledge and experience are well-rounded. Degree candidates collect merits for participating in PPA-approved classes, workshops and seminars as a student or instructor; attending and volunteering their services at PPA events such as Imaging USA; contributing images and articles to PPA publications; entering images in the IPC; and training and serving as judges in print competitions.

Merits are awarded in four categories:

- Exhibition, for competing in the IPC.
- Electronic Imaging Exhibition, for competing in the digital manipulation category of the IPC.
- Speaking, for speaking, instructing or articles in PPA publications.
- Service, for attending and/or volunteering at PPA events, and serving as a photographic competition juror.

PPA members can earn any or all of the

degrees offered in the program: Master of Photography (M.Photos.); Photographic Craftsman (Cr.Photos.), and Master of Electronic Imaging (MEI). All three degrees require earning 25 merits, but in different combinations of the four merit categories:

- Master of Photography—13 Exhibition merits, plus a total of 12 merits in the Exhibition, Electronic Imaging, Speaking or Service categories. (No matter how you slice it, to earn a PPA Master degree, you must enter International Print Competitions.)
- Photographic Craftsman—13 speaking merits, plus a total of 12 merits in the Electronic Imaging, Speaking, Service or Exhibition categories.
- Master of Electronic Imaging—13 Electronic Imaging merits, plus a total of 12 merits in the Electronic Imaging, Exhibition, Speaking or Service categories.

To learn more about PPA degrees, visit [ppa.com/education-events/meritsdegrees.php](http://ppa.com/education-events/meritsdegrees.php). For a set of suggestions on how to market PPA degrees to your clientele, visit [ppa.com/education-events/meritsdegrees/using-degrees-merits.php](http://ppa.com/education-events/meritsdegrees/using-degrees-merits.php).

Competition has also helped Hatcher develop a consistent style that resonates with clients. "I used to do things without knowing why," she says. "I'd try things, and then I couldn't do it again. Competition has taught me to work more slowly, more deliberately. I began to realize I have a distinct style. Now when I click the shutter, I think, *does this image have the desired impact? Is it a Lissa Hatcher?* That thought process goes a long way toward creating images clients want to buy. Competing—and earnestly applying the critiques I've received during competition—has helped me get that reaction more often."

### DEGREES ABOVE

PPA's degree program is the industry's oldest and most established professional degree system, and PPA is the industry's oldest and most recognized professional association. A Master or Craftsman degree is a stamp of approval that the photographer's work meets a high standard. In a field where the number of local photographers has increased exponentially over the past decade, a PPA degree signifies your status as a qualified professional photographer. A degree says your work is endorsed by your peers—the harshest of all critics.

"For me, the most important thing is that my peers recognize I've attained a certain level of photographic skill," says Dennis Craft, M.Photos., Cr.Hon.M.Photos., CPP, and Photographic Exhibition Committee chairman. "That is vitally important. When I got into competition, the quality of my work improved exponentially. Learning from my peers has been essential to my development. The confidence it gives me is enough to justify the work I put in toward that degree. When you succeed in competition and earn your degree, the accomplishment says that not only are you a competent photographer, you're a step above. Degrees

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[rather] exclusive," she says. "When you have confidence in your pricing, your clients will assign more value to your work."

Self-confidence is an extremely useful bonus of competition success. When Lissa Hatcher moved her business, Photography by Lissa Hatcher, from Oklahoma to Virginia, her success in image competition strengthened her conviction that she could build a new client base in another state.

"When I moved, I lost all my clients, my local name recognition, everything," she says. "Establishing new connections can be difficult, so I'd encourage prospects to look me up and check my credentials. When one prospect Googled me and all my awards came up in the search results, she called back and said, 'It seems like everyone says they're a photographer these days, but you're *really* a photographer. You were Photographer of the Year two years in a row in Oklahoma. You are for real.'"