

AGS Judging: Technique Series – Color-Related Products &



This Judging column is going to cover the judging considerations of one technique – a different one for each of the coming issues - to assist AGS Certified Judges when performing their judging duties AND gourd artists who use the given technique and those who enter gourd competitions. Our goal is to help you answer the following questions:

- What does good look like?
- What are the expectation differences for novice, intermediate, and advanced levels?
- What do experts in the given technique expect to see that demonstrate quality execution of the skill?
- What are errors that we should be aware of?



Our goal for sharing the judging criteria will promote a fair and consistent approach to evaluating gourds at Gourd Art Competitions. We know that no two artists (or judges) will agree 100% on a set of guidelines, but they will agree more than they disagree.

Categories and their descriptions of what else, if anything, is allowed for a category will vary from one event to the next.

Many competitions will allow other techniques in addition to the main one, i.e., “*Main Technique*” with other media and embellishments. The use of color and/or a finish is probably the technique most likely allowed with other main techniques.

Color – Is it a Matter of Preference or a Technique?

It's both. The choice of ink, dye, paint and so on are chosen by the artist based on the look they want to achieve and what their favorite products are. Because there is a look and color palate

that the artist has chosen, it is important that judges view those choices in terms of how well the techniques were applied and not critique the colors used which may be different from the style or preferences of the judge. When viewed as a technique, there will be observable characteristics that demonstrate how well or not so well the color and product were applied.



There are a variety of color-related products that may be used for a solid background or design. Observations would include: (a) Is the color uniform with no overlapping marks or runs? and (b) Are brush or applicator marks showing?



When color-related products are used to paint or pencil a design judges will be looking to see if the product used was contained within wood burned lines. Wood-burned lines are not a requirement, but when dyes/inks/paints/colored pencils are used with woodburning the color should stay within the lines for a neat appearance. Judges would like to see that the product does not obscure the wood burned lines.

Finishes – Inks, Dyes, Paint, Colored Pencil, Varnishes/Finishes



Inks can be *used to create a marbled or mottled design.* Dots and dribbles and runs can be intentionally created with alcohol and products containing alcohol over prior layers of alcohol ink (AI). There are many different looks that can be achieved when AI is applied over a previous layer. Is the design pleasing to the eye? Do the

colors used complement each other? Is the appearance of the technique(s) used consistent?

sagging of finish or runs? Is there lint, dust specks or grit on the finish? Was the finish evenly applied with no missed areas? Does the surface feel very smooth?



We also look at the uncolored areas of the gourd. Are areas not dyed free of any smudges or spots of dye? We don't expect perfection but do recognize that entries by actual beginners (Novice Division) may include one or two spots of uneven application or smudges, which may be forgiven.

Entries in the Intermediate and Advanced divisions should not have any uneven applications of color or color application outside of a designated area.

The same products may be used to add color on the inside of the gourd. In

addition to observing for complete coverage, judges will examine if the gourd has been adequately cleaned of gourd fiber and seeds.

Clear Finishes – Water-based, Solvent-based, Lacquer



There are many products, and they are available in gloss, semi-gloss, satin, and matte formulations and the preference for which one to use belongs to the artist. What judges will look at is the end result. Is the finish smooth and neat with no

Judging Criteria

Now that we've reviewed some products to apply color and finish to a gourd, we will summarize that information in the format of the new Judging Form.

Overall appearance. Evaluate based on overall appeal, artistic design, originality and artistic creativity; a "wow" factor.

1. What is the eye appeal, balance, and overall form?
2. Has the artist used a fresh approach?
3. Do the colors complement each other?
4. Does it add to or detract from the main technique?

Craftsmanship. Evaluate based on attention to detail, uniform quality of work, overall impact not marred by obvious flaws.

1. How well was the piece painted/color penciled? Is it neat and smooth? Do you see individual pencil marks or brush or applicator marks?
2. Is the painting and finishing neat? Incomplete painting, errant paint/ink marks that show or sloppiness should be penalized.
3. Are the edges of the painting or coloring jagged?
4. Are there fingerprints or lint/debris on the surface?

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Judging continued

Difficulty/level of effort. Evaluate based on difficulty



of techniques as applied. Complexity of design, skill involved, and amount of effort required. The expectation for the degree of difficulty increases from Novice to Intermediate, and from Intermediate to Advanced.

1. Is there highlighting or variation in color to give it depth?

2. Are the colors blended into the adjoining colors?

3. How complex is the design? Well-done, complex and extensive painting/coloring with shading and highlighting should be scored higher than work with less detail and complexity.



Featured technique or theme. Theme or class description must be met; it should be what you notice most.

1. Examples: Some categories specify a subject; or maybe it's a general theme... does the entry fulfill the description of the category?
2. Is it what the judges notice first?
3. Do the flaws of the gourd itself detract from the design?

Entry Levels and Judging Color & Finishes on Gourds

What is the main difference when judging colored entries in the Novice, Intermediate and Advanced divisions? It is in Craftsmanship and Difficulty/level of effort. As the entrants advance from one division to the next, so too is the expectation that the entries will demonstrate more attention to detail and greater amounts of complexity.



Entries are purposely separated into these divisions, so they are judged among those of similar degrees of prior experience. You should also know that an entry that won a certain ribbon at one show may not win the same ribbon at another show. The competition is going to be different at every show you go to, and you may face stiff competition. Step-up your game and focus on continuous improvement.

Conclusion

Many of these guidelines will apply to other techniques, such as pyrography, carving and weaving. It may seem redundant, but repetition will lead to a better understanding and a consistent application of these judging guidelines. Focus on the originality, quality of craftsmanship and overall impact of design of your entries.

One last word: Take the time to enter your gourd art in the proper category and at the appropriate level. Don't be afraid to enter at the higher level if you are on the cusp of two levels. Challenge yourself. Recognize that you are likely to be more accomplished than you give yourself credit for. 🙌



The Interior of a Gourd Entry. Details matter. The inside of a cut gourd should be cleaned as best as possible and will be considered part of the work and judged accordingly. If the opening of a gourd is very narrow, and not part of the design (e.g., vase, bobblehead) the coloring and finishing of the inside of the gourd is optional. However, if the opening is for a bowl or basket, for example, the inside of the gourd is part of the design and the quality of the cleaning, sanding, and finishing is important. At the Master's Level, cleaning/finishing the interior is expected. 🧼



Dear Judge Abby – A column from the monthly newsletter

The judging committee invites queries about entering competitions. Do you want information about the entry levels? Should it be based on years of experience, number of ribbons received or accomplishments such as teaching? Maybe your question is about the results of judging your entry versus another and you want to better understand the results. Please email us with your questions, and if photos would help, send them too. Email us at americangourdsociety@gmail.com.

In July we responded to this question, and you may have missed it. See below.

Dear Judge Abby,

"I have many pieces of work that just don't fit into a single category. I'll get an idea and work on the project, letting it evolve. What it ends up as may fit into a single technique competition category, but often it does not. What should I do?" Happy Gourder

Dear Happy Gourder,

The categories in competitions serve a purpose. They allow entries with a specific technique or theme to be judged against similar entries. The craftsmanship (quality of work/attention to detail), degree of difficulty, overall appeal and artistic design are carefully assessed against the ideal standard for the technique at a certain level (novice, intermediate, advanced, masters).

Those judging criteria become more challenging when the categories are "multimedia," "anything goes" or other open category because both the techniques applied to, and the subject of, the entries can be so varied. Judges are not really comparing apples to apples. Theme categories, such as Spirit Dolls or Musical Instruments have something in common, while the artistic techniques can be varied. Perhaps you can focus the idea and work on a skill or theme of the upcoming competition and aim to increase the degree of difficulty and intricacy of the techniques you're applying. If the technique is carving, it should be what judges will notice first. Another option is to enter the mixed media categories at local juried art shows.

Sincerely, Judge Abby 🧼

