

# AGS Judging: Technique Series



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? Conversely, what are errors that we should be aware of?

We believe having these techniques covered will enable 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. The other “variable” happens at gourd shows, because they often describe entry categories differently. Some will allow other techniques in addition to the main one, i.e., Woodburning with other techniques. When other techniques are allowed judges and entrants need to know what the acceptable ratio of the main technique to “other” techniques is ... is it 90:10, 75:25 or 51:49? How is the specified ratio measured? Is the main technique the only one being judged? AGS Guidelines can help, but

ultimately it is the decision of the individual Show/Competition committee and what they have announced (in writing). If not specified in the Show Guidelines, then the AGS Guidelines would be the default specifications.

The AGS Judging Program suggests three (3) scoring options: Option A is detailed, Option B is simplified, and Option C is verbal consensus based on the observations of the judges using all of the same criteria as in Options A & B. When a Gourd Show posts their show book of

divisions, categories and classes they must also identify the scoring option that will be used.

## AGS Guidelines for Main Technique with “Other” Techniques

Main technique should be the dominate technique, 75% or more of the crafted area. Note: there is no requirement regarding the percentage of a gourd that must be crafted.

- If pyrography is less than 75% the entry should be moved to the category that corresponds to the actual predominant technique or to a multimedia category
- Main technique should be the ONLY technique evaluated for the quality of Craftsmanship
- Main technique should be the ONLY technique evaluated for Degree of Difficulty



*Pyro-shades (unknown artist)*

## Pyrography Judging at Gourd Competitions

Pyrography by definition is the art of burning a surface with some type of heated tool. Typically, with gourd art, the tool is a variable temperature burner with pens or wire tips, or a solid point burner without temperature controls. Torches and other heated objects\* may be used. Typical pyrography categories are (1) Wood burned only, on a whole or cut gourd with a clear finish, or (2) Wood burned plus color (ink, dye, paint, colored pencil), on a whole or cut gourd with a clear finish. Of course, variations of these basic categories can be made depending on the decisions of the show committee and written in their Show Book. Are other techniques and

### Scoring Option A

1-5 points for each of the following

1. Originality of Design
2. Quality of Craftsmanship & of the Gourd
3. Creativity & Artistry
4. Color, finish, accessories, decoration
5. Appropriate for category

### Scoring Option B

50% each

#### Craftsmanship

- Skill, Technique, Attention to Detail
- Degree of Difficulty

#### Creativity

- Originality & Impact of Design
- Use of Color & Line
- Enhancement of Gourd's Natural Beauty



*Award winning entry by Ron Pressel from Indiana (2014)*

embellishments allowed? Entrants should carefully read the entry guidelines and rules to avoid disqualification and judges should read them too to be consistent and fair.

### Burning techniques

The burning techniques consist of three basic styles: line, shading and stippling. There isn't a right or wrong way of doing pyrography, however as in any type of art, there are certain guidelines that create a more appealing end result.



*Leather Look by Kathy Gordon from Pennsylvania*

### Considerations

**Originality:** It is recommended that the use of commercial patterns and class projects should not be allowed above the novice class. If the gourd is created from a pattern or the project was from a class and is entered in divisions above novice, few points for Originality should be awarded.

**Dominance:** In Pyrography categories, pyrography must predominate, we recommend 75% or more of all techniques included. If the pyrography does not meet the "dominant" technique requirement it should be moved to another, more appropriate category, such as "multiple techniques."



*Pyro-Owl by Gloria Crane from Utah*

**The Gourd:** Is the gourd appropriate for the project? Are there flaws or mold markings that detract from the finished project?

**Neatness:** Are areas burned cleanly, without obvious errors such as hot spots, scorch marks, uneven thickness of lines, uneven shading and color?

**Presentation and Design:** Is the pyrography placed on the gourd in an attractive manner? Has the artist used

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# Judging continued



*Pyro by Hellen Martin from Texas*

lights, darks and mid-tones? Combined soft and hard edges to create the illusion of depth and perspective? Is the overall composition pleasing to the eye? The judge should consider all these factors when scoring for overall appearance.

**Details Matter:** Does the gourd sit well without danger of tipping over? If opened, is the inside of the gourd clean and neat? Has an appropriate finish been applied? If color has been added, does it add to the pyrography or take away from the overall appearance?

**Craftsmanship and Artistry:** The skill of the artist should be noted. How well has a piece been burned and what is the level of difficulty? Has the artist used a fresh approach or is the piece lacking in originality?

## Applied Judging Behavior

**Personal Preferences.** A judge's personal preferences on colors or design, for example, should be "checked at the door" when working as a judge, as the rules clearly state. Judges should be looking at and judging according to the Division, Category and Class descriptions. As an artist you may have a preference for glossy finishes but the entrant used a satin finish. As a judge, you may also have a



*Pyro by Sandra Butler from Indiana*

favorite subject, such as an owl and are immediately drawn to that entry, but that preference should also be checked at the door. Even if a gourd "speaks" to you personally, as a judge, your duty is to the stated rules of the show and the quality of all items against the judging standards for the Category. As a judge you and your fellow judges must not allow personal preferences to play a part in your judging. Be sure to remind each other of the need to be open-minded and unbiased when judging.

## How is 75% Determined?

One reason we chose 75% instead of 51% is that it will be easier to determine if the technique is truly the dominant one. Seventy-five percent was also chosen instead of 95% because many artists want to use color or other products to enhance their work and 75% recognizes this desire and see it as a way of supporting the artist's intention, originality and impact of the design.

## Judging the Main Technique - Pyrography

As previously mentioned, when a class permits color along with the pyrography, it is still the pyrography that is the technique to be judged for craftsmanship, degree of difficulty and originality. The use of color will be judged for how well it was used to enhance the design and its impact on the design. However, we've also seen lovely multiple technique pieces that do not meet the class description. Perhaps the entry also has carving and clay applied...lovely to be sure, but they do not follow the



*Pyro-shading+InLace by Jenn Avery from Pennsylvania*

class description. In some cases, these entries are allowed to stay in the class for judging along with ones that are intentionally simple (pyrography with color) to meet the class description. If allowed to stay in the class, judges must evaluate them or move them to a different, more appropriate class. If not moved please remember to deduct points for failure to follow the class description. The winner should clearly be one of the entries that followed the requirements listed.

### Conclusion

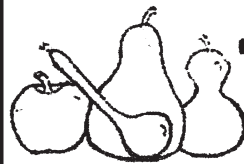
Many of these guidelines will apply to other techniques, such as carving, weaving and painting. It may seem redundant but repetition will lead to a better understanding and a consistent application of these judging guidelines. Focus on the originality, quality of craftsmanship and overall impact of design 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 American Society does not condone, endorse, nor encourage fractal burning, also referred to the Lichtenberg technique. The AGS and several chapters support the stand taken by the American Assn. of Woodturners to NOT accept for demonstration, sale or display at either exhibitions nor competitions, gourds that demonstrate the application of fractal burning. 🍂*



*Pyro+Color by Sherry Briscoe from North Carolina*



## The Gourd Pile

The Gourd Pile bins are full of gourds of every shape and size, just waiting to be used for all your projects.

You will be pleased with the quality and especially the thickness we have achieved with this year's crop.

Visit our farm (call before you come) and pick out just what you need or give me a call and I will ship them out to you within two days.

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