

Chat Shot

'Antihero' by Tony Myshlyaev

by Henley Spiers

This shot by Tony Myshlyaev stopped us in our tracks, an unusual feat in a world where we are bombarded by imagery from all sides. It's a particular source of fascination to learn about the process of underwater photographers who come to the discipline with professional training in photography itself. As Tony shares the story behind the creation of 'Antihero' with the Shot Chat team, we get a clear glimpse of his dedication to detail, light, and the crafting of an image.

Is this image and composition something you planned in advance?

Tony Myshlyaev: This image in itself was not planned. I don't think images like this can be planned as the natural light is too dynamic and shifts too quickly. So as the light changes, the location, pose, composition changes with it. I have a background in studio photography and light theory and that knowledge was my tool in accomplishing this photograph. My friend and I are both huge anime fans so we were inspired by cartoons and action heroes for this pose. A lot of

people say it looks like Spiderman.

Who or what are your photographic influences?

I learned studio lighting from school. I had access to as much equipment as I wanted so I tried everything. It made me appreciate natural light a lot more because I knew how long it took to make any kind of set up. In regards to my inspiration - I would say suahuatika is definitely my inspiration and he was also my instructor. He has an artistic background whereas I have a technical background.

What equipment did you use and where did you shoot it?

Equipment: Subal housing with a Nikon d500 camera

Location: Koh Tao, Thailand

Water conditions: Water conditions were 30 degrees tropical with no waves. It was about 1.5 - 2m deep. you can see the surface at the top of the frame

Help: The model is my friend Alexander Widing (@mrwiding on Instagram)



Settings: f/5.6 - 1/400 - iso 200.
Manual mode
I exposed the light correctly and

froze the image. I guess I could say low ISO was my top priority.

What's the background story?

My friend hired me to do a photograph where he had a cape and a golden wetsuit to look like a superhero. After about 30 minutes of trying photos with the cape, I could tell it wasn't going to work. There was a cool cave nearby that has a 30 minute window every day when the light shines into it. I knew this ahead of time and made sure we were there the first moment the light started to enter the cave. The light kept moving so I kept trying different things. Playing with the light anyway that I could. There are many holes through which the light can shine. I tried not to get fixated on any one lighting situation and kept trying out different things. The main challenge was thinking quickly as the light enters this crack and keeps changing. So we only have a few minutes to discuss an idea, try it, refine it and move on. I am good at talking with models so I had to get him trusting me, comfortable and ready to express himself through poses that would make a bystander chuckle, but he obviously had to trust me. Most of the poses from this shoot involve him climbing onto a rock. But this was a happy accident of a moment that he lifted his second leg above the rock and had this very unique unorthodox pose.

I love this "cyclops mask" as I call it amongst myself and my clients. It catches the reflection in a very lovely way and has a "timeless adventure" kind of feeling. It did not fit his face very well but I talked him into it by forcing him to deal with its discomfort and showing him the results hahaha. We caught the reflection in the sand behind him. It was definitely unplanned but had a big influence during the image selection process.

Any advice on how to communicate and work well with models?

Ah that's a good question. One of my favorite teachers from my program was a fashion photographer, Lurenda Mastromonaco - that was during back in the film era of the 90s. In my program she was always drilling us about being quick and communicating with the models and building up their confidence as much as you can. It is so important to build that trust and I like to do it by letting them know, in any way that I can, that they are doing an incredible job. The hope is to get them to a point where they can really imagine what you want them to do. Most times the best photos are the ones where they forget the camera, even if it is just for a split second, and relax into a truly natural pose. So I'll often ask them to do things on the surface but most of the time the best poses are something a little "off script"

Did you know you had something special in the moment?

After shooting this photo, the lcd lit up and I was definitely happy with what I saw but I did not think too much about it because there is always an opportunity to refine and make something even better. I was only looking for flaws in lighting, posing and composition.

Do you think you could repeat the shot? Is there any aspect of the shot which you think could be improved? If you were trying again today, is there anything you'd do differently?

"I think one famous painter said "art is never finished, it is only abandoned.""

Yes, I could repeat the lighting in the shot - perhaps only for another week or so before the alignment of the sun in the sky shifts so much



so that the light doesn't shine into the cave for another year in the same way. But repeating the same pose and feeling would be very difficult, even for the same person. Because this was a dynamic unplanned moment. I think the shot can always be improved. I think one famous painter said "art is never finished, it is only abandoned."

I don't know what I would try different in this photo, I have tried to stop thinking about images that way. I'd rather see the circumstances as "I did the best I could while shooting and I did the best I could while editing." Otherwise I think I would eat myself up about why "this precious moment was squandered." I think a perfect photo needs to



have some imperfections which gives it that human element.

Can you describe the programmes you used, and what you did please?

As far as editing goes, I just use Adobe Bridge for organization and Adobe Camera Raw (ACR) + Photoshop for editing. I do most of my editing and white balance adjustments in ACR and then open up to clean up and do localised enhancements in Photoshop - just meticulous things that make my OCD act up. I like to take my time and usually I'll spend a day or so working on a photo. Resting my eyes and coming back to look again. This is only

possible when I really like a photo that I shot. Otherwise there is no way I can dedicate myself to it for that long. Honestly I did some clean up but this location was pretty amazing and most of the work was done by being at the right place and the right time.

I prefer a warmer white balance in caves to try and distinguish myself from other photographers - nothing special there. I don't use any filters/skins/plugins. Just Photoshop. I don't know exactly what I did, I don't remember. Just anything I see that bothers me, I like to fix up. Make the exposure nice and even and colours all nice and tidy. I don't really know what to add beyond that. It's more a matter of perspective and planning than any real Photoshop magic. I love colours so I studied colour theory a lot. It does have a comic book kind of vibe but it's not something I can recreate everywhere I go, it was just the way the light worked in that one special moment of the day (during that special time of the year) that allowed me to exploit it in Photoshop.

I still use an APSC camera so it's definitely not the gear. I just am obsessed with natural light and white balance and I spend 5/7 days shooting, thanks to the easy logistics I have in Koh Tao. For every 1 photo you see, I edit many more. So it's a lot to do with my selection process. Behind the scenes, it's always a big stressful mess figuring out which is the best shot. I just play around with a ton of raw files until one feels fun. I try to put out 1 photo every 4 days so it does take a lot of commitment!

What has the reaction to this image been?

I think this is a photographer's photo - those are the people that have appreciated above all else.

In general, it's been received well by the western audiences. The people in Thailand that like it are mainly those that operate cameras because there is a different aesthetic standard here. It definitely has not gone viral because of it's Low Key (shadow dominant) thematics. That's quite normal and I expected the reaction to be mixed but overall I've been really grateful for how it has been received

Thank you for sharing your story with the Shot Chat!

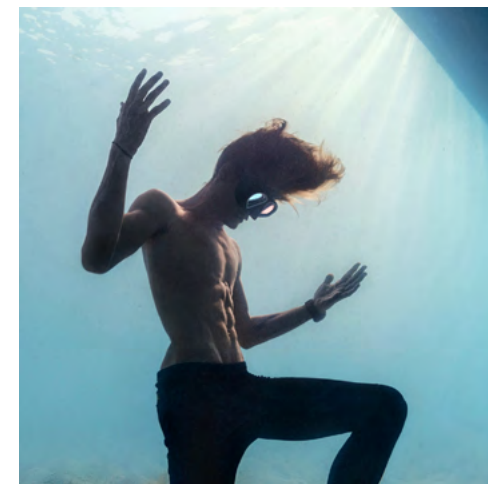
Henley Spiers
www.henleyspiers.com

Tony Myshlyaev

Perhaps better known as Tones of Blue, Tony brings seemingly simple elements: water, light, and people, together to create frames which consistently turn the eye.

He works as a freediving instructor and photographer in Thailand and you can explore more of his work via the link below.

www.tonymyshlyaev.com



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