

The No Rules* Astro Photo Show

** okay, so there are a couple of rules.*

Must be shot in 2009. No dumpster diving into your archives.

Use anything with or without a lens that can capture light. This means 3 dollar disposable cameras, 79 dollar digital point and shoots; brand new Canon Mark LXI D9000 DSLRs, ST1100000 CCD cameras, and any forgotten film camera in the back of your closet are eligible! Homemade cameras too. If it captures light it's fair game!

You must be a TAAS member.

Maximum entries-3 Each entry must be matted, framed and ready to hang.

Maximum frame size 11 x 14.

If you want to participate in a photo exchange with another entrant, mark one of your entries on the back for exchanging.

A few dates to remember and use as possible photo ops. As each month nears, I'll post a few interesting targets and some tips for making photos.

January 2009

- 1 The first sunrise of the IYA 2009 (International Year of Astronomy)
- 10 The largest Full Moon of 2009
- 30 Venus near the Moon

February 2009

- 4 Moon near Pleiades
- 9 Full Moon
- 12 Zodiacal Light (it's tougher than you think)
- 23-24 Mercury, Moon, Mars, Jupiter conjunction (morning)
- 27 Venus near Moon

Ongoing 2009

Star Trails

Show will be held in November at a venue to be announced later.

We will award a People's Choice Award, two runners up and one Judges Choice Award.

Tips, tricks and other stunts to make astrophotos that rock!

1. Shoot like Paparazzi.

This may seem like a no-brainer or a cop-out, and you may think that surely everyone is going to shoot the largest Full Moon of the year, the comet of the century, or stalk the conjunction of the decade, but not everyone will have the same idea for composition, foreground subjects or sky conditions and artistic eye that you do. So just shoot it! Besides, you might be the only one in your area that has a clear sky the night of the big event, and if you don't go outside and try that's a sure way to not get the shot. I practice what I preach. Just look at the archives of my blog. <http://infinity.my-expressions.com/>

2 Make photos of atmospheric optics.

This may seem like fudging, but some of the most amazing images I've seen have been of sky phenomena like sundogs, moonbows and halos. Don't count them out because they aren't exactly what is considered astrophotography. Because of their dynamic range they are very difficult to capture as you see them. On top of that, anytime you are outside shooting, it gets the creative juices flowing and that's always a good thing!

3 Shoot outside your comfort level.

Try to photograph something you've never tried before. If you keep shooting the same thing over and over, you will of course master it, just don't fall into a comfortable rut and not try anything new.

4 Shoot for the memory.

Sometimes it's best to just shoot the scene as it is right in front of your eyes as a documentation of what you saw even though it might not be perfect. Often a snapshot records enough data to stimulate your memory of the event later. While this may or may not make for an award winning photo, it's one of the best ways I know to have a keepsake of what you saw.

5 Make your mistakes when they don't matter.

There are going to be times you want to photograph an event that you have had no practice for and you're only going to get one chance to make a photo of it. An example of this is a dim object (say the ISS) moving through the field of a bright one (like the Moon) and you want to capture the dynamics of the speedy motion of the ISS against a not so speedy stellar background. A few nights before showtime, go outside and set up your camera to record the scene at the same time the actual event will occur. Aim your camera at the field the ISS will fly through and frame it in a pleasing way. Now try different f/stops for the designated time of the pass to determine which one is best for the result you want. You can use charts to figure out how long the exposure will be using tick marks on the detailed star charts at Heavens-above. The stars will trail a bit if the exposure is over 30 seconds long so keep this in mind when setting up the shot.

6 Fill the memory card.

It's simply the right thing to do. Don't scrimp and just take a few photos because you think it's enough. Delete the ones that don't turn out and no-one will be the wiser. Save the keepers to print and share. If you're stacking images you will need to save every ounce of data possible to make the best compilation. Remember less is not more here. More is more. It's okay to be greedy, it's highly recommended.

7 Be inspired by bigger pictures.

Look at other photos and make notes of why you like them and how you might make a similar image. Even though you may not have a zillion mega pixel camera, or direct access to the Hubble Space Telescope you can still make killer images with simple point and shoot cameras or digital SLR cameras by using ideas from the pros you admire.

8 Turn off the flash

Enough said. Unless you purposely want bloopers and odd reflections, turn it off. The flash unit is only good for about 6 feet maximum, and the Moon is much farther away than that, so turn the darn thing off and save your battery power as a bonus.

9 Hocus focus

Focus is the most difficult aspect of digital astrophotography. Focus manually on a distant object and then lock the focus if possible. Some cameras hunt unsuccessfully for focus because they can't figure out what you are aimed at in the dark if it is small and dim.

10. **Keep it fun!**

Don't kill yourself or your camera trying to impress your peers. Do it because you are widening your horizons and growing creatively with your technique and camera.

Thanks,

Becky Ramotowski