

A visit to Underwater Photographer of the Year - Gosport Museum and Gallery 2023

by Issy Arnett
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Today Mr Scrummie and I headed off to the newly refurbished Gosport Museum and Art Gallery to attend the press preview of the Underwater Photographer of the Year exhibition.

We'd never visited the museum and gallery before and had absolutely no idea what to expect, but were enticed 'down Gosport way', by the prospect of seeing the prestigious annual competition for underwater photography in flesh!

To say we were pleasantly surprised by the venue is a total understatement; nestled in Walpole



Road, the neighbour of Morrisons and Pets At Home, and housed in what was the old Grammar School, the space is a total hidden-in-plain-sight gem in Gosport's crown.

The magnificent 1901 building has been beautifully refurbished and transformed into the most fantastic community hub; housing alongside its museum and gallery spaces: a bright and spacious café, a stunning open-air courtyard and a brilliant Play Gallery - a breast-feeding friendly, family-focused, art and play space for under-fives.

There isn't the slightest hint of



pomposity about the refurbishment; clearly the intention has been to create a space shaped by the community, for the community, and it works beautifully.

And so, on to the exhibition itself!

Underwater Photographer of the Year (UPY) is an international competition born in 2014, out of a desire to revive a decades-old tradition of major international Underwater Competitions, all of which trace their roots back to Bernard Eaton's Brighton Underwater Film Festival of 1965.

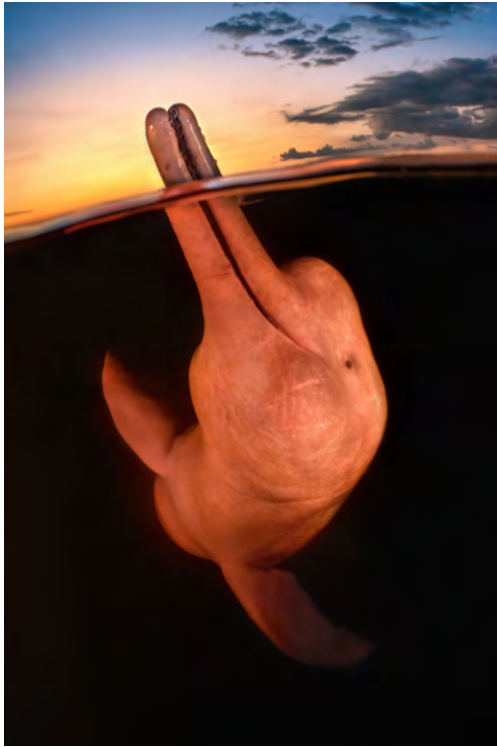
And so, it seems only right that the competition find a home back on the South Coast of England, in a town embedded with naval and marine

history.

Visitors begin the exhibition with J. Gregory Sherman's 'Fade' and from there, work their way through an incredible showcase of hidden underwater realms, including oceans, lakes, rivers and even swimming pools!

This year's competition attracted over 6000 entries from 72 countries but it was US photographer, Kat Zhou who walked away with first prize, awarded for her photo, 'Boto Encantado', of a pink river dolphin in the Amazon River in Brazil.

The photo's title is taken from a local legend told by indigenous communities, that - come night-fall - the dolphins in the river transform



UPY 2023 WINNER
'BOTO ENCANTADO'
Kat Zhou, United States

into handsome men, known as "Boto Encantado", and walk out of the water, hoping to find young and foolish people to fall in love with them!

Now, I was raised by a Highland Scot, and this shape-shifting watery beast folklore reminded me very much of the Celtic mythology surrounding kelpies (or water horses) - and made me wonder how many other cultures and traditions have this sort of superstition embedded in their waterside histories... Do you know a legend like this?



British Water Living Together
HIGHLY COMMENDED
'PASH AND PAL'
Martyn Guess,

From the poles to the tropics, this fascinating exhibition really gets you peering at the tiny, crisply photographed and printed details, and asking big questions. Whilst being beautiful, it's also incredibly thought-provoking.

UPY unashamedly positions the natural world right up alongside the human, and only sometimes is the pairing a peaceful one.



My favourite entry comes from the 'British Waters Living Together' category and is by Martyn Guess. Titled: 'Pash and Pal', the image (shot on Lundy Island, here in the UK) shows the moment that diver, Pash Baker's brightly coloured flippers caught the attention of a local grey seal.

According to Martyn, the seal was so enamoured with Pash's flippers that he wouldn't leave her alone, even when she was coming up for air! As a mum of two small children, this image really speaks to me and I absolutely love how Martyn has captured the connection between seal and human in that 'flipping beautiful' moment!

On the other side of the coin, depicting sides living less harmoniously together, the Save Our Seas Foundation category repeatedly presents the unavoidable truths of global warming and mass ocean

pollution. Important images to be seen; striking for very different reasons to their warmer and fuzzier exhibition counterparts.

So - why visit Gosport Art Gallery and Museum, and the Underwater Photographer of the Year exhibition?

Well, because it's beautiful, poignant, thought-provoking, detailed and vibrant; the 'British Waters' categories in particular serve as a home-pride-inducing reminder that, right here, on our doorstep, in Great Britain, we have the most incredible and awe-inspiring natural habitats, animal species and underwater worlds.

It's also completely FREE and ACCESSIBLE to visit. Whether you're a nature lover, a photography fan, or just someone looking for somewhere calm and quiet, you'll enjoy the exhibition. Mr Scrummie and I spent an hour there, we could happily have spent longer.

Underwater Photographer of the Year runs until 15th July 2023. For more information, visit the Gallery's website.

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www.mummyscrummie.com

<https://www.gosportmuseumandgallery.org.uk/event/underwater-photographer-year-2023>