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A Look Back at “Alaska Positive”

By the late 1960s, the consideration of photography as an art form was an idea whose time had come. In 1970 the Alaska State Museum launched a statewide photography competition called *Alaska Positive*, to present to the public the best work being done by Alaska photographers. Now, 35 years later, the museum has assembled the award-winning photographs from many of those past competitions for a retrospective look at Alaska’s most famous photography show. Following its exhibition in Juneau, the exhibit is touring Alaska.

“The Best of *Alaska Positive*: 35 Years of Award-winning Photographs,” opens (your date here). The show will be on view through (date).

More than 70 photographs are included, the earliest being from 1971 and the most recent from 2004. A 44-page catalog accompanies the exhibit, illustrating the award-winning photographs, and providing short juror biographies and quotes from past juror statements.

The emphasis of the show has always been on the personally expressive use of the photographic medium, as opposed to commercial. This has been reflected in the selection of jurors, who have typically been involved in the arena of photography as an art, be they photographers, curators, critics or artists.

Mark Daughhetee, Curator of Exhibitions at the museum, said, “For the past three and one-half decades *Alaska Positive* has been a consistent venue for Alaska photographers to showcase their artistic visions through the medium of photography. During its 35-year history, *Alaska Positive* has exhibited hundreds of images created by Alaskans, and those images have been viewed by tens of thousands of visitors.”

Alaska Positive started small but has grown over the years. Last year’s competition drew 276 entries from 81 photographers and artists. Initially, the competition was an annual affair, but in 1987 it changed to every two years. A Juror’s Choice award is made for every show, as well as other awards, which have changed over the years. Following exhibition in Juneau, each edition of *Alaska Positive* tours Alaska for display in museums across the state.

Many of the jurors have been known nationally or even internationally, such as Garry Winogrand, Judy Dater and John Baldessari. Often they have commented on the challenge of making photographs in an environment as dramatic as Alaska. Arthur Ollman, a San Diego-based photographer and curator who juried the show in 1998, stated, “Photographs often mean what they seem to mean, but occasionally they mean much more. These potent observations may offer metaphor, transcendence and poetic insight about their subject or they may simply state that which is apparent but astonishing.”