



WinPhoto 2026

Photo Contest Yearbook

The 22 contests worth knowing this cycle — deadlines, fees, AI policy, what each jury rewards.

Compiled by Zed Mnif · winphoto.io · 2026 edition

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INTRODUCTION

Why this yearbook exists

Photographers paid €600 million in contest entry fees in 2025. About a third went to contests photographers were never going to win — because they entered the wrong frame to the wrong jury. This yearbook is the antidote: 22 contests, classified by what each jury actually rewards, with the AI policy decoded so you stop disqualifying yourself by accident. Use it once per cycle.

The classification is editorial, not mechanical. A contest that says "AI permitted" inside a dedicated category is a different beast from one that judges captured and generated work side by side. A contest whose jury rewards portfolio coherence is a different submission than one that rewards a single decisive frame. The four-position AI taxonomy on the next page is the spine; the per-contest pages translate it into deadlines you can act on this week.

Every row was read from the contest's own 2026 rules page, not paraphrased from a third-party summary. Where a contest has not yet published 2026 rules at edition time, the previous-cycle rules are used and the row says so. Where a contest publishes no AI clause at all, the row says "not stated" and the safer default — treat as Position 1 — is applied.

Bookmark it. Print it if you work better on paper. Forward it freely. Corrections to zed.mnif@gmail.com — the next edition incorporates them.

— *The Critic / WinPhoto*

THE TAXONOMY

The four AI positions

Every photography contest open in 2026 publishes an AI policy. Most photographers read them wrong, in one of four predictable ways. Knowing which position a contest occupies tells you what the jury is actually checking for.

POSITION ■1

Generative AI forbidden in the final image

Every visible pixel must come from light that fell on a sensor. Documentary, journalism, conservation, scientific imagery sit here.

Allowed. AI denoise, sharpening, dust removal, RAW recovery — operations on captured pixels.

Forbidden. Generative fill, sky replacement, object removal, AI upscaling beyond ~2x.

POSITION ■2

AI-assisted edits permitted, generative forbidden

The darkroom-continuous position. Fine-art, landscape, and travel contests typically sit here.

Allowed. AI denoise + content-aware fill that samples from within the captured frame.

Forbidden. Generative tools that invent pixels from a prompt (still out, even small object removal).

POSITION ■3

Dedicated generative-AI category

AI-generated work welcomed in its own category only. Submitting generative to a regular category is disqualifying.

Allowed. Captured photographs to the regular categories; generative submissions to the generative category.

Forbidden. Misclassification — investigators check, and bans propagate across future cycles.

POSITION ■4

AI fully permitted

Stock-image, brand-sponsored, and tourism contests. Rare in serious contests.

Allowed. Anything — captured and fully-generated work judged together.

Forbidden. Nothing AI-related; the skill being assessed is visual outcome quality, not photographic practice.

THE 22 CONTESTS

Classified by AI position

Each entry carries its 2026 cycle dates where the rules are public, the entry fee, the AI policy verbatim, what the jury actually rewards, the disqualifying signal, and a direct link to the official rules page.

Position ■1

AAP Magazine #58 / AAP Awards 2026

Position ■1

Cycle. Opens 2026-01-15 · Closes 2026-07-15 · Winners 2026-10-01

Money. USD 18 (single image) · Grand Prize: \$5,000 + solo exhibition + AAP Annual Book inclusion. Category winners: \$1,000 + AAP Magazine feature.

AI policy. Photography only — AI-generated work not eligible.

What this jury rewards. Documentary, journalism, conservation: the jury reads for captured authenticity. Every pixel must trace back to light on a sensor — no generative fill, no sky replacement, no synthetic extensions. RAW files surface at the final round.

Skip if. Skip if your workflow includes any generative tool, including small object removal — Position 1 contests treat it as a categorical disqualifier, not a degree question.

Rules. <https://www.all-about-photo.com>

EISA Maestro 2026

Position ■1

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. AI-generated images and pictures older than 2023 are excluded.

What this jury rewards. Documentary, journalism, conservation: the jury reads for captured authenticity. Every pixel must trace back to light on a sensor — no generative fill, no sky replacement, no synthetic extensions. RAW files surface at the final round.

Skip if. Skip if your workflow includes any generative tool, including small object removal — Position 1 contests treat it as a categorical disqualifier, not a degree question.

Rules. <https://eisa.eu/terms-and-conditions/eisa-maestro/>

National Geographic (Traveller UK) 2026

Position ■ 1

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. Generative AI not permitted.

What this jury rewards. Documentary, journalism, conservation: the jury reads for captured authenticity. Every pixel must trace back to light on a sensor — no generative fill, no sky replacement, no synthetic extensions. RAW files surface at the final round.

Skip if. Skip if your workflow includes any generative tool, including small object removal — Position 1 contests treat it as a categorical disqualifier, not a degree question.

Rules. <https://www.natgeotv.com/uk/special/national-geographic-traveller-uk-photography-competition-2026>

POYi 83 (Pictures of the Year International) 2026

Position ■ 1

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. POY does not accept AI-generated or manipulated images in any category.

What this jury rewards. Documentary, journalism, conservation: the jury reads for captured authenticity. Every pixel must trace back to light on a sensor — no generative fill, no sky replacement, no synthetic extensions. RAW files surface at the final round.

Skip if. Skip if your workflow includes any generative tool, including small object removal — Position 1 contests treat it as a categorical disqualifier, not a degree question.

Rules. <https://poy.org/83/rules.html>

Siena International Photo Awards 2026

Position ■ 1

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. AI-generated photos not accepted; human capture and edit only.

What this jury rewards. Documentary, journalism, conservation: the jury reads for captured authenticity. Every pixel must trace back to light on a sensor — no generative fill, no sky replacement, no synthetic extensions. RAW files surface at the final round.

Skip if. Skip if your workflow includes any generative tool, including small object removal — Position 1 contests treat it as a categorical disqualifier, not a degree question.

Rules. <https://sipacontest.com/rules>

Smithsonian Photo Contest 2026

Position ■ 1

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. Images generated or manipulated with AI are not permitted.

What this jury rewards. Documentary, journalism, conservation: the jury reads for captured authenticity. Every pixel must trace back to light on a sensor — no generative fill, no sky replacement, no synthetic extensions. RAW files surface at the final round.

Skip if. Skip if your workflow includes any generative tool, including small object removal — Position 1 contests treat it as a categorical disqualifier, not a degree question.

Rules. <https://photocontest.smithsonianmag.com/photocontest/rules/>

Travel Photographer of the Year 2026

Position ■ 1

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. Wholly or partially AI-generated images ineligible; raw files required.

What this jury rewards. Documentary, journalism, conservation: the jury reads for captured authenticity. Every pixel must trace back to light on a sensor — no generative fill, no sky replacement, no synthetic extensions. RAW files surface at the final round.

Skip if. Skip if your workflow includes any generative tool, including small object removal — Position 1 contests treat it as a categorical disqualifier, not a degree question.

Rules. <https://www.tpoty.com/tpoty-2026-awards/rules/>

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2026

Position ■ 1

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. AI-generated images banned; generative fill banned; AI denoise OK.

What this jury rewards. Documentary, journalism, conservation: the jury reads for captured authenticity. Every pixel must trace back to light on a sensor — no generative fill, no sky replacement, no synthetic extensions. RAW files surface at the final round.

Skip if. Skip if your workflow includes any generative tool, including small object removal — Position 1 contests treat it as a categorical disqualifier, not a degree question.

Rules. <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/wpy/competition/rules>

World Press Photo 2026

Position ■1

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. Must be made with a camera; no synthetic images or generative fill.

What this jury rewards. Decisive timing plus caption-independent reading. The jury looks for the single frame that survives without its accompanying text — news value that the composition itself carries. No staged or set-up imagery; the moment must be reportage.

Skip if. Skip if you can't show RAW + temporal frame sequence on request — authenticity check is forensic, not vibes-based.

Rules. <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/contest/entry-rules>

Position ■2

Black & White Spider Awards 2026

Position ■2

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. AI-created images are not accepted.

What this jury rewards. Fine-art and landscape: the jury accepts modern darkroom operations (AI denoise, content-aware fill that samples from within the captured frame) but rejects anything generated from a prompt. Edit aesthetics over prompt aesthetics.

Skip if. Skip if you used generative fill anywhere — even a small object removed via a generative tool disqualifies; the rule reads operations on captured pixels, full stop.

Rules. <https://www.thespiderawards.com/how-to-enter.php>

CEWE Photo Award 2026

Position ■2

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. No purely AI/computer-generated content; no generative fill in post.

What this jury rewards. Fine-art and landscape: the jury accepts modern darkroom operations (AI denoise, content-aware fill that samples from within the captured frame) but rejects anything generated from a prompt. Edit aesthetics over prompt aesthetics.

Skip if. Skip if you used generative fill anywhere — even a small object removed via a generative tool disqualifies; the rule reads operations on captured pixels, full stop.

Rules. <https://www.cewe.co.uk/cewe-photo-award.html>

International Color Awards 2026

Position ■2

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. AI-created images are not accepted; digital manipulation OK.

What this jury rewards. Fine-art and landscape: the jury accepts modern darkroom operations (AI denoise, content-aware fill that samples from within the captured frame) but rejects anything generated from a prompt. Edit aesthetics over prompt aesthetics.

Skip if. Skip if you used generative fill anywhere — even a small object removed via a generative tool disqualifies; the rule reads operations on captured pixels, full stop.

Rules. <https://www.colorawards.com/how-to-enter.html>

LensCulture Art / Portrait / B&W / Street 2026

Position ■2

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. No purely AI-generated work; AI-assisted editing OK if disclosed.

What this jury rewards. Fine-art and landscape: the jury accepts modern darkroom operations (AI denoise, content-aware fill that samples from within the captured frame) but rejects anything generated from a prompt. Edit aesthetics over prompt aesthetics.

Skip if. Skip if you used generative fill anywhere — even a small object removed via a generative tool disqualifies; the rule reads operations on captured pixels, full stop.

Rules. https://www.lensculture.com/competitions/pa2026/event_rules

LensCulture Critics' Choice 2026

Position ■2

Cycle. Opens 2026-02-01 · Closes 2026-06-15 · Winners 2026-09-30

Money. USD 35 (single image) · Top prize: \$15,000 (overall) plus editorial publication.
Category winners: \$1,500 + LensCulture publication.

AI policy. No purely AI-generated work; AI-assisted editing OK if disclosed.

What this jury rewards. Personal voice over technical novelty. The jury — international critics, gallerists, picture editors — rewards a recognisable authorial sensibility across the submitted set. They aren't looking for the best photograph; they're looking for the maker.

Skip if. Skip if you submit six different aesthetic registers — the jury reads inconsistent voice as career-early, not career-experimental.

Rules. <https://www.lensculture.com/competitions/critics-choice-2025/faq>

Sony World Photography Awards 2026

Position ■2

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. Computer-generated content cannot be the origin; manipulation OK from photo.

What this jury rewards. Fine-art and landscape: the jury accepts modern darkroom operations (AI denoise, content-aware fill that samples from within the captured frame) but rejects anything generated from a prompt. Edit aesthetics over prompt aesthetics.

Skip if. Skip if you used generative fill anywhere — even a small object removed via a generative tool disqualifies; the rule reads operations on captured pixels, full stop.

Rules. <https://www.worldphoto.org/sony-world-photography-awards/open>

Position ■3

Hamdan International Photography Award (HIPA) 2026

Position ■3

Cycle. Opens 2026-01-01 · Closes 2026-05-31 · Winners 2026-09-30

Money. Free entry · Grand Prize: \$200,000. 1st per category: \$40,000–\$50,000. 2nd: \$30,000–\$40,000. 3rd: \$20,000–\$30,000. Total pool: \$1,000,000.

AI policy. AI permitted only in "Dreams Through AI" category; original photograph required elsewhere.

What this jury rewards. Cultural specificity over universal-stock framing. The jury rewards intimate, region-rooted storytelling — multi-generational family frames, single-community series, decisive moments inside a named cultural context. Technical perfection alone won't carry it.

Skip if. Skip if the image reads as stock cliché, HDR-cartoon, or wedding-posed — those signals disqualify regardless of subject.

Rules. <https://hipa.ae/award/family-hipa-award-2026>

International Photography Awards (IPA) 2026

Position ■3

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. AI images go to a dedicated AI category; ineligible for top prizes.

What this jury rewards. Portfolio coherence. The jury rewards a tightly-scoped series — one subject, one place, one extended moment — over a sampler of your best individual frames. Curatorial discipline reads as authorship; sampler reads as filler.

Skip if. Skip if your portfolio is six unrelated singles dressed as a series — the jury detects the absence of an organising idea immediately.

Rules. <https://www.photoawards.com/ai-generated-images/>

Position ■4

BJP / 1854 OpenWalls Spotlight 2026

Position ■4

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. AI-generated imagery permitted, must be clearly stated upon application.

What this jury rewards. AI fully permitted; captured and fully-generated work judged side by side. The skill being assessed is visual outcome quality, not photographic provenance.

Skip if. Skip if you want a contest that distinguishes captured from generated — Position 4 contests don't.

Rules. <https://www.1854.photography/awards/>

Position: not stated

Aperture Portfolio Prize 2026

Position: not stated · policy not on public rules page

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. AI policy not addressed in published rules; "original work" warranty only.

What this jury rewards. The contest has not published a 2026-cycle AI policy on its rules page. The published rules rely on an "original work" warranty alone. Treat as Position 1 by default — the safer assumption for serious entries.

Skip if. Skip if you need certainty before paying the entry fee — write to the organiser for a per-cycle clarification before submitting.

Rules. <https://aperture.org/experience/calls-for-entry/portfolio-prize-terms-conditions>

Inge Morath Award 2026

Position: not stated · policy not on public rules page

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. AI policy not addressed in published call; work must be applicant's own.

What this jury rewards. The contest has not published a 2026-cycle AI policy on its rules page. The published rules rely on an "original work" warranty alone. Treat as Position 1 by default — the safer assumption for serious entries.

Skip if. Skip if you need certainty before paying the entry fee — write to the organiser for a per-cycle clarification before submitting.

Rules. <https://www.magnumfoundation.org/news/inge-morath-award-call-for-applications-2026>

Mangrove Photography Awards 2026

Position: not stated · policy not on public rules page

Cycle. Closes 2026-06-01

Money. Free entry · \$1,000 grand prize. Worldwide exposure via Mangrove Action Project channels.

AI policy. AI policy not in public rules; authenticity check at final round.

What this jury rewards. The contest has not published a 2026-cycle AI policy on its rules page. The published rules rely on an "original work" warranty alone. Treat as Position 1 by default — the safer assumption for serious entries.

Skip if. Skip if you need certainty before paying the entry fee — write to the organiser for a per-cycle clarification before submitting.

Rules. <https://www.photography.mangroveactionproject.org/enter-the-competition>

Sony Alpha Female+ 2026

Position: not stated · policy not on public rules page

Cycle. Cycle dates: see official rules

Money. Entry fee + prize pool: see official rules

AI policy. AI policy not addressed in 2025 official rules (carried into 2026).

What this jury rewards. The contest has not published a 2026-cycle AI policy on its rules page. The published rules rely on an "original work" warranty alone. Treat as Position 1 by default — the safer assumption for serious entries.

Skip if. Skip if you need certainty before paying the entry fee — write to the organiser for a per-cycle clarification before submitting.

Rules. <https://alphauniverse.com/legal/alpha-female-plus-2025-grant-program-official-rules/>

METHODOLOGY

How the yearbook was compiled

Each entry is the contest's own 2026 rule page, read directly. Where the 2026 cycle hasn't published rules yet, the previous-cycle rules are used and noted. For contests that don't publish a per-cycle AI clause, the row shows "not stated" — typically because the contest pre-dates the question or relies on the photographer's "original work" warranty.

The Position 1–4 classification is a reading of the rule's *effect*, not a paraphrase of its surface wording. A contest that says "AI permitted" but only inside a dedicated category is a Position 3, not a Position 4. A contest that says "AI permitted for assisted edits" is a Position 2, not a Position 4.

The honest read: **18 of 22** contests have a 2026-cycle AI policy on a public rules page. **4 contests** have no AI clause anywhere in their published rules and are listed as "not stated". Two additional contests were considered and excluded — Magnum Photography Awards (discontinued as a standalone competition in 2017) and Visa pour l'Image (a festival, not a contest with a per-cycle rules page).

If you spot a misclassification or a contest we've missed, write to zed.mnif@gmail.com — corrections published weekly. The next edition incorporates them.

AFTERWORD

One more thing

Want the weekly Letter? You already get it — this PDF is your welcome bonus. The Letter ships every Sunday: one photograph the critic read as Strong Submit at a major contest that week, plus the deadlines closing in the next seven days. Short, sober, no upsell.

Want a per-photograph verdict against any of the contests in this yearbook? Open winphoto.io/analyze — free tier, no signup, the critic reads your single frame against the contest brief you pick. The verdict is the same one that feeds the Sunday Letter; you just see it on demand for your own work.

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— *The Critic / WinPhoto*