

Zena Holloway

by Peter Rowlands

Believe it or not, Zena Holloway is only in her early 30's and yet in a short space of time she has established herself as the most creative advertising photographer underwater based in the UK. She works for international clients keen to have her unique images representing their companies and products.

Originally intending to study architecture after school she went on a diving holiday in Egypt and, you've guessed it, she got 'the bug'. She became a dive instructor there followed by a stint in the Caribbean during which time she used her Sea & Sea MX10 with mixed results but she knew she wanted to make her way in the underwater film world.

Returning to the UK three years later she wasn't sure whether to go the wildlife route which is the norm for many photographers. She sought advice from as many experienced people as possible but in the end it was more circumstance which helped mould her direction.

Thinking that working as a diver in the film industry would provide valuable experience Zena got a job with Andrew Schaale at Extreme Facilities, an underwater film rental company in Battersea, Southwest

London. The experience proved invaluable and she came into contact with a new world a far cry away from those early days in Egypt. It was exactly the environment in which Zena could immerse herself and learn from all those around her.

Extreme Facilities were used by many of the crew who were working with Mike Portelly. For those who don't know Mike, he, more than anyone else in the UK, put underwater based commercials on the map. His pioneering imagery which began in the early Eighties has been used extensively ever since.

Zena, however, did not work directly with Mike but she got work with some of his crew and she must have done a good job because they kept re-hiring her when ever they were shooting!

At about the same time she started to shoot her own images, mainly in swimming pools, but with advertising firmly in her sights. This was very much a hand to mouth time and she was helped by many people in the industry who gave their enthusiasm and time for free.

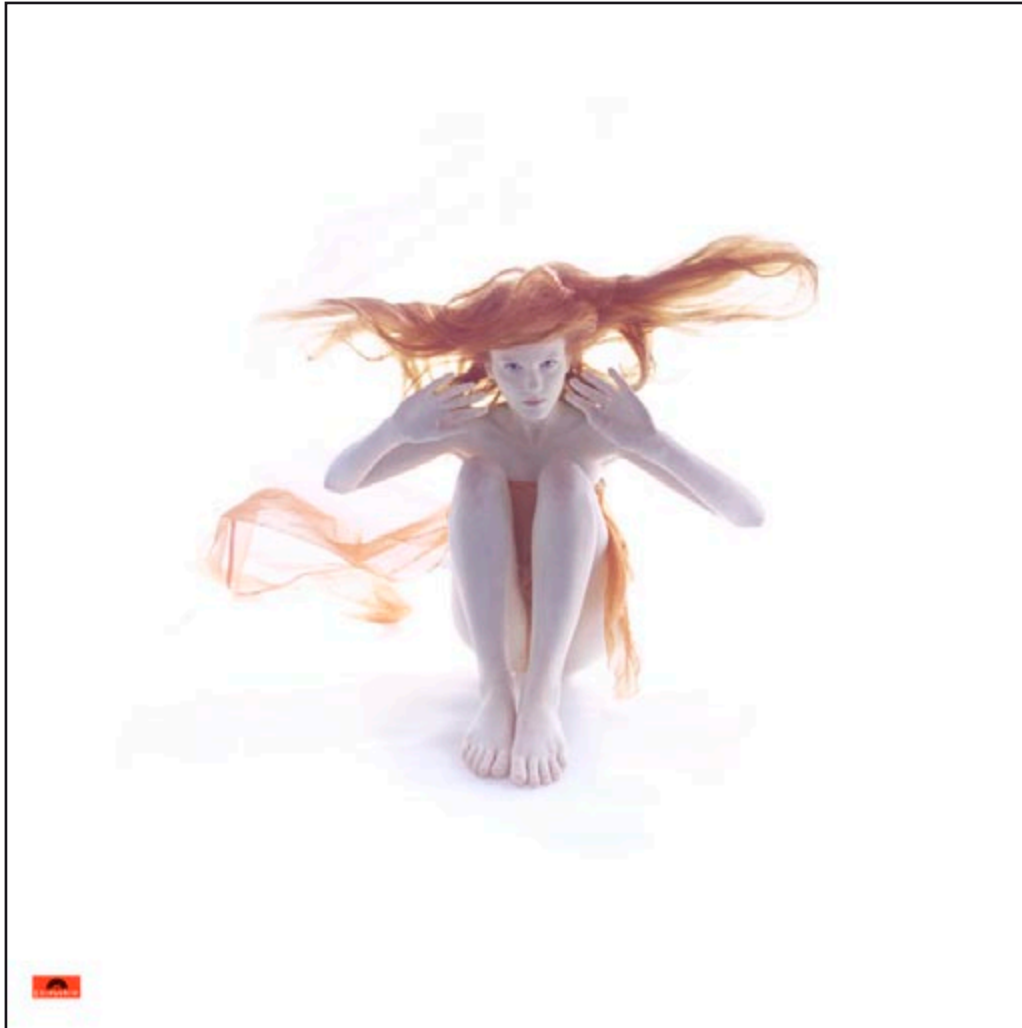
Zena's first major commission came from her first agent who got her an assignment shooting for Faberge,



This was a major shoot earlier this year in Grand Turk with a team of twelve in Zena's group together with six clients from the commissioning agency and the client so no pressure there then! The big problem was the weather which was awful for most of the trip producing water 4°C colder than normal (important if all you are wearing is a latex mermaid suit!), strong currents and poor viz.

Zena had four models- 2 female, 1 male and a child – and the amazing suits were made by Thomas Shouse aka “The Tail Man” in the movie world. The suits were a tight fit, beautifully hand coloured but had no relief zip (if you get my drift). To give you an idea of scale, the tail was about 1 metre (3ft) across.

Zena used an Aquatica Mamiya RZ67 housing modified to take a Phase 1 digital back which gave her unlimited exposures and the ability to view the results straight away back on the surface. It was shot with available light with a little bit of digital enhancement.



This was a shot taken in 2003 for Polydor Records as an album cover for the band Love Field but Zena is not sure if it was ever used as the band were having some problems.

Taken in a private swimming pool in Weybridge with a white drape background, the model was a Canadian girl who Zena screen tested underwater and knew immediately she was ideal for the job.

The shot was lit with soft lights 'all over the place' and captured with an Aquatica Nikon F5 and Provia 400 film.



Taken in 2001 this was Zena's early personal shoot of the mermaid's tail idea. The tank was draped in black and long shutter speeds created a dream-like effect. She worked with four freedivers over a period of three days in the Oceanic tank in Devon and made the costumes herself from pale and silver neoprene. Once again she used an Aquatica Nikon F5 housing with Provia 400 with single top lighting.



This was a billboard advert for Greenpeace commissioned by Saatchi in 2004. It was shot in Cyprus in one long day with the specially made cage and three freedivers. The shark was a bought in shot and added digitally.

Zena used an Aquatica Nikon F5 housing and the shot is taken with available light with Provia 400 film.



Zena has a three year old daughter, Brooke, who quite naturally is already a star underwater and they live with her partner Patrick in West London.

the men's perfume giant. From there her confidence and scale of operation grew exponentially.

She had a fairly loose arrangement with her first agent but it was when she switched to The Peter Bailey Company in London's West

End that things really started to take off. She has since worked with Steffi Graf, Travis. Placebo and pop promo king Chris Cunningham to name drop but a few and despite thinking she would always be a stills photographer is now in demand directing commercials.

She operates very much in the agency world where multinational clients will only work through accredited agents and advertising agencies but, if it all sounds ideal, there is a great deal of frustration as favoured projects can take months to materialise and almost two in three jobs quoted for never go ahead.

Despite all this Zena is positive about the future and her main ambition is to direct a car commercial underwater!

In photographic terms Zena is the first to admit that she knows only what she needs to. She uses photographic equipment to capture the images she wants rather than get bogged down with all the photographic intricacies. She is however a true devotee of the digital age and has always been very computer literate. She now uses almost

exclusively a Canon MK2 1DS in a Seacam housing.

UwP first featured Zena in UwP12 in April 2003 and I'm sure we'll be featuring her special images in future issues of UwP.

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**Limited edition prints
of Zena's work are
available at**

www.zenaholloway.com

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