THE PHOTOMODE

E-MAGAZINE

THE VIRTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS 2025

COVER BY MURPHYVP

THE PHOTOMODE

THE VIRTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS 2025

This issue of THE PHOTOMODE highlights the winners and runner-ups together with some of the finalists and honourable mentions of **the Virtual Photography Awards 2025**, hosted by @**thefourthfocus**.

We invited some of the creators to tell us about themselves and the creative process behind their shots. For a full overview of all the winners and runner-ups go to www.thefourthfocus.com/thevpawards

We encourage you to read what these creators have to say and hope that it will be an inspiration in your own virtual photography.

We believe that awards like this inspire creators to push themselves to try new things. And most of all it brings the community together - to celebrate the art form of virtual photography - that we all love.

We always strive to feature the best from our community in THE PHOTOMODE. And this time we certainly do. Enjoy!

Malin,
@**playpausephoto**

Our page is your stage

We dedicate our pages to the Virtual Photography Community.

We love the art form of virtual photography and believe inside you'll find the very best this community has to offer.

If you like one of the featured artists, simply click on their work and it will take you directly to their profile.

Want to be featured?

Tag and mention us or use #ThePhotoMode & participate in our monthly themes.

contact@**thephotomode.com**

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THE VIRTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS // 2025

The Virtual Photography Awards is an annual celebration of in-game photography and screenshot art – founded and hosted by @**thefourthfocus**.

These awards honour the creativity of digital artists worldwide, showcasing their talent and inspiring new visions across the community.

The Awards span over 7 diverse thematic categories, each designed to challenge the imagination and to inspire innovation. The categories this year were – ACTION, COLLECTION, ENVIRONMENT, LO-FI, OPEN, PEOPLE, STORYTELLING.

Made up of experienced capture artists, distinguished photographers, and game industry professionals, the judging panel will use their expertise to select the Virtual Photographers of the Year.

This will then culminate in the ultimate prize of **Virtual Photographer of the Year**.

Website: The VP Awards
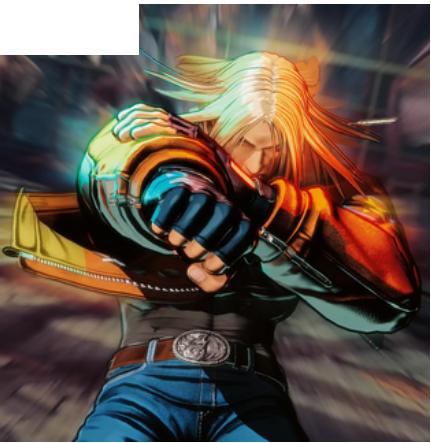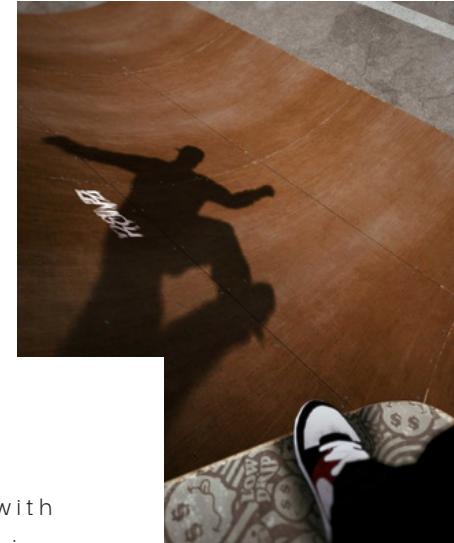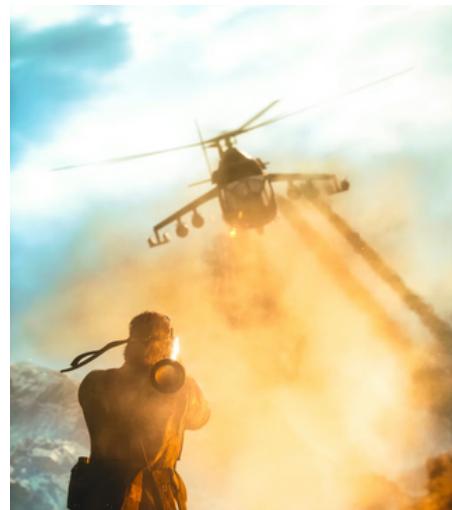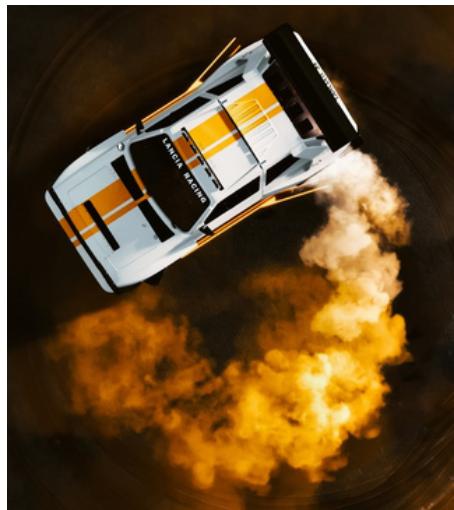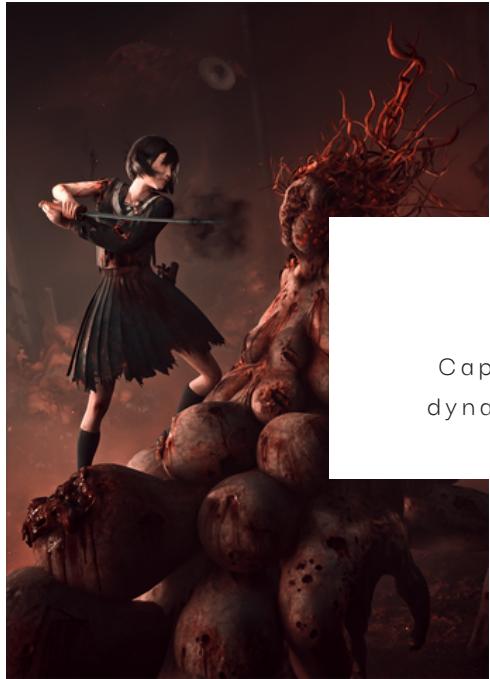
ACTION

Capture the intensity of movement, combat, sports, and racing with dynamic compositions that freeze motion and impactful moments in a single static frame.
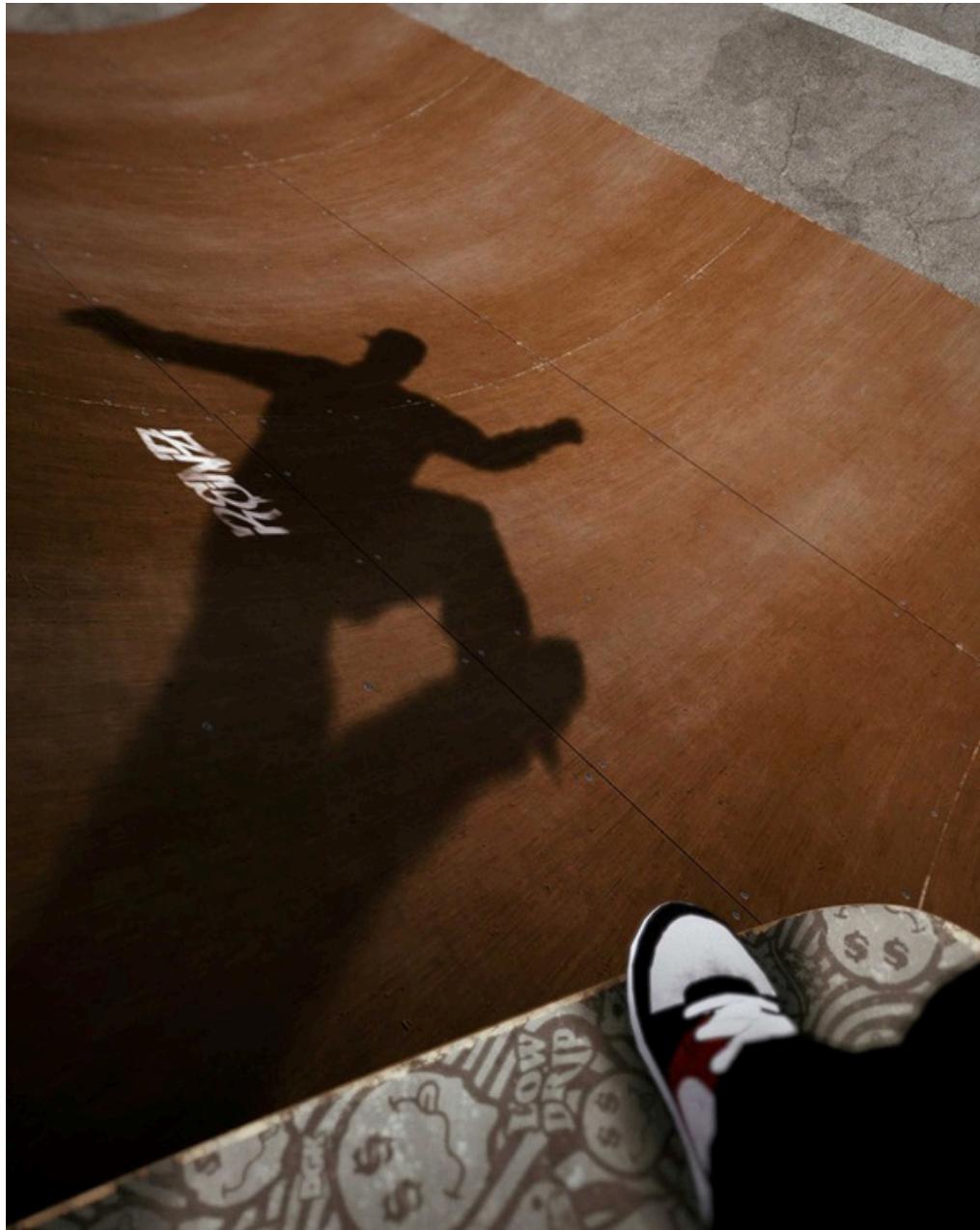
_VIRTUALTOURISM
action winner

SHKEGULKA

action runner-up

We see a lot of stunning action shots from you - what would you say are the key elements to a good action shot and what is your technique to capture them?

The genre is relatively new to me, but I'd say what matters the most is going absolutely crazy in what you do for drama.

I enjoy being good at games. For shots, however, the opposite often works better. Risks and curiosity have to take over, so I don't shy away from the most

questionable gameplay decisions to see what happens. What if I rush towards this attack instead of blocking? What if I peek from cover while under heavy fire? And hey, maybe it's time to use a flashy move that will surely get me killed? Been there, done that. Anything goes – as long as it generates and exaggerates the desired dynamic.

It also helps explore the wide range of animations and their interactions, which may be my favourite thing to do. Each frame is a unique nuanced mix of elements, and there's nothing more rewarding than examining them for hours until everything – down to the last flying spark or the physics flapping in the wind – finally clicks together.

So my technique is being unreasonable and carefully observing the chaos that ensues. The drama we're looking for is just a moment away from the game over screen.

You received three finalist spots and one honourable mention. What was your reaction to that?

I'm 15% normal human being, 85% my own worst critic. The shortlists made me super happy, but I also had to double-check later that day to see if I was hallucinating, because there's no way my pics are on the list among with so many fantastic works. It's a huge motivator to keep going,
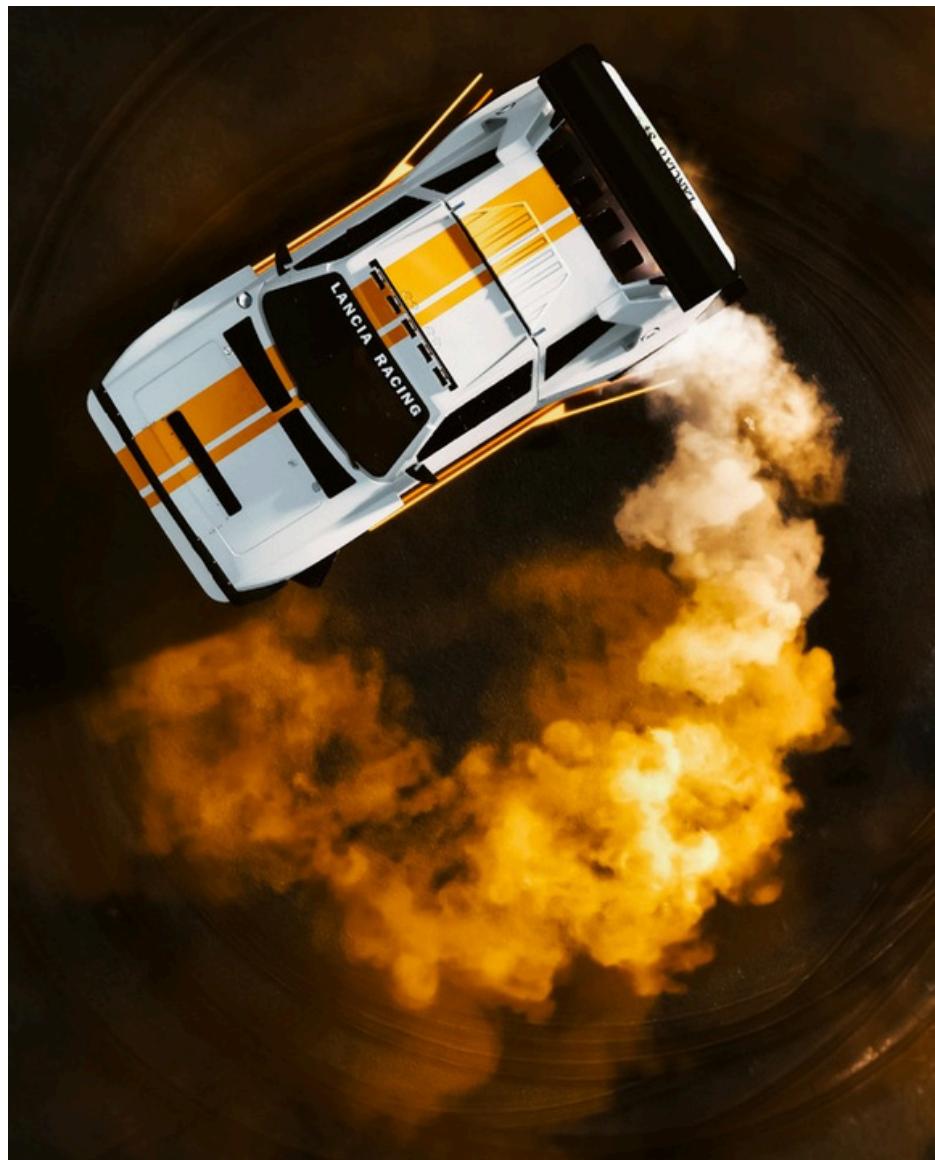
SASKIA.S.PHOTO.WORLD

action finalist

Could you tell us about the creative process behind this shot?

I'm someone who truly loves racing games and simulators, and one of my absolute favorite titles is The Crew Motorfest by Ubisoft. What fascinates me most about creating images in this game is the amount of visual freedom it offers — especially when it comes to customizing cars with different items like colored drift smoke or unique skins. For this particular shot, I paid close attention to making sure everything worked together visually. When I chose and customized the car, I made sure that the colors of the vehicle, the skin, and the drift effects were all harmonized. I then had the idea of taking the scene into a desert environment and performing donuts with the car to fully emphasize these effects.

The sand being thrown into the air played a very important role in the final image as well. It adds a strong sense of movement and realism, making the action feel more raw and authentic. Finding the right perspective was another key step — after experimenting with different angles, I decided that a bird's-eye view would best capture the full scenario and highlight the circular motion and visual impact of the scene. This image didn't come together instantly. It took quite a few attempts until everything aligned the way I envisioned it. Once I was happy with the composition, I adjusted the weather and lighting conditions to give the image its own mood and atmosphere. Small details were refined in post afterwards to subtly enhance the overall look without losing the natural feel of the scene.

This is not the first time we see your shot on the shortlist. How do you decide which photo to submit for a contest?

Whenever I'm exploring virtual worlds, I take many shots and always try to get the best out of each one. But every now and then, there are images that feel different — images that stand out to me personally and have a certain presence or energy that I don't see very often in other works. Those are usually the shots I choose. I select images that truly convince me on a personal level — the ones that almost feel like they're telling me, "Pick me." Out of all the images I create, there are only a few that genuinely surprise or move me. When that happens, those are the images I like to submit to special events like this, because they represent moments where everything came together naturally and authentically.

THE
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PHOTOGRAPHY
AWARDS // 2025
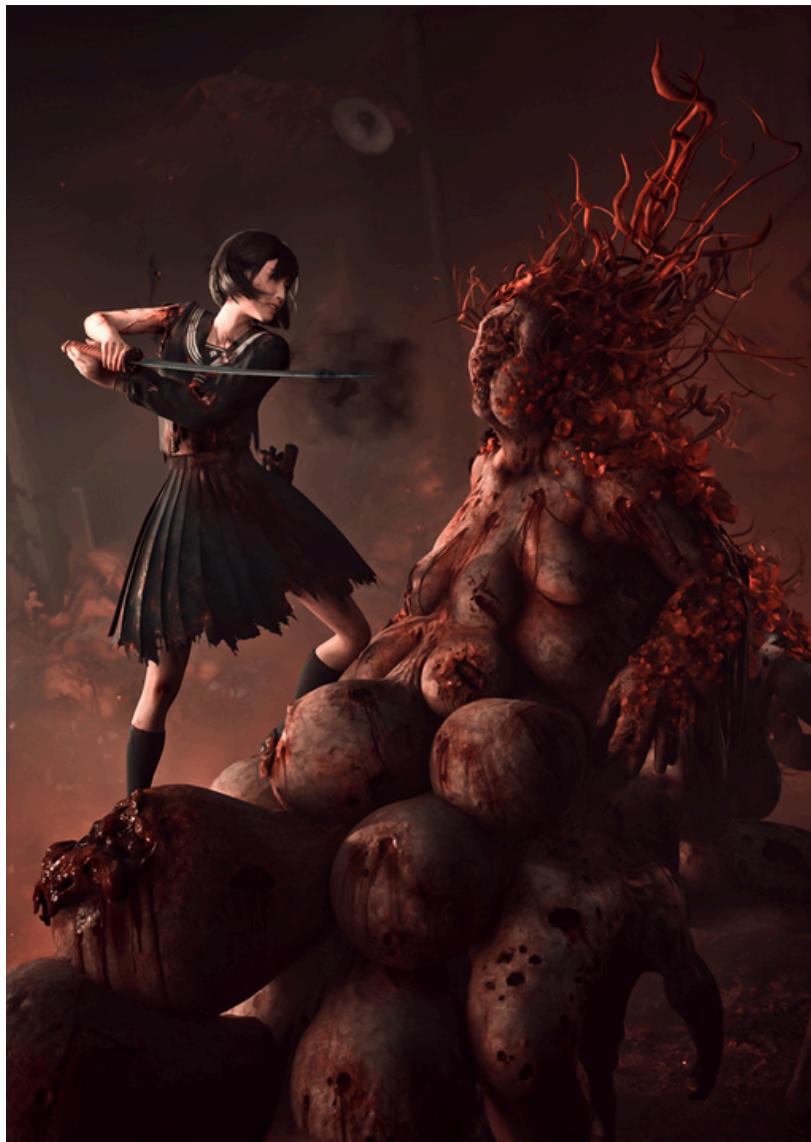
SEEKERS_SANCTUARY
action finalist

Could you tell us the story behind your shot? And what did the creative process involve?

When I first heard about the VP Awards I wasn't too sure I'd enter. I had already won a competition by The Fourth Focus in the past for an action shot and didn't think I could do it again, but I wanted to challenge myself to see if I could put together another shot good enough to get to the finals or win. I initially had a different shot in mind with one of the larger end-game bosses of Silent Hill F, but I was not able to reach the boss in time for the competition, so I decided to try a shot with some of the other enemies. I had also just unlocked the katana in the game, so I was excited to get some epic shots!

I had taken a few basic combat shots with the birthing monster before I had the idea to use the posing tools from the legendary Otis to move Hinako and position her on top of the monster to capture the moment right before the killing blow. Hinako was already frozen in the middle of an attack, so I had to adjust her legs to position them correctly on the monster and adjust her head to face it. I adjusted the monster's pose slightly as well by moving its head to face Hinako. I placed a few custom lights in the scene to ensure all the important details were properly lit and added some volumetric fog to clean up the background. I decided to use colour tones that had a rusty and bloody feel to them instead of the game's more vibrant colours. The final touch was adding IGSC depth of field to clean up the shot and remove the sharp edges.

What was your reaction to finding out that you made it to the shortlist?

I was surprised to hear from a friend that I made it into the finalists, considering how many other incredible shots were entered by other artists. There are so many incredible virtual photographers in the community who have the really pushed the boundaries with their talent so it's an absolute pleasure to be chosen amongst them as one of the finalists. I'm grateful to Mik/The Fourth Focus for hosting these awards as well as the judges who must do the incredibly difficult job of choosing the winners from so many outstanding artists. Best of luck to the other finalists and to those who didn't make it this year, you are all still amazing so keep on keeping on!

S.PICTUREZ

action finalist

Can you tell us a little about yourself and what virtual photography means to you?

I've been exploring virtual photography for about a year. At the moment, my focus is on learning how to translate in-game moments into strong images by paying attention to composition, timing, and light, while gradually developing my own visual approach.

What is the story or inspiration behind your shot and what did the creative process look like?

The image was captured in Metal Gear Solid 3. I was drawn to the raw intensity of the scene – a direct confrontation, strong movement, and heavy atmosphere. So I experimenting with camera position and timing in the photo mode until the scene felt visually strong and readable.

COMPUTART
action finalist

**Could you tell us the story behind your shot?**

I just really like shooting fighting games, they have amazing characters designs and all kind of cool effects. They aren't that much used as a subject, and for this one it's the return of a legendary IP.

But it is also often a challenge to shoot them, since they have all kind of "gimmicks" unique to the genre: Character models warping depending on the camera position, effects or lightning working only on the side you're supposed to see in game, etc. So managing to get a nice and dynamic shot with all that, is already a satisfaction in itself.

Was it hard to decide what shot to enter in the category?

Well yes and no: it needed a bit of thoughts considering I have multiple eligible shots for that category. Especially with this game, since fighting games have a natural affinity for this.

But in the end the choice for this one was pretty natural. Even if many of my shots of this game where popular, this particular one really was above the rest when I posted it. And, personally, I think it is super efficient, simple 1:1 ratio, colorful, impactful, with motion.
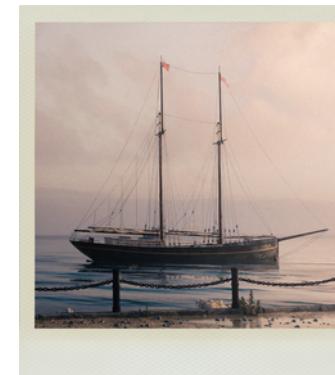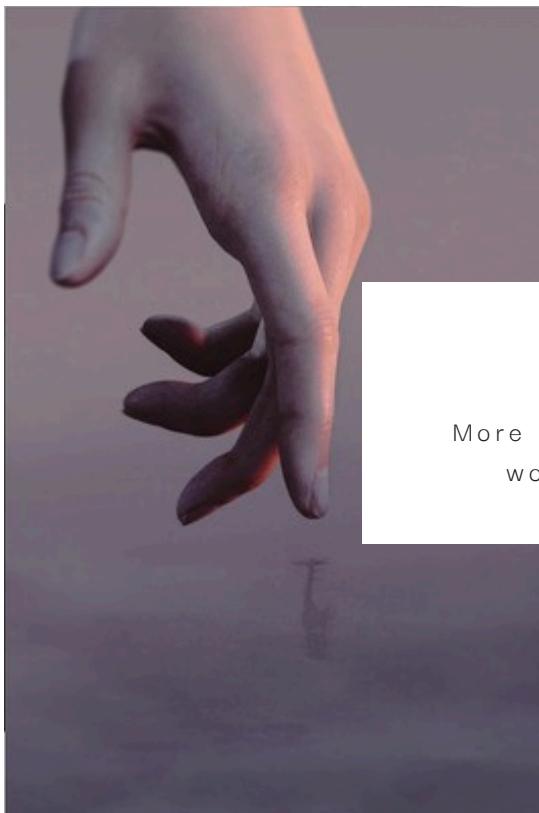
COLLECTION

More than just a single image, this category seeks cohesive bodies of work that show a common artistic concept, sequence, or visual language across 3 or more images.

PMI_PLOTNIKOV
collection winner

How does it feel to be the winner of the Collection category in this years VP Awards?

This was my first time participating in The VP Awards, and watching the Results Show was really intense and exciting.

The competition is very high – the level of work at The VP Awards remains consistently strong and continues to grow every year, which I consider important and encouraging.

When I saw that my work was announced as the winner during the show, this feeling of growing expectation finally let go, and it was genuinely pleasing. The jury's feedback made the moment even more memorable.

Being shortlisted or winning means the work resonated – and that matters.

Could you tell us about the creative process and inspiration behind your collection?

I've always been drawn to series – projects built around a unified visual or conceptual idea. Working with continuity between frames feels closer to what I truly want to do. When The VP Awards announced the Collection and Storytelling categories, I knew – this is what I want to be part of.

I created this triptych specifically for the competition, and from the very beginning, conventional game photography in the traditional sense wasn't my reference point. I wanted to create something that goes beyond a screenshot – a narrative open to interpretation, yet visually compelling and fresh.After seeing the results of my work on a six-frame collection exploring crime and the gallows, I realized – the visual uniqueness wasn't satisfying me. So I turned to photographers who build series around strong visual patterns. I used this approach for storytelling and compressed the story into three frames.

I rarely use monochrome, but here it was the only right choice, because this isn't about any specific moment. Color anchors an image to time and place. I didn't want that.

The work is titled The Weight of Time.
"His Time. His Witnesses. His End."

UYSCUTI10
collection runner-up

Can you tell us a little about your collection and what inspired it?

The collection focuses on hands and the subtle emotions they carry. I was inspired by quiet moments and small gestures that feel meaningful without needing explanation. The images live in the space between intention and action, where feeling quietly exists.

GINGERBREAD
collection finalist

Hi, I'm Annamaria, an aspiring capture artist living in France and this was my process for the Memories of Sicily collection.

During launch Mafia: The Old Country had no photo mode or tools, but the game itself is begging to be displayed in galleries, so I've decided to go back to the basics and do some old fashioned wall-hugging. This is the technique screenshotters used prior to PMs and mods becoming popular. All you gotta do is find a wall - or waist-high object - , crouch down and turn the camera around, it will automatically recover from the wall, the player will disappear from view, from there you can easily capture what's directly in front of you. This way I was able to shoot a game with a fixed camera and showcase mostly scenery and some detail shots. I realised that these would exactly be something you'd find on polaroids: memories of a holiday or the stillness of everyday life, which resulted in the creation of this series.

Technically speaking the only variables I had control over were the field of view and the aspect ratio. Regarding the FOV I was able to adjust that on the fly on a shot-by-shot basis using the Options menu in the game. To shoot in different ARs I used a composition shader in ReShade to be able to execute my vision better in both portrait and landscape orientations.

In addition to that I also had to make some adjustments in post, such as adding the appropriate amount of grain, wear and tear, adjusting the black and white levels, removing any unwanted objects, clipping and so on. I'm quite adept at faking light too, which I took advantage of in this phase and slightly enhanced the in-game lighting to a point where the end result looks better but isn't exactly noticeable at first glance.
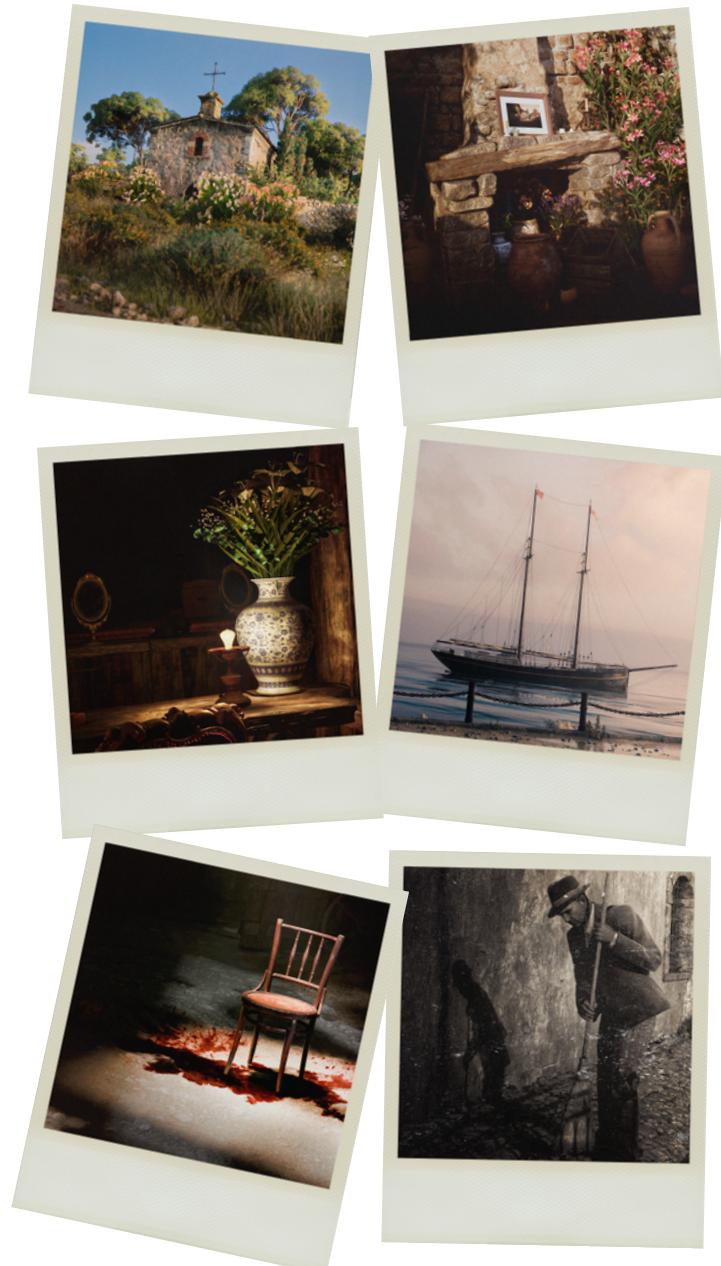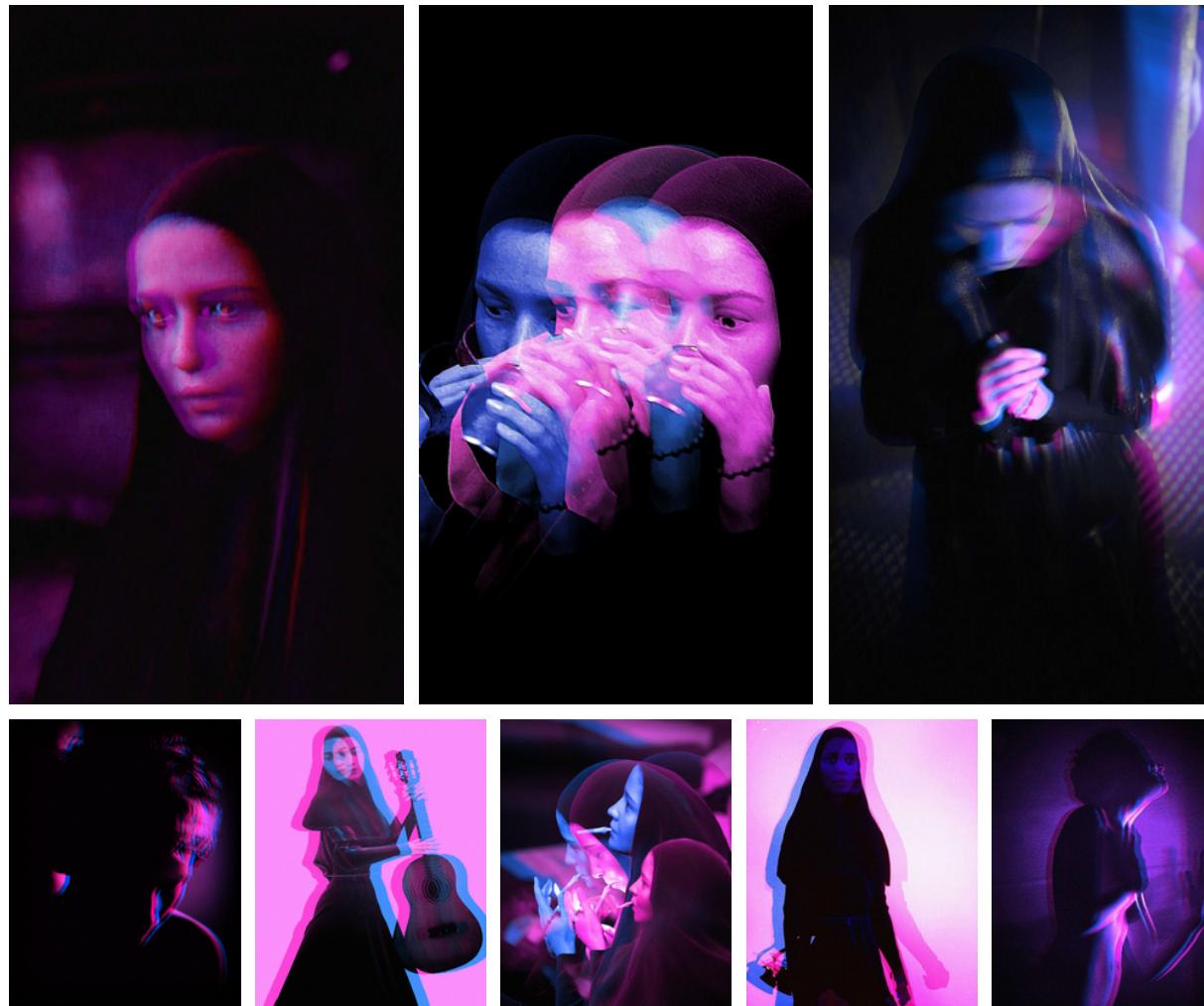
THoRAXTHEIMPALER

collection finalist

Could you tell us about your collection - what is the story and inspiration behind it?

'How Do You Really Feel' is my attempt at expressing Indika's inner conflict visually. She's torn between a desire for salvation and the fear that such a thing might not exist, she yearns for god's love but dances with the devil. Indika's literally split between different versions of herself.

I felt the double exposure effect paired with different blurs and distortions would help highlight this conflict. The blue/pink/purple color scheme is something I've always enjoyed, and I think it accentuates the game's psychedelic vibe. My hope is that the color scheme and compositions help the viewer form a deeper connection to Indika.

What was your reaction to finding out you made the shortlist?

I was stunned. It's something I hoped for but didn't think could happen. I feel that any time someone connects with one of my photos it's a beautiful and amazing thing. I love these characters and I want to share that love with as many people as possible.

It's bittersweet as well, so I'm a bit torn. Part of me is elated knowing people enjoyed my photos enough to include them in the shortlist. Another part of me is sad because I can't share the moment with my dad who passed away 11 months ago. In the morning before he died, I proudly told him about a cool community account sharing one of my photos. I was so excited and I remember how surprised and excited he was for me too.

I wish I could share this with him now and hear what he'd have to say. Above all else I'm truly grateful that my photos were included in the shortlist.

KEEPYOURINNERLIGHT
collection finalist

### Could you tell us about your collection?

When I first started Alan Wake 2, I immediately felt that it was more than just a video game. The atmosphere created by Remedy is so immersive that I was instantly drawn into its visual world. This visual density and artistic quality became my primary inspiration: I didn't just want to play; I wanted to capture the intangible tension emanating from every frame.

These photos depict psychological tension. The noir-style contrasts of light and shadow highlight Alan's inner turmoil, uncertainty, and the suffocating presence of darkness. The photos capture not just a location, but a subconscious anxiety on the border of silence and noise.

The photos consciously avoid direct action. Instead, they focus on the alienation of mundane spaces – an empty kitchen, a TV screen vibrating with static, or an ominous bathroom. Through these black-and-white compositions, I wanted the viewer to focus not on colors, but on shapes, textures, and the weight of emptiness. The forest looming behind the curtains or the light of a lonely lamp reinforces the feeling that the reality we perceive as safe could crumble at any moment.

For me, these shots are aesthetic imprints of digital loneliness and despair. They present a world where light signifies not salvation, but merely survival against the all-consuming darkness. I wish every gamer and artist to experience this simultaneously creepy yet beautiful world at least once.

ANTICOWL
collection honourable mention

Could you tell us about your collection - what is the story and inspiration behind it?

The story behind the glitches is that I've been a fan of Rob Sheridan's work for years. Not just him, but also the old album covers from, for example, Front 242 in the 80s, which also used this kind of technique. The "Never Stop" EP and "Official Version" to name them. William Gibson has also some glitches as book covers. So, I was partly inspired by those.

This is when I was discussing the VPAs with a friend that this project was born. Knowing where to look was somewhat easy. I started using software, but I wasn't happy with the result at all. Then I reread an article by Rob that explained what equipment was needed to get started.

I was playing Cyberpunk 2077 at the time and I thought, "Hey, why not try it with some shots and see what happens?". It took me about one or two days to master the equipment and understand the how and why.
If anyone tries this, make sure you have a remote shot that can be locked. It helps a lot.

Making of: Behind the Shots
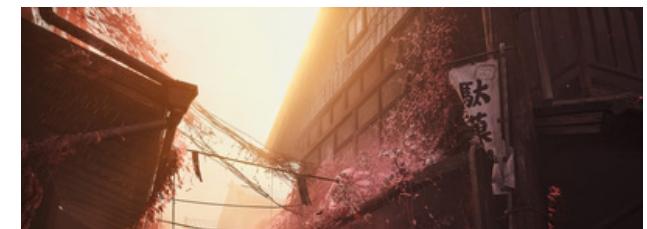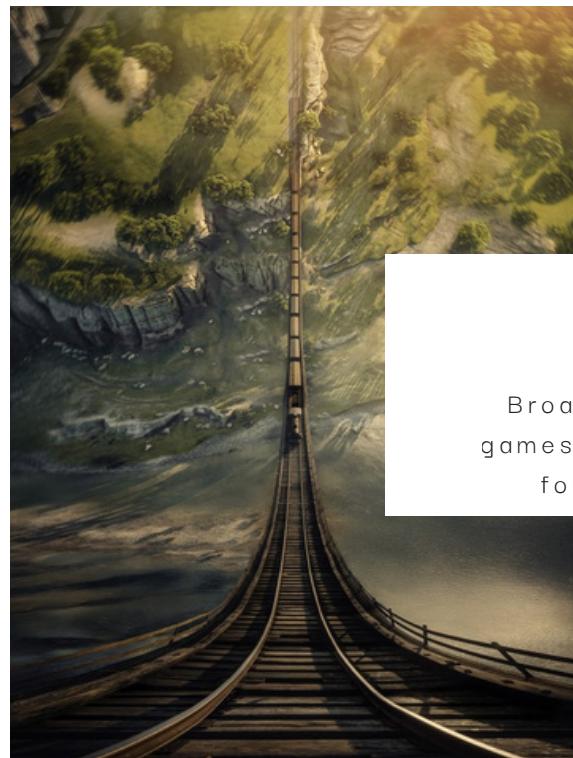
ENVIRONMENT

Broad interpretations of the varied and wonderful worlds of video games. Turn to your surroundings to capture the interest that can be found landscapes, nature, urban areas, and fantasy locations.
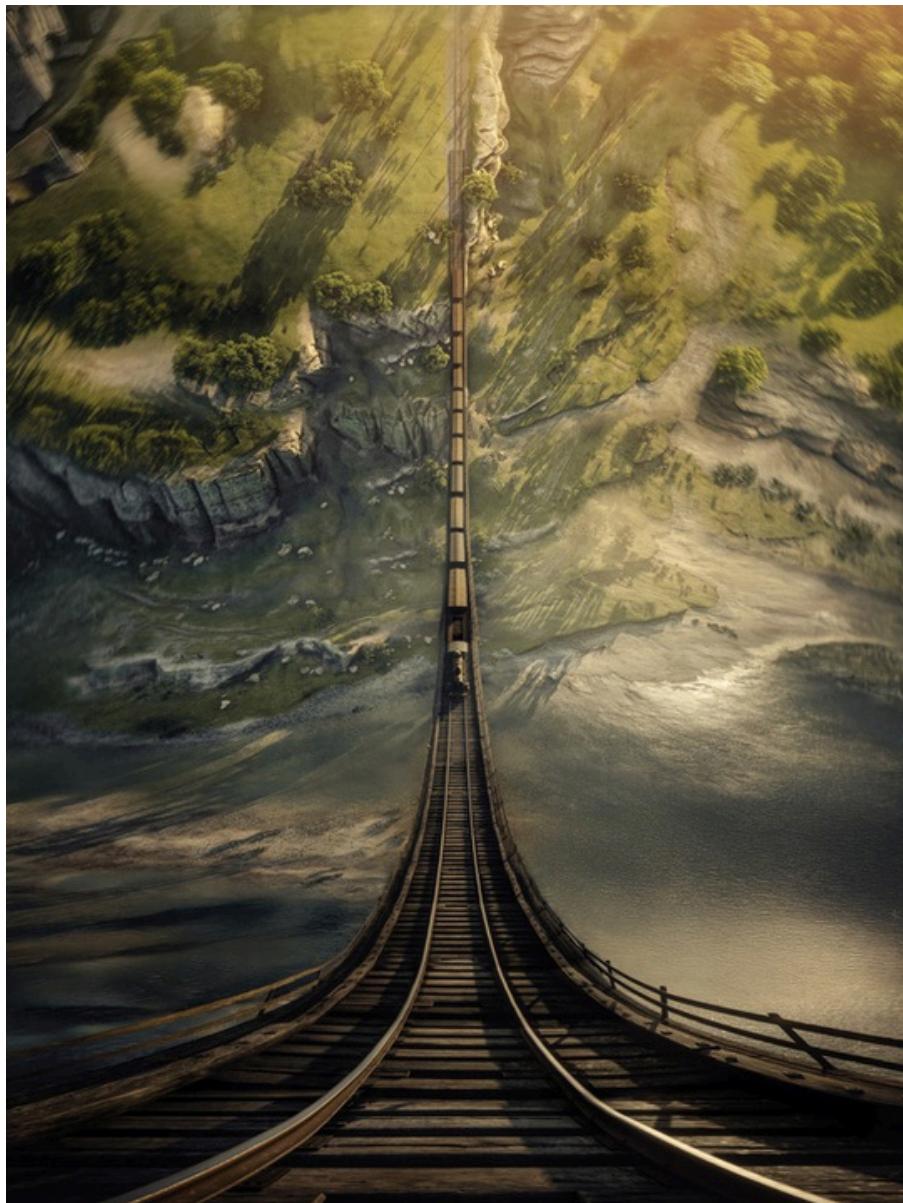
MURPHYVP
environment winner

How does it feel to be one of this year's winners?

Being named one of this year's winners is a deeply rewarding experience that has given me a meaningful opportunity to reflect on my journey. It has been an incredible learning process since I first started exploring the world of virtual photography back in 2023. Now that I am in my third year in this creative field, receiving this recognition feels like a significant milestone that encourages me to keep improving.

Looking back, my path to this award was a gradual one. I missed the very first competition because I was still quite new and wasn't aware of its existence at the time. By the time the second awards came around, I felt that I still had more to learn and hadn't quite reached the level of preparation I was aiming for. However, for this year's awards, I was determined to dedicate more time to the conceptual side of my work. I focused on developing a specific idea and seeing that effort lead to being among the winners is a wonderful feeling. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the organizers for their hard work, the jury for their time, and all my fellow participants who continue to inspire this community with their amazing work.

What was the inspiration for your image and what did the creative process look like?

For this year's environment category, I wanted to step outside of my usual style and try a different approach. I spent some time researching various visual techniques and decided to experiment with the "drone-ception" or "flatland" style. I had admired this concept for a long time but hadn't yet found the right moment to try it myself. The surreal and captivating photography of artist Aydın Büyüktaş served as my primary reference and inspiration throughout the entire project.

The creative process began with selecting the right world to host this vision. I chose Red Dead Redemption 2 because its organic, natural landscapes felt like a suitable environment for my first attempt at this perspective, offering a bit more flexibility than a rigid, building-dense city. Finding the right location was a patient process; I spent approximately 12 hours scouting the map inch by inch with a freecam. To bring the scene to life, I relied on the Rampage Trainer to position the train and set up the elements. Additionally, Otis_Inf's camera tool was essential for managing the shots with the precision needed to make the final composition work.

The technical execution was similar to creating a vertical panorama. I captured 11 individual shots, starting from a 0-degree horizontal perspective and incrementally moving the camera until I reached a 90-degree top-down view. Since there isn't an automated way to stitch this specific type of perspective, I manually aligned each frame in Photoshop using transform, warp, and perspective tools to create a seamless transition. Finally, I used Generative Fill to refine minor details and applied a custom color grade to reach the final look. I am very grateful to the VP Awards for providing the motivation to explore such an interesting technique and gain this new experience.

Video: Behind the Shot | Droneception Tutorial

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MARKA

environment finalist

Could you tell us about the shot and the creative process behind it?

This image was captured in the world of DEATH STRANDING 2, featuring a kangaroo gazing at the sunset. I wanted to preserve the gentle light of the fading sun and the stillness that filled the scene.

I stayed there for a while, watching the sky slowly darken alongside the kangaroo, immersed in a quiet moment where I felt part of that world.

What was your reaction to finding out you made it to the shortlist?

I didn't overthink it and simply captured the moment as it was. I am grateful that it was selected for the shortlist.
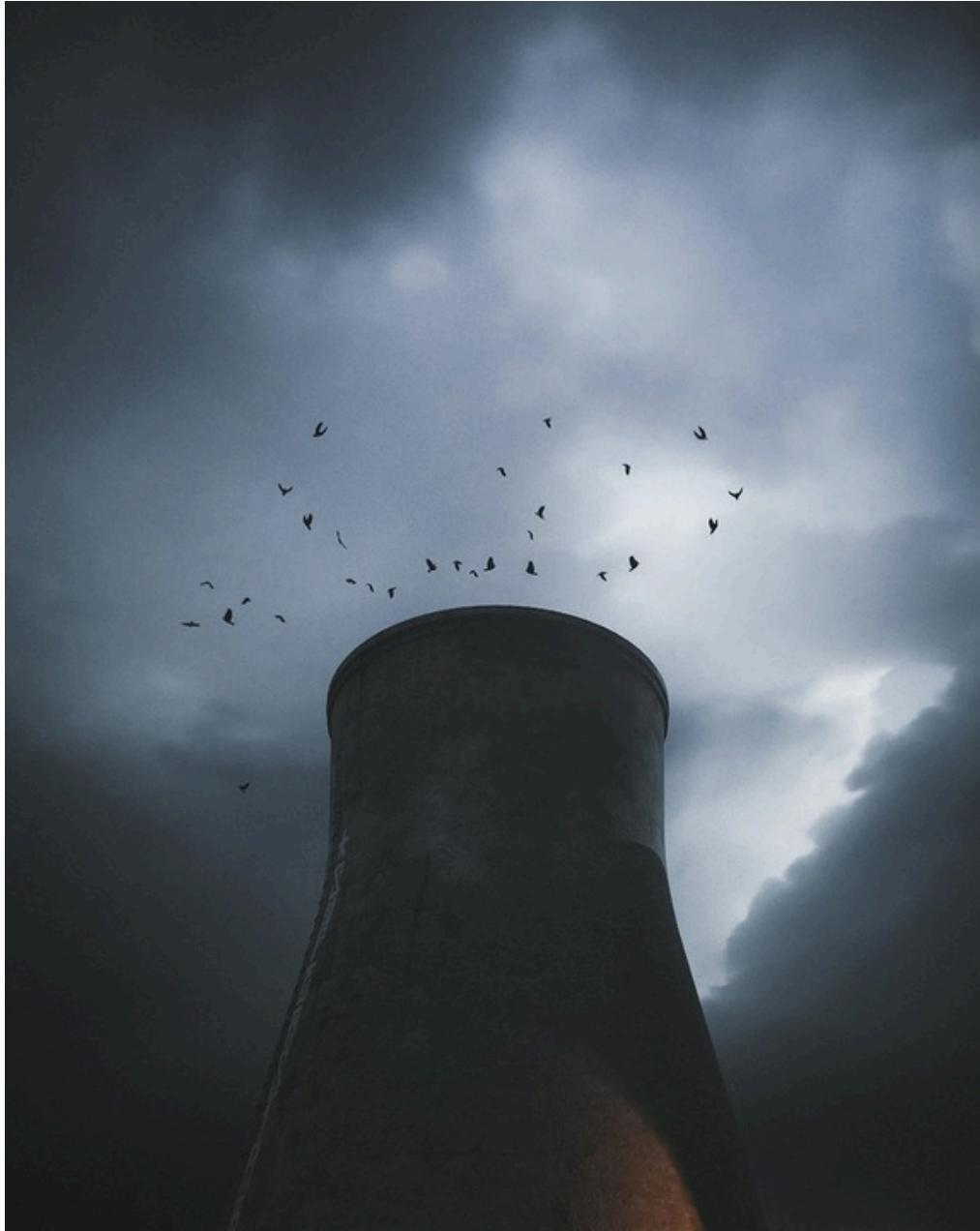
AGGZGAMING

environment finalist

Could you tell us about your shot and the creative process behind it?

I really loved how the birds were circling above the cooling tower in this shot. It gave the scene such a moody, atmospheric vibe, and instantly caught my attention

What does virtual photography mean to you?

To me, virtual photography is a feeling... a connection, an escape. A good shot always makes you feel something, it stirs an emotion and stays with you.

SUEDEMAKER
environment finalist

Could you tell us a bit about yourself and your shot?

Hi! My name is Jonathan, and I've been doing virtual photography since about 2013 as a general hobby.

I started simply with console commands and mods in Skyrim but as games started to add photo modes, I branched out and it wasn't until around 2022 that I joined the VP community online.

My shot for the Environment Category this year in the VP Awards comes from a criminally underrated game, Mad Max. The explosions during the car combat are generally the highlight, but the game features one of the best skyboxes I've ever seen.

I took the shot after coming across the junk pile while exploring the wasteland and seeing the opening in the sky. The different types of clouds, the shadows being cast in the distance, the car being rusted out and looking like it came directly from the pile… the rest is history!

What was your reaction to being selected?

Excited of course! Being selected as a shortlist contender (as well as having an Honorable Mention in a separate category) this year is an honor. In the past I've been somewhat dejected after submitting shots I love to various contests without being selected, but it's important to remember there are thousands of submissions and you never know what will grab someone's eye. Keep taking pictures because you enjoy it, not because you want acclaim. I have no idea if my shot will end up winning, but if I let "not winning" stop me from continuing, the shot that was picked this year wouldn't even exist!

SHXDOW.VP
environment finalist

Could you tell us about the photo and the creative process behind it?

I was amazed by how detailed and photorealistic this game environment is. I took this shot in RoboCop: Rogue City using Otis_inf camera tools while exploring this street, capturing several shots from the area.

Initially, I planned to focus on the gritty street and buildings, but I later added the car to the frame, which I feel made the shot more interesting. I'm happy with the final result and even happier to have it shortlisted for the VP Awards.

How did you decide which photo to submit for the category?

From that area of the game, I think I had captured more than 10 shots, which made it harder to choose which one to submit.

I trusted my gut and went with this shot. I think the gritty street and the surroundings made it perfect for an environmental shot.

XCUCULUS
environment finalist

Could you tell us a bit about yourself and the creative process behind your shot?

Hello, my nickname is Cuculus and I'm from Germany. I really got hooked on VP in 2023 with A Plague Tale: Requiem. At the time, I was doing a lot of traditional photography, and Requiem was the first game that captivated me with its photo mode and story. From that moment on, I wanted to combine my two hobbies.

This made video games even more fun for me and allowed me to express my creative side. I began posting my photos online and continued experimenting with new possibilities and tools. Over time, I also participated in VP contests, including the VP Awards. Among other entries, I submitted a Silent Hill f photo in the environment category this year. In this photo, I paid close attention to how the special lighting would appear most interesting to the viewer, so I tried to emphasize the blooming effect on the roofs. The pylon and flag create a nice foreground, and the vanishing lines of the roofs guide the viewer through the image across the deadly beautiful alleys of the surrounding area.

How did you decide which photo to submit for the category?

I have to say that I struggled with this task because, once again, we were blessed with beautiful environments in games this year. At first, I asked myself, "What was a special moment for me? Which of the shots really showed something unique, reflected a creative process, or perhaps invited different interpretations?" When making my selection, I also try to give the photos a name based on how I interpret the image or moment myself, which sometimes helps me a lot. Finding a name is a good foundation to do further decisions. And that's how I finally was able to choose a photo. Oh, and the picture is titled "Awakening."
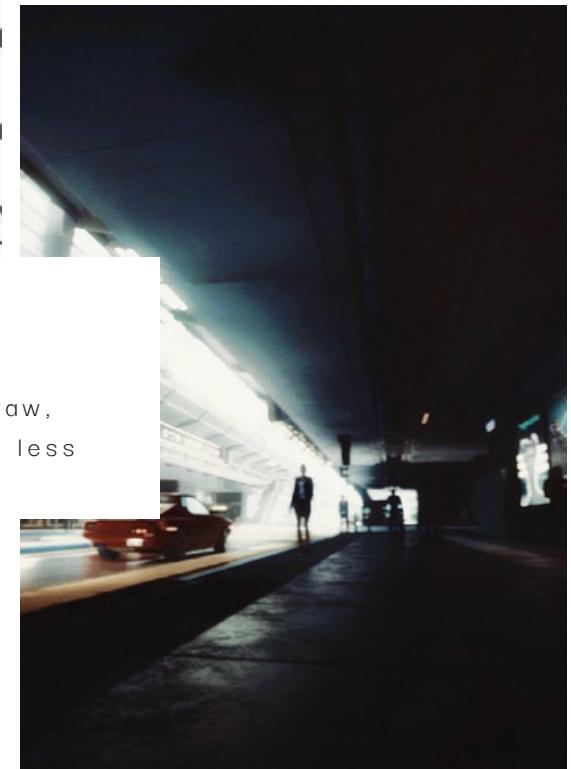
LO-FI

Embrace photographic imperfections and experimentation for a raw, mood-driven aesthetic. Images here should have an evocative and less technically precise style.
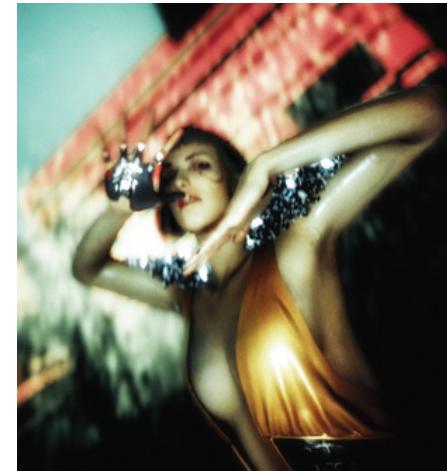
PIP
lo-fi winner

How does it feel to be one of this years winners?

I feel thankful. The community has made me feel very appreciated, and to share this moment with my friend virtualtourism, who won the action category, makes the experience so much more enjoyable.

Could you tell us the story behind your shot and walk us through the creative process?

I like to look at street photography, and when I go for this type of shot I usually do one of two things. I either go to a place I like and wait for something to happen, or I just snap the camera and see what I can find. I think this helps when trying to capture a moment that feels spontaneous. It's also makes it fun for me because you never really know what you are going to get.

SPIDEYTWOSHOES
lo-fi runner-up

You have a very specific style with forced perspective. Can you tell us a little about that and where you find inspiration?

My tendency to use forced perspective in my photos comes in part from my affinity for minimalism. I love to isolate figures to tell a story through striking simplicity. I also find it fascinating to show connections between people and elements of their environment. In virtual photography, sometimes the easiest way to show this is through perspective tricks.

I've been using the photomode in Ghost of Tsushima and subsequently Ghost of Yotei for years now, and I've always loved the unique feature of the "particles" option. Carefully lining up a bird or a falling leaf offers opportunites for capturing surreal stills. I'm always searching for a dynamic photo that people will hopefully remember.

You were also finalist in two other categories and had one honourable mention - how do you select what photos to submit?

Contests like this are sometimes tough, because many of my absolute favorite photos do not seem to fit the specific criteria needed to succeed in the categories. So I have to go with my gut and trust that other people see what I see with my art. I know my strengths, so I tend to choose photos that represent my personal style and will leave an impression immediately. I kept thinking "I want to submit photos that will catch the eyes of the judges scrolling by." The easiest way to do this is making sure they know exactly what is happening in the photo, and by making it memorable.

NIMMU
lo-fi runner-up

Can you tell us the story and the creative process behind your shot?

I took this photo on the day the new update for Ghost of Yōtei introduced the shutter speed option in photo mode. I really love long-exposure photography, so I was very excited about it.

At first, I was just testing and playing around, watching as the flowers slowly painted the image through the long exposure. This wasn't the photo I originally planned to even post anywhere, because at first, I thought the blur from the flower covered Atsu's eyes too much. But after looking at the image for a while, I started to love it more and more.

It felt like a very old photograph you might find forgotten in someone's drawer. During editing, I leaned into that aged-photo feeling, pushing the colors toward yellows and browns and pushed the highlights a little closer to overexposure.

Were you familiar with Lo-fi photography prior to the contest?

I wasn't very familiar with the term itself, even though I've used some Lo-fi characteristics in my own real-life photography before, such as blur and light leaks. When I think of Lo-fi, the first things that come to mind are nostalgia, a dreamy atmosphere, and a slightly grungy feel.

What I really love about Lo-fi photography is its imperfections, and I want to lean more into that in my photos in the future.

UTENTE1
lo-fi finalist

Can you tell us a little about yourself and your shot?

My name is Flavio, I'm a 34-yo musician and teacher from Cremona, Italy. I'm very new to the virtual photography world. I started taking in-game shots last summer, with my first works featuring Alan Wake 2, Shadow of the Colossus and Control. I always try to bring an original take on virtual photography, preferring a cinematic style over a more classic photographic approach. Ahti from the Remedy universe is an incredibly fascinating character, and seeing him smile in that moment of the game instantly inspired me. The shot originally started as a close-up, then I broadened the field of view to get a better view of the shining lights in the background. And finally I decided to focus on his hand holding the mop and blur everything else.

Were you familiar with Lo-fi photography prior to the contest?

I have a passion for lo-fi aesthetics in general, and I think my style reflects this passion quite closely. I find it very soothing to the eye to mix my cinematic vision with these vibes, as I always aspire to create pictures that are somehow visceral and emotionally driven even if imperfect. This approach, both in my shots and in my music, allows me the freedom to focus on atmosphere rather than technical perfection.

TWENTYEIGHTVP
lo-fi finalist

Could you tell us the story and creative process behind your shot?

Ok, so... whenever someone makes a picture - and I mean in general - what is the first thing they worry about? That the image is clean, sharp, defined.
Well, I did the opposite of that in a way with my image. I was listening to the Deftones with the concept that not everything needs to be perfectly clean or sharp, and not everything needs to be defined by rule or norm.

So, I took inspiration from their album cover "Saturday Night Wrist" that I wanted to experiment with. Not to do the same in general, but to take the color palette and put my take on it.

What does virtual photography mean to you?

For me, it means the freedom of expression in realities that do not exist. It allows me to view, practice, and execute shots that wouldn't be possible in the real world, like photographing a dystopian city, such as Cyberpunk, or a region that was blasted by nuclear radiation, like Fallout or Metro, to put an example. It allows me to express mental states or emotions and vibes without talking.
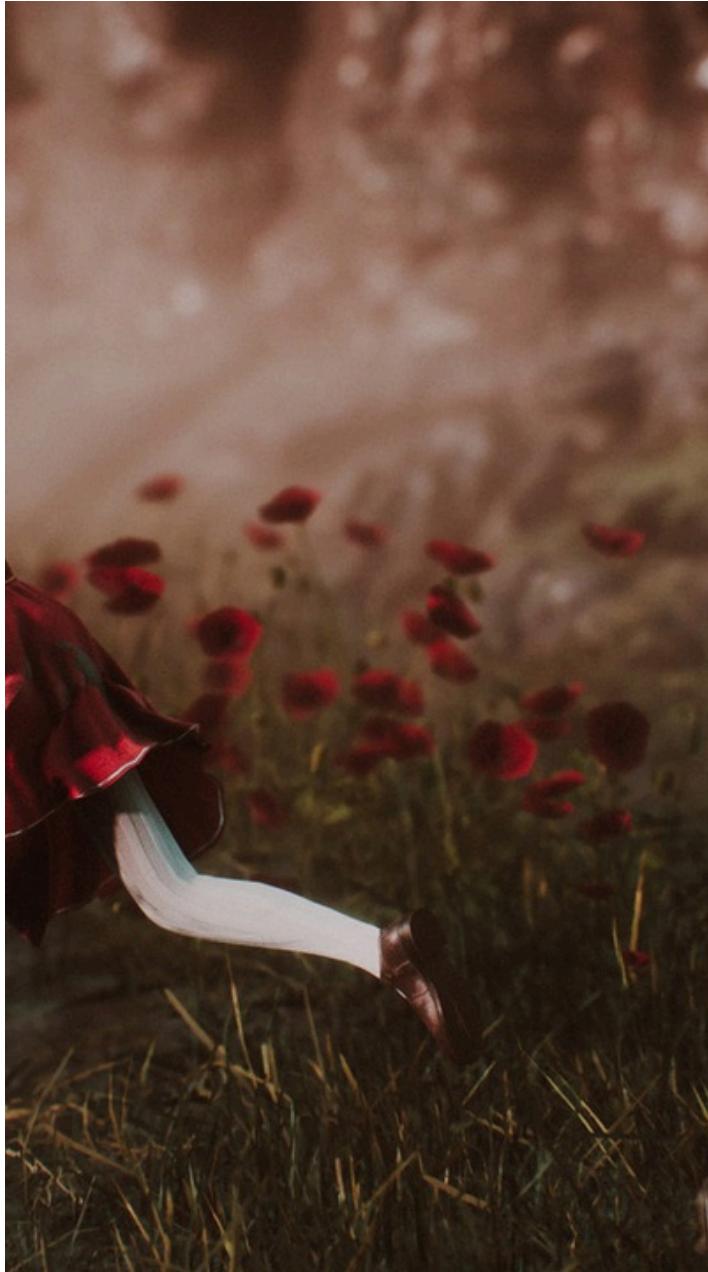
BLUSH.VP
lo-fi honourable mention

Can you tell us a little about yourself and what virtual photography means to you?

As I work professionally in a creative field, I find that virtual photography is a beautiful escape to express art in a no pressure, no expectations environment. It's a great way to experiment and have fun with different ideas.

This shot has a quite unique composition – what is the story or inspiration behind it?

I've been inspired lately by photographers who frame their subjects in unconventional ways to tell a story.
I love how a subject exiting the frame creates movement and mystery.

OPEN

For images that fall outside the scope of all other categories, this one allows freedom to create striking and original shots of any photographic style and genre.

HARY1495G
open winner

What was the inspiration behind your shot and can you walk us through the creative process?

I always loved taking shots of shadows and telling a story with it and so with each shot it had to be something that is intriguing but also visually pleasing. Honestly though, this shot stemmed from the idea after seeing AI and all that nonsense take over and destroy nature in process and so I kinda thought about it and decided to make a shot where the human protects nature and its beings with it. Hence the human giving a hand being a part of nature (aka one with nature) and helping the bird have its peaceful life.

As for the process behind it, technical wise, I love using the AMM mod for Cyberpunk and building my own sets so that helps a lot with executing ideas of your choice!

What does virtual photography mean to you?

Personally for me, virtual photography is an outlet to dive into a different world of creativity where there is no limitations and experiment with ideas which I'd do IRL but without much of the hassle and also an outlet to relax after a long day, just have some music on and figure out what ideas to work with or shoot in what game and how.

XJQXZ66
open runner-up

Can you tell us the story behind your shot and walk us through the creative process?

This photo was created with another piece, together I named it "City in Your Hand". I like to explore different themes or ideas with my photos, for me it feels like a free drawing board that I can try any possibilities with any art form based on VP. Therefore, I related to the object - cell phone, we used everyday in our real life.

Nowadays we are living in the age of information explosion, a technology tool like cell phone can provide all the information we need easily and the game I choose to shoot is Cyberpunk 2077. That makes me think, many years later we probably have better high tech tools to help us access information more efficient and convenient, at that time we possible can "watch" the activities around the city by getting all different feeds that feel like we are "holding the alive city in hand".

Was it difficult to select this entry for the category?

The open category was a challenge for me to decide which photo to hand in, since I personally have the definition of that category as "any style beside the other 7 categories can all go in" with freedom of any kind of art form, as long as it is based on VP.

At first I was considering another piece but at last I decide to put that one with others as some creative, fun collage display, and take this one which I tried with something new ideas also with a lot fun as the final decision.

AYGHAN
open finalist

Could you tell us about the creative process behind this shot?

This photo was an attempt to recreate the iconic metro artwork first revealed at E3 2018. That visual was a founding piece of Cyberpunk 2077's identity, and I wanted to pay personal tribute to it.

Since photo mode is very limited in the functional metro, I had to take a different approach: an empty, abandoned station in Dogtown provided the right urban backdrop to match that specific mood.

The setup was a long process. Beyond just placing the train and NPCs, it was about choreographing the expressions and lighting to tell a specific story. Finding the right framing was a challenge, but I eventually followed the logic of the original artwork, using the metro map on the left to close the frame and balance the composition. I originally tried to place another NPC next to V, just like in the official art, to fill the space. But after testing several characters, I couldn't find a pose that felt coherent with the mood. With hindsight, I think leaving V alone makes the shot more impactful.

Most of the illumination comes naturally from the daylight in the station, but I added a white light to make V pop and red lights on the soldiers to evoke the danger of Arasaka.

There is a strong contrast between the cold, metallic feel of the wagon and V's "human" presence. When capturing this, I imagined a heavy silence inside the train, like the calm before the storm. This shot was taken with the in-game photo mode. The post-processing was very minimal, just a slight adjustment of brightness and contrast. The colors are original from the game engine.

Why did you choose it for the OPEN category?

I chose the OPEN category because this shot didn't really fit anywhere else. I also feel like this new category is perfect for work like this, which goes beyond traditional limits.

The capture dates back to early 2025, a time when the photo mode didn't yet have certain features that came later with update 2.3. Maybe capturing a shot like this is less daunting across all platforms now, which shows the game is moving in a fantastic direction.

With such a passionate virtual photography community and developers who actively listen, it's exciting to see the creative possibilities continue to expand.

Honestly, I felt like this photo was a failure because it looked too different from the original artwork. I struggled to like it at first. But with time, I started to appreciate it more for its own identity. Seeing it shortlisted for the VP Awards, especially considering the incredible talent shown every year, was completely unexpected. Seeing it recognized here feels like a very kind ending for a shot that was almost never shared.
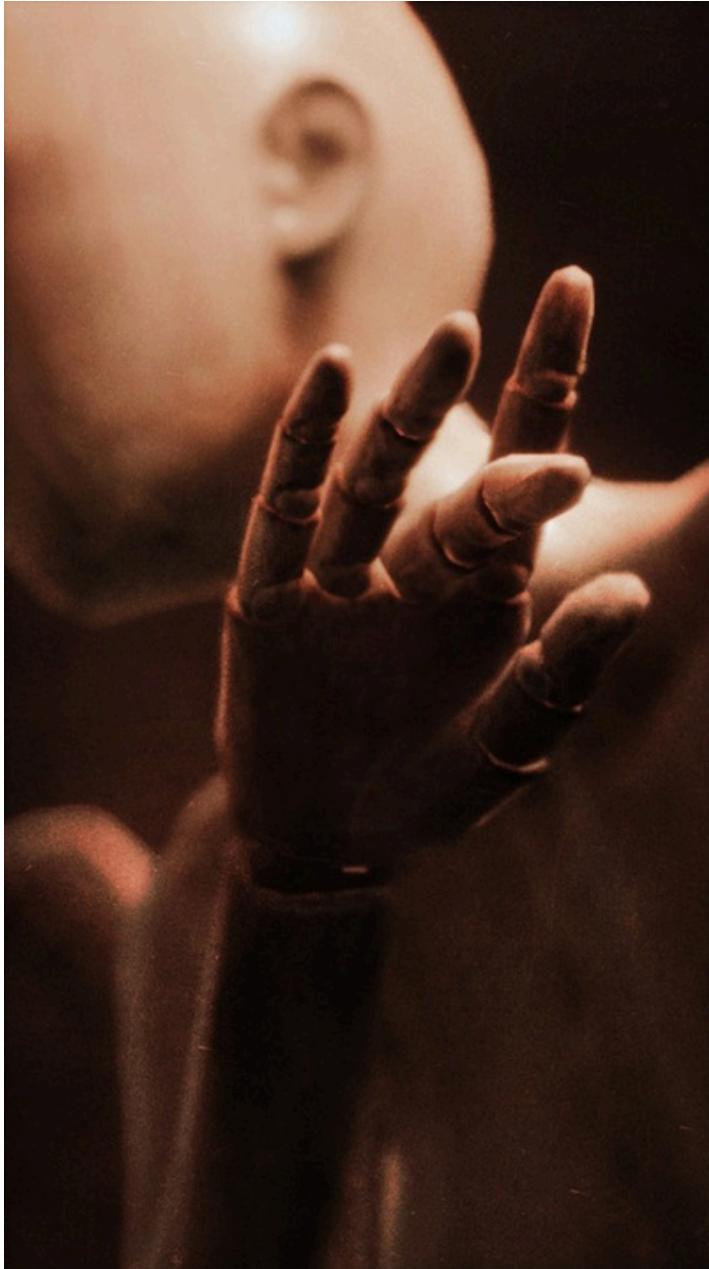
Can you tell us a little about yourself and what virtual photography means to you?

I'm Crabby. I joined the VP scene in January last year. I love playing video games and capturing little things around me, but I have never really done anything more with it aside from it being a small part of my work.

That love and interest has now translated into me getting properly into VP after discovering the community, starting from Infinity Nikki. I used to take pictures in games, never really thinking of it as "VP". They were always just fun art references, but now it's so much more than that for me. It has become such an important part of my life and most consistent hobby of mine.

Through VP, I have met so many lovely and creative people. It's such a mentally enriching experience, and the joy of being able to share what I'm creating is even better. It's very special to me and I'm glad to have discovered it.

I love how there are so many possibilities, and it just makes me enjoy and take in the details and beauty of the game even more.

What is the story or inspiration behind your shot and what did the creative process look like?

For this shot, I was capturing puppets placed in a theatre area in Infinity Nikki to make a collection. The inspiration was the environment itself. My goal was to capture something that communicated the feeling of just being lost with subtle creepiness.

When I came near this puppet, I really liked its overall pose, especially the hand placement with its face's direction.

I didn't open my camera with a specific angle in mind. After experimenting and moving around it for a bit, a focused close-up shot felt to resonate a lot with what I had in mind. I kept a soft focus on its hand to keep the movement and added some warm back light for more depth and drama.
Being so close made me feel it could suddenly come alive, which was sort of in sync with the story, so for me, it was mission accomplished.

CRABBYSWITCH
open finalist

ORISH
open finalist

Could you tell us about the creative process behind this shot?

To take this shot, I first changed the skin of my character and then performed many tricks.

I took about 12 shots to choose the best one, before this one seemed great for me. Then I tried to find a good angle, lights and color and before sharing it, I used Lightroom for the background blur.

What was your reaction to finding out you made it to the shortlist?

I posted this one in the Open category, thinking that none of my pics would be chosen. This one is a big surprise and I'm honestly proud!

GROOVIGHOST
open finalist

Could you tell us the story or inspiration behind your shot? What did the creative process involve?

The inspiration behind my shot came from an original character of mine, named Wolfram. Their story revolves around learning how to navigate the world going from a "someone" to a "something". Death has failed them, and they now wander the darkness as a being who can only live in the shadows. I created this capture to convey their feelings. The veil between worlds in their universe is much thinner to them now to where they can catch a glimpse of things they were never supposed to see. This causes them to question what their destiny even is. They come to the conclusion that they are in control of their own self, despite all the darkness and outside forces that surround them.

It started off as just a few sentences of writing from Wolfram's POV. The poem "Invictus" By William Ernest Henley was part of my inspiration! Creative capture ideas tend to just summon themselves exactly into my mind, and I pick apart the pieces of the idea, until I can take all the photos in game I need to piece it all back together to form exactly what I had first visualized.

What does virtual photography mean to you?

Expression. Virtual photography has been the absolute best way to convey whatever story or emotion is in my head. It's like showing a small yet incredibly meaningful piece of me to the world. I love being able to show how my eyes perceive different environments and characters too! Everyone has their own beautiful vision, and I adore being able to share mine along with an incredible community.
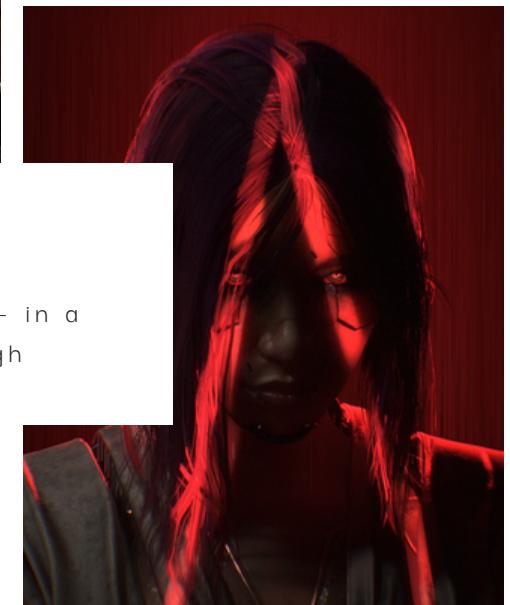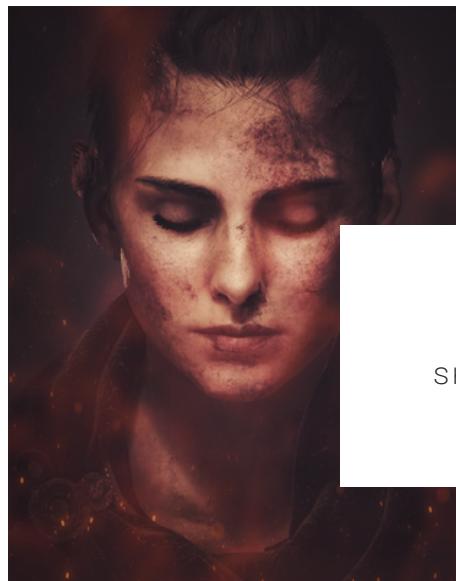
PEOPLE

Shots that focus on characters – whether individuals or groups – in a
personal context to create a connection to the viewer through
expressions of identity, emotion, and culture.
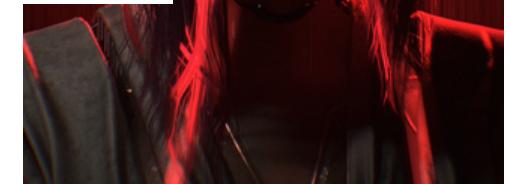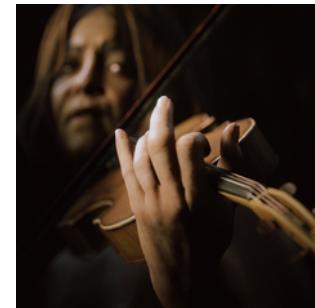
UYSCUTI10
people winner

Can you tell us the story behind your shot?

I was drawn to the moment just before something changes. The image focuses on the thin space between two people, where emotion feels present without any action. Nothing is decided or finished, and that uncertainty is what gives the image its meaning.

What does winning this award mean to you?

This award means a lot to me. I'm really happy, especially because this image is close to my heart, and seeing it appreciated like this feels very special.

EDWARDFRAMES
people runner-up

Can you tell us the story or inspiration behind your shot and walk us through the process of capturing it?

The inspiration behind this capture came from Arcane season 2's intro. There is a shot of Vi with the letter V on her face. I had already done a recreation of this with Panam that blew up on Twitter. I wanted to continue that success, but this time with Songbird.

I used the Possessed version of Songbird and based the shot around its haunting mood. I used red lights along with a red background to keep the feeling of evil. I tilted her head slightly downward to create a cold, dark stare. Thanks to PC tools, I have access to a lighting tool called Cyberlit. The light I used on the face is an Area light with the "spotlight capsule" option enabled. I arranged two of these lights so they formed an upside down V. I added two additional lights behind Songbird to illuminate both sides of her hair. For the cherry on top, I used the Gravity effect in Reshade to add glitch lines in the background.

The final product became something that got me lots of likes and recognition at the VP Awards!

SHINOBI
people runner-up

Can you tell us the story behind your shot and walk us through the creative process?

The shot I entered was very fun to create. At the time, the game had no photo mode, so I used Frans Bouma's Universal Unreal Engine 5 Unlocker to place the camera inside a wall and remove some rocks that were not flattering to the frame.

I then positioned the characters where I wanted them – you can make them move and run while keeping the camera elsewhere. I also had to take two different shots with different characters to include all five, since only three can normally appear at the same time.

Was it difficult to select this entry for the category?

It was not hard to choose this image for the contest because it has a strong "wow" factor, with bright, warm colors and striking silhouettes. I did not take many shots this year, so my options were limited anyway.

I also wanted to interpret the "PEOPLE" theme with something other than a portrait, and this sense of fellowship felt like a good fit.

NAIRDAH
people finalist

Can you tell us the story or inspiration behind your photo?

I was wandering through the bustling streets of the Saint Denis, lost in the ambient noise of horse hooves and distant chatter. Suddenly, a melody cut through the chaos, a soulful, melancholic violin tune echoing from a quiet alleyway. I followed the sound, and that's where I found her.

In a world that often feels harsh and unforgiving, she stood there as a beacon of quiet resilience. Looking at her, you get the sense that life hasn't been particularly kind to her. She carries the weight of her years in the lines of her face. Yet, in that moment, none of that seemed to matter. It felt as though she had very little left in this world, but the violin was the one thing that kept her going, her anchor to a sense of beauty and purpose.

While the town moved frantically around her, she was in a different world entirely. I was deeply moved by the intense concentration on her face, it wasn't just a performance, it was a conversation between her and the wood and strings.

When I took this shot, I chose to focus specifically on her hands and the neck of the violin. I wanted the viewer to feel exactly what she was feeling: a complete, singular focus on the music. By narrowing the depth of field, the world around her fades into a blur, mirroring how she had mentally tuned out the noise of the streets. For her, in that heartbeat, the only thing that existed was that tactile connection with her instrument. It felt incredibly personal, like I was witnessing a private prayer disguised as a song.

Can you tell us a little about yourself and what virtual photography means to you?

For me, it all began years ago while casually exploring various video games, even multiplayer ones where I had absolutely no business taking screenshots. There was something magnetic about stumbling upon breathtaking scenery and wanting to preserve it forever. Back then, I'd take captures on Steam, sometimes not even caring if the HUD was visible, all I cared about was capturing those beautiful compositions and the feeling they evoked. It felt less like photography and more like collecting moments.

Over time, I noticed more games were incorporating dedicated photo modes as a standard feature. At first, I didn't think much of it, but as I started experimenting with these features in the games I loved, I realized how incredibly powerful they could be. These modes offered tools reminiscent of real cameras: depth of field, focal length, exposure settings, and post-processing effects. The more I played with them, the more I began seeking out games specifically for their creative potential. Taking beautiful screenshots became a "side quest" for me, a secondary objective I pursued alongside the main story.

To me, virtual photography is the art of finding humanity within pixels. It's a way to slow down and truly appreciate the staggering amount of detail and emotion that developers pour into these worlds. It allows me to step out of the role of the player and into the role of an observer, finding quiet, cinematic stories in the middle of a digital landscape. Ultimately, it's about that one perfect frame where the boundary between a game and reality seems to disappear.

CCF_PHOTOMODE
people finalist

We have seen stunning portraits from you before - what are the key elements to a good portrait for you and what is your technique to capture them?

Good lighting and composition are key elements when shooting portraits, but also the expression the subject has can make or break the shot.

I look for emotional moments when I take portraits, then think about ways to compose the shot to fit the mood. I really like minimizing the background (unless it's part of the mood or enhances the subject in some way) so that the subject shines without unnecessary distractions.

Of course, lighting is key, and looking for areas in game where the light falls just right is important.

What was your reaction to finding out that you made it to the shortlist?

My honest reaction was surprise. There were so many evocative shots in the People category, and I wasn't sure my symmetric, straight on shot would make the cut.

But surprise gave way to satisfaction as making the shortlist is an achievement, and I am happy to be on it no matter what the finals results are.

DOMSAUGA-HERA

people finalist

Can you share a little about yourself and your virtual photography journey?

I've always been interested in photography and video games, so the transition to virtual photography felt natural. While I'm open to the idea of a career in this space one day, it's currently a hobby and a way for me to practice technical composition. My journey has mostly been a private one; I've captured over 2,000 images across various titles, but I tend to be selective about what I share, having only posted about 10% of my library. For me, the process is less about social media engagement and more about the personal creative challenge.

What is the story or inspiration behind your shot and why did you decide to submit it for the category?

The inspiration for The Queen's Gambit was a technical experiment in realism. I wanted to see if I could take an NPC and, through lighting and perspective, make them feel like a living person with a connection to the viewer. Choosing a low-angle perspective from across the board places the viewer in the seat of the 'lesser' opponent, looking up at a master. To finish the effect, a custom light setup provided emphasis on facial details that the default environment lighting missed.

I chose to submit this for the People category because the shot focuses on creating a connection through the character's expression and the specific culture of a park chess match. It felt like the best fit for the category's emphasis on identity and personal context.
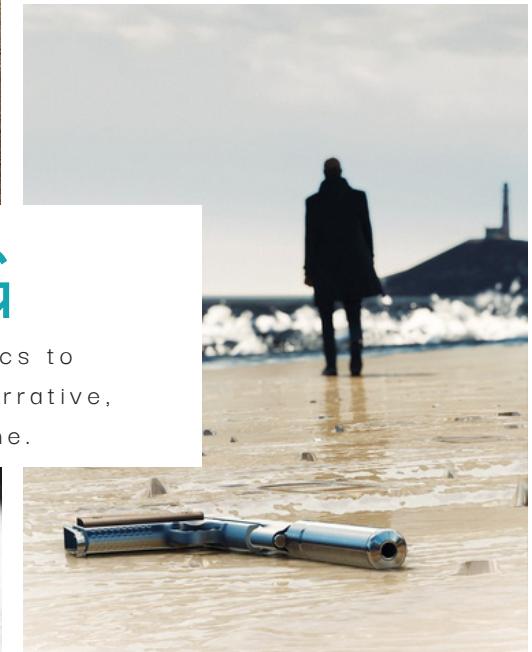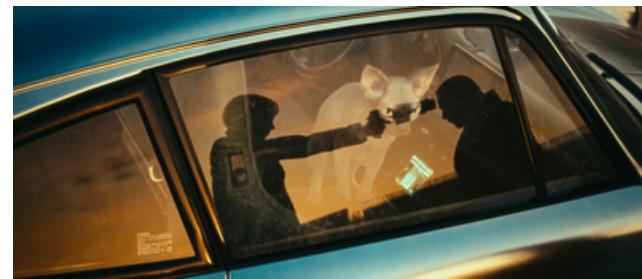
STORYTELLING

Use visual language to create shots that go beyond aesthetics to convey meaning. This category rewards images that evoke a narrative, raise questions, or invite the viewer to step into the scene.

HARY1495G
storytelling winner

How does it feel to be the first person to win in two categories and then be crowned the Virtual Photographer of the Year?

I don't think I expected to win much but to be honest I value this as a form of art where people get together and share their artworks and be inspired by it at the same time learn a lot from others as well. So, I just don't think much about how many wins or have a record of numbers etc but more into how much everyone has improved in and around the art of VP and it's always amazing to see the entries get more and more interesting! For me this is an exhibition of art from everyone where I learn a lot from others and also have a good time while at it.

This is such an interesting scene. How did you come up with it?

As much as shadows catch my attention, reflections are equally as interesting and fun! Especially with cyberpunk as it uses path tracing on PC and the reflections are as good as they can get (even though my pc struggles with it necessary sacrifices have to be made to push the pc to its limits lol). So I've experimented with some ideas in previous years but this time I had an idea to set up a scene which tells a story with more depth and layers, with 2 different perspectives. Story in this can go a few ways so I leave it upto the viewer to decide what's happening in the scene. So, IMO reflections are an interesting way to tell a story. There sure are a lot of photography IRL and photographers who make use of this in many ways so there's also a lot of inspiration to gain from them!

DEFALTSIUNCULA
storytelling finalist

Could you tell us a little about yourself and your virtual photography journey?

My name is Stefan Calic (StephenCalic), also known as Defaltsiuncula. I was born in Belgrade, Serbia, and I began exploring virtual photography in 2022.

From a very young age, I was obsessed with sunset shots and quiet landscapes, capturing them with whatever mobile phone I had at the time.

Before virtual photography became part of my life, I was always drawn to visual storytelling. My creative path naturally expanded into music production, which became my main profession, and into game modding, where I released popular animation mods for The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt.

I've always had deep respect for modders and creators who push games beyond their limits, giving players more freedom and creative control. Elden Ring became the first game I truly started capturing through virtual photography, and the first time I ever installed third-party camera tools. That moment changed my perspective. I realized I could have infinite sunsets, endless nature, and entire worlds to explore, all inside the games I love. Those worlds were already there, waiting on my PC.

That's when virtual photography stopped being an experiment and became something I genuinely needed to pursue. Using various third-party tools gave me the freedom to break away from gameplay and approach these worlds with a photographer's mindset, pushing my own limits while focusing on atmosphere, light, and presence.

Virtual photography became a way to translate my personal emotions and interpretation of those digital worlds into still images. Over the past three years, my work has been shortlisted in several virtual photography

contests (VP Awards). In 2023, I also placed third in an official The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt screenshotcompetition. Those were important moments for me, as they confirmed that this way of seeing and creating inside games could grow into something more. It feels strange to say, but those were my beginner years in virtual photography.

Can you take us through the creative process behind your shot?

For this particular shot, I stayed in the area longer than planned, waiting for the right movement. I first spent some time simply observing how the light, wind, waves, and atmosphere behave. I was looking for a moment where the environment felt calm but still alive.

The idea behind this image was a sense of transition, a moment where something ends, and something unknown begins. I wanted the character to feel small in relation to the space around him, standing between what he leaves behind and what lies ahead.

Dropping the weapon was a conscious choice, as it represents the tool that once defined him. Then I spent time adjusting the framing, quickly repositioning the character, and waiting for the right movement of the waves, the slight motion of his coat in the air, and his body language to align exactly as I had imagined it, making sure everything felt quiet yet emotionally strong.

The process required patience. If the waves or even a subtle movement of the coat didn't align with what I had in mind, I would start over and wait for the moment again.

My goal was not to dramatize the moment, but to let the environment speak, allowing the image to feel open, uncertain, and quietly emotional.
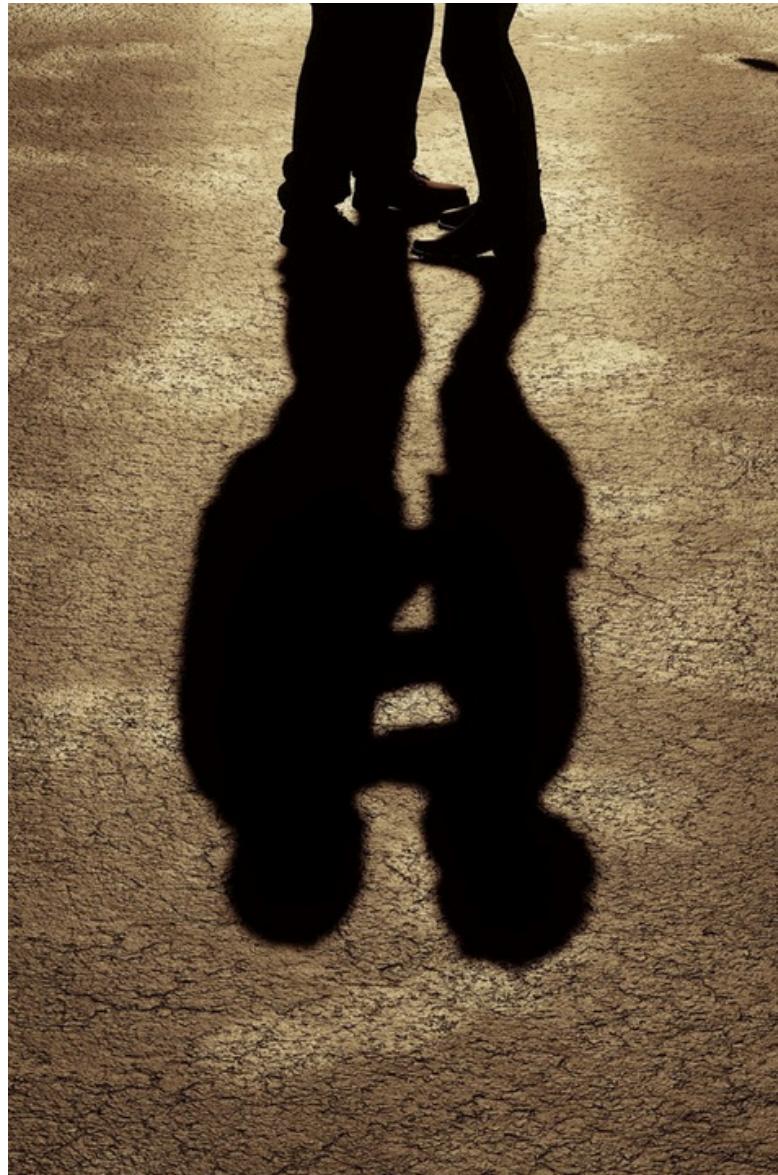
SPREAD_HER_WING
storytelling finalist

Can you tell us a little about yourself and what virtual photography means to you?

I'm honestly a boring person, with nothing much to say about myself. But virtual photography has given even someone like me a way to speak. It's like both eyes and a mouth at the same time.

Can you share the story or inspiration behind your photo?

What I tried with this photo was the idea of not describing everything, but instead leaving things implied. I thought that by doing so, the image itself could begin to speak more richly. The fact that this photo is here suggests that the attempt was at least partly successful.

TOKO_LUKE95
storytelling finalist

Could you tell us the story behind your shot and take us through the creative process to capture it?

Regarding the creative process for the photo, it was quite practical in the sense that... I was so involved in the game's story that when I found that silhouette on the ground, I started wondering what had happened and where the body had gone.

I immediately thought, "Could someone have passed by and removed the body?" So, from there, I decided to create this narrative and made the footprints with my own character to create the mystery of a second person having passed by and found the body before.

The choice of black and white was to further enhance the air of mystery and also to highlight the silhouette on the ground in a way that the contrast between dark and light makes it very evident. For the framing, I based it on the rule of thirds.
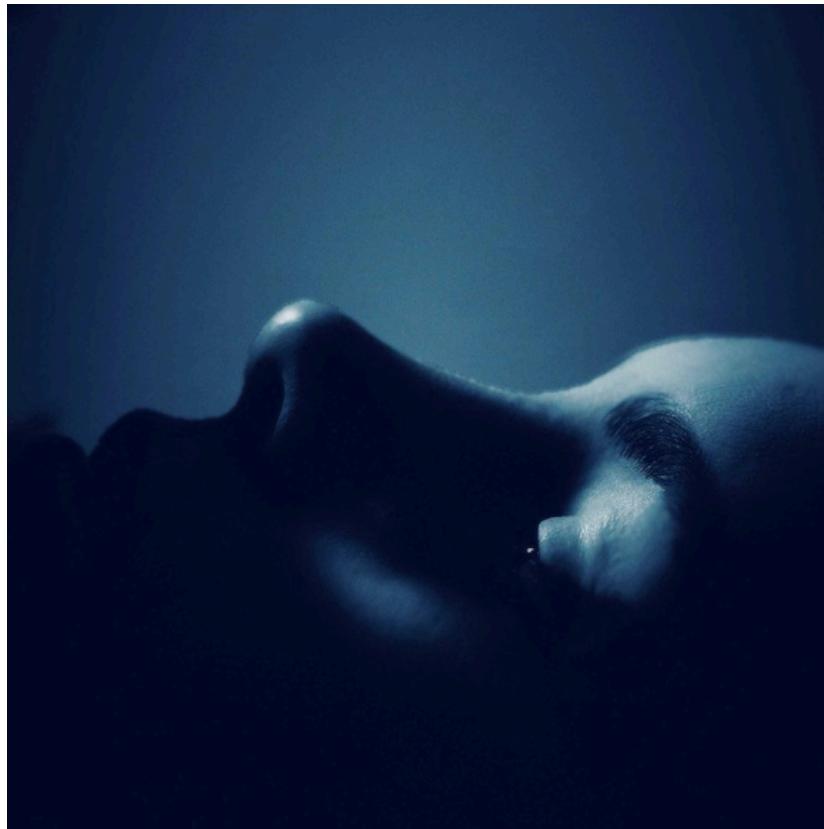
STRAWBELLA_HORIZONS
storytelling finalist

What was the inspiration for your shot and can you take us through the creative process behind it?

This shot was inspired by a chapter from a short novel I'm currently working on. Both the chapter and the image reflect a feeling of restlessness – Insomnia – from clinging to past moments and people – a quiet, lingering sense where unresolved feelings start to surface. It's about recognising those deep, often unseen emotions that tug at us from within, and learning to live with them instead of pushing them aside.

That emotional weight is why I chose to use blue tones in the photo, symbolising sadness and melancholy. We're often told to hide the parts of ourselves we see as "ugly," but I believe that facing these vulnerabilities – our weaknesses – actually makes us stronger. There's a certain courage in showing those emotions for what they are.

A passage from the novel directly inspired this piece and helped shape its meaning: "It is only a matter of time. The clock of resolve is ticking. We will either vanish by the despair of our own making, or we will come to remember what we have so easily forgotten. There is no light without darkness. There is no joy without pain. And no life without death. The ideal world–the one we seek–is but a dream. Unattainable. And yet, many people chase it. I chase it. Even when I know that imperfection is, and always will be, the way of life."

This idea – of chasing perfection while knowing it cannot exist – is, I think, what keeps many of us awake at night. It manifests as feeling lost, as believing that every step we take is somehow a mistake. But those mistakes are not failures; they are proof of our humanity. We aren't meant to perfect ourselves, only to grow into the best versions of who we can be. Trial and error isn't something to fear – it's the path toward self-acceptance.

Interestingly, the capture itself was taken while I was working on a Christmas set. It was Aloy's expression that reminded me of the passage I previously mentioned – there was something in her eyes that felt as though they carried this entire story within them. From there onward, everything else fell into place. The lighting became central to the piece; I focused on creating an interplay between shadow and light, mirroring the inner conflict I sought to visually convey.

What does virtual photography mean to you?

Virtual photography, as a medium, was never something I imagined myself pursuing – mainly because I didn't even know it existed before joining the online gaming community. Over time, however, it has become an invaluable creative outlet and a wonderful way for me to tell stories with more than just words. Through it, I've met some incredible people and formed friendships I truly believe will last a lifetime. What we've built together feels like a warm, genuine safe space, and I'm deeply grateful to be part of it.

Regardless of what some may say, virtual photography is definitely a form of art. It calls for creativity, imagination, originality, and storytelling – plus, above all, a love for the games that inspire us.
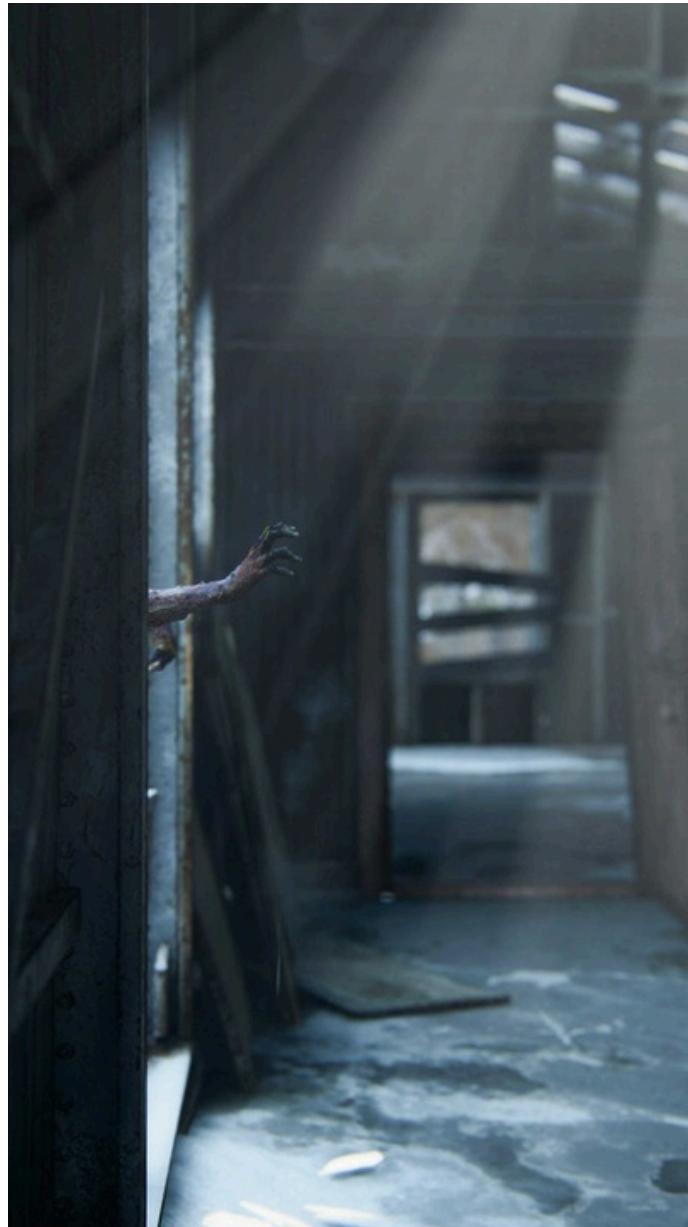
JACKBYRNES
storytelling finalist

Could you tell us about the shot and the creative process behind it?

I was playing The Last of Us Part 1 and i was at the part of the stoy where ellie and david run away from the infected. As i ran away i noticed the Arm of the infected reachin through that door,and it kinda gave me goosebumps. So i started the photomode and disabled player visibilty.My idea behind this shot was to create a capture that tells the sad story of a post apocalyptic world,where everything is empty excrept the reaching arms of the intected.

How did you decide which photo to submit for the category?

I deviced to take this picture because for me it was a story telling picture right from the start and i'm happy and honoured that people understand the idea behind it.

THE PHOTOMODE
E-MAGAZINE #36

Congratulations!

HARY1495G
overall winner

You will find a longer interview with the
"Virtual Photographer of the Year"
in our next **VP&ME**.

The Virtual Photography Awards will return

Dec 2026

WEBSITE: THE VP AWARDS