

Zen and Prizes: a fair deal?

I knit because I want to. Because I live in the 21st century in a highly developed country, and make a decent wage, I do not have to knit my clothes, or spin my own yarn because I have to. It is a lovely hobby that brings wonderful garments that would be out of my price range otherwise.

When I decide to knit something, I'm *never* thinking about if I should enter it into the fair. It doesn't cross my mind. Each year, when the fair booklet comes (and hey, Marin County Fair organizers - you could email it to me in a pdf, and I'd be fine with that), I start going through my project page on ravelry to figure out what might be "fair material." After all, I need to be able to get the item back (charity sweaters that have gone to Afghanistan are OUT), it has to be done well enough by knitter world standards, and I have to like how it turned out.

My first year of submitting items to the fair resulting in a [bonanza of first places](#). I was thrilled, since I'd never entered anything like this. The next couple of years ([here](#) and [here](#)) were not filled with that first blush of success. I started looking at the larger picture of the fair - like what was winning, and how things were displayed (sadly, treasured handspun items were *on the floor!*, or fine lace shawls used as tablecloths for other items). My friend Judy and I did offer some critique on the displaying, and I've talked about the judging on the blog and on Ravelry.

As I walked into the fair this year, I already knew how things had turned out for me prize-wise. [My friend Les sent me photos](#), I did well, and I of course will never turn down an award. But I wasn't in the same place as the first year. I know that my award first of all depends on what other people enter too, and from that standpoint, the fair clearly has lost some folks who might have put in their items - I can think of amazing sweaters and shawls and handspun that could be in the Fair and totally clean up, but people don't, because items haven't been given respect. This year, fortunately, the fair is starting to pay attention. NO item was on the floor, lace shawls with prizes were displayed to effect, and some cute collections were made (a whole set of hats in a bookshelf unit were very cute together).

The second factor in any competition is the judging. Last year, I was [pretty harsh on the judging](#) because it resulted in ugly and unwearable sweaters winning big. This year, that was not the case. The prize-winners were largely deserving -- the women's sweater was lovely, and shock - the men's sweater that won would have given serious competition in my mind.

Now, my handspun traveling woman shawl not only won its category, it took a special award. That was a shock to me. You see, I knew someone putting in a handspun sweater (spun on a spindle!), and I figured I was competing for 2nd place. I was wrong, see?

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And the lovely Twist sweater did place (4th place) which was pretty good considering that there were some really nice sweaters in that group:



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and even my last-minute decision to put in a scarf did okay:



But I'm still in my zen place - my goal is to hopefully get a prize so that my registration fees get covered, which has happened every year so far. And to the Marin knitters - I think it is safe to enter your items - I want to see the amazing stuff out there in the fair next year!