

A WINPHOTO PLAYBOOK

# Sony World Photography Awards 2027

What actually wins — which track to enter, what each jury rewards, and how to spend the months before the deadline.



Four hundred thousand photographs will  
be entered.

The work that is **remembered** was decided  
months before the deadline.

# The biggest competition in photography.

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The Sony World Photography Awards opened its 2027 edition on 1 June 2026. Recent cycles have drawn more than four hundred thousand entries. Entry is free. The overall title — Photographer of the Year — is, for many photographers, the most prestigious stage in the medium.

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**400k+**

ENTRIES PER CYCLE

**Free**

TO ENTER, ALL TRACKS

**\$25k**

PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

**Jan 5/12**

2027 DEADLINES (STUDENT: 27 NOV '26)

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Free entry and a global stage mean the pool is vast and the noise is total — which makes Sony a strange contest to advise on, because the most important decision an entrant makes is not *which photograph* to submit. It is **which competition they are actually entering**. This Playbook is built around that decision, and the months of work that follow it.

**How to use it.** Read § 01 first and decide your track. Then read only the half that applies — the rubric your jury uses, the categories, and the calendar of work between now and January. The last section shows how to pressure-test a frame or a series before you commit.

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*This guide follows the published 2027 rules (20th edition), read and verified in June 2026. Details can still change mid-cycle — confirm the specifics at [worldphoto.org](https://worldphoto.org) before you enter.*

# Series, or Single Image — or both?

Sony is really several competitions under one name, and the two that matter most pull in opposite directions. Choosing badly is the most common way strong photographers go out in the first round — a single brilliant frame entered into the Series categories reads as thin; a loose set of nice images entered into Single Image has nowhere to land.

## SERIES

### A body of work.

Judges a **series of 5–10 images** that hold together, across ten categories. For the photographer with a sustained project and something to say across a sequence.

→ For series-thinkers.

## SINGLE IMAGE

### A single frame.

Judges **one image**, on its own, across ten categories of its own. For the photographer with one arresting, graphically strong photograph that stands alone.

→ For single-frame-thinkers.

Decide what kind of photographer you are for this contest before you decide what to submit.

**The rule that catches people every year:** for the first time in 2027 you can enter **both** Series and Single Image — but the entries must come from **different bodies of work**. There are also dedicated routes — Student (closes **27 Nov 2026**, six weeks before the majors) and Youth among them — covered in § 04.



MAASAI COMMUNITY · © ZIED MNIF

№ 02 · THE SERIES COMPETITION

# What the series jury rewards.

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The World Photography Organisation panel is chaired, in most years, by a senior curator or museum director. That composition sets a consistent taste. The Series jury rewards, in order:

- 01 **Series cohesion.** The set is the unit of judgement, not the best photo in it.

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- 02 **Documentary or conceptual depth.** A reason the work exists beyond the surface.

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- 03 **Technical craft.** Assumed, not rewarded on its own.

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- 04 **Subject access.** Evidence you got somewhere others didn't.

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- 05 **Personal narrative.** A point of view that is yours.

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**What wins:** recent Photographer of the Year winners — Citlali Fabián (2026), Juliette Pavy (2024) — took the title with sustained documentary projects carried by personal narrative and real access. Not single-image bravado.

# The Series categories.

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Each takes a 5–10 image series. Cut the strongest orphan frame if it breaks the set — cohesion beats any single picture.

**01 Documentary Projects** Long-form reportage; the heart of the Series field.

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**03 Portraiture** A series of people; presence over polish.

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**05 Wildlife & Nature** Behaviour and habitat across a coherent set.

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**07 Architecture & Design** Built form, structure, the made world.

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**09 Histories** Historical narratives, archival-led projects — new for 2027.

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**02 Environment** Humanity and the natural world, in tension.

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**04 Landscape** Place as a sustained argument, not a postcard.

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**06 Creative** Conceptual and staged work; idea-led.

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**08 Sport** The decisive moment, sustained over a story.

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**10 Perspectives** The open, conceptual category — wide latitude.

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INDIAN PEAFOWL IN DISPLAY · © ZIED MNIF

№ 03 · THE SINGLE IMAGE COMPETITION

# One frame, judged on its own.

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The Single Image competition is the opposite discipline. A single image, judged alone, tends to win on **graphic strength and immediacy** — a composition that resolves instantly and holds. Single Image winners are rarely the most complicated photographs; they are the most *legible* ones.

The question isn't "is this a good photograph." It's "does this stop a juror on image eight thousand of the day."

# The Single Image categories.

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Each takes a single image. Pick the category that flatters your one frame's strength, not the subject you shoot most.

01 **Street Photography**The unrepeatabe public moment.

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02 **Travel**Place and culture in a single frame.

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03 **Natural World & Wildlife**One decisive animal or landscape moment.

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04 **Portraiture**A single portrait that holds the eye.

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05 **Landscape**Graphic, resolved, immediate.

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06 **Lifestyle**Everyday life, elevated.

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07 **Creative**Conceptual single images; disclose manipulation.

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08 **Architecture**Line, form, and light in the built world.

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09 **Animal Portraits**One animal, character over action — new for 2027.

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10 **Motion**Movement frozen or flowing in one frame.

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*Category names are the published 2027 lists, verified June 2026 — check [worldphoto.org](https://worldphoto.org) for any late changes.*

# Four routes most entrants overlook.

- **Student Competition**A 5–10 image series for accredited students. 2027 theme: Journeys. **Closes 27 Nov 2026.**
- **Youth (under 19)**A single image, for photographers under nineteen.
- **Sustainability Prize**A 5–10 image series; ran in recent cycles — confirm 2027 status.
- **Alpha Female Award**For women+ photographers; ran in recent cycles — confirm 2027 status.

These routes are smaller fields than the Series and Single Image majors — and for the photographers who qualify, that is the point. A focused series aimed at the Sustainability Prize competes against a fraction of the volume the Single Image categories carry.

## Assisted editing — with disclosure.

Standard processing of a real capture is fine. Manipulation is permitted in Single Image, , and the origin of the entry must be a real photograph: computer-generated content cannot be the origin of an image. No CGI-origin work; no passing a manipulated frame off as a straight capture.

This matters more at Sony than almost anywhere — its authority rests on credibility, and undisclosed manipulation is the kind of thing that turns a win into a withdrawn prize.

# Eligibility, files, and your rights.

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|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FEE            | <b>Free</b> — all tracks, no entry cost.                                                                                                                                        |
| ELIGIBILITY    | 18+ for Series and Single Image (Youth is under 19). Series: work published between <b>1 Jan 2026 and 12 Jan 2027</b> . Single Image: photographs <b>taken in 2026</b> .        |
| EXCLUSIVITY    | You can enter <b>both</b> Series and Single Image — but from <b>different bodies of work</b> (new for 2027).                                                                    |
| FILE FORMAT    | JPEG · long edge ≥ 3000px · <b>1–5 MB</b> · sRGB · 300 dpi · no watermark.                                                                                                      |
| CAPTION        | Required, up to 1,000 characters. For Documentary and Single Image especially, the caption carries weight — write it as carefully as you frame.                                 |
| RIGHTS GRANTED | A <b>non-exclusive</b> worldwide licence for Sony / WPO to use submitted and winning images to promote the Awards, the touring exhibition, and the yearbook — with attribution. |
| COPYRIGHT      | <b>You retain it.</b> Photographer-friendly by the standards of the field — but read the grant once before you upload.                                                          |

Because the contest is free, the usual fee-economics check disappears. "Free" is exactly why the bar to *stand out* is so high: everyone enters.

№ 07 · THE MONTHS AHEAD

# The work that wins is built over months.

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The winning Series is almost never assembled in the final week — it is shot, edited, and sequenced over the autumn. Here is the shape of the runway.

JUN 2026 · NOW

## Decide which photos go where.

You can enter both Series and Single Image — sort your work, don't pick a side.

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JUL — OCT

## Shoot and gather.

Build more frames than you need. For a series, prioritise access and consistency.

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27 NOV 2026

## Student deadline.

The Student competition closes six weeks before the majors — don't calendar it for January.

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NOV — DEC

## Edit and sequence.

Cut to the cohesive set. This is where most series are won or lost.

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5–12 JAN 2027

## Deadlines.

Single Image closes 5 Jan (16:00 GMT); Series closes 12 Jan (13:00 GMT). Submit with the caption written, not improvised.

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APR 2027

## Winners & London ceremony.

The London exhibition and the Photographer of the Year title.

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CHEETAH, WATCHING · © ZIED MNIF

№ 08 · PRESSURE-TEST YOUR ENTRY

# Before you commit months — get a read.

The hardest Sony decisions are *which track* and *which category* — exactly the ones photographers get wrong about their own work. WinPhoto reads your photographs against Sony's real criteria and returns a verdict in four tiers, with the reasoning quoted from the brief.

#### Strong submit

A real contender — enter it.

#### Submit

Worth entering; sharpen first.

#### Maybe

On the line; reasons given.

#### Weak match

Wrong track or category — told honestly.

READ YOUR WORK AGAINST SONY 2027

## [winphoto.io/analyze](https://winphoto.io/analyze)

Free · no signup · about thirty seconds · read against every open contest at once. Or read a series or a frame against this jury directly on the Sony page:

[winphoto.io/competitions/sony\\_world\\_photography\\_awards\\_2027](https://winphoto.io/competitions/sony_world_photography_awards_2027)

KEEP THE FIELD GUIDE COMING

# One photograph worth a Strong submit, every Sunday.

The Letter is short, sober, and free — a working photographer's read on the contests worth your time, and the rules that quietly disqualify people. This Playbook is part of it. The next major gets its own.

[winphoto.io](https://winphoto.io) — read a photo against every open competition.