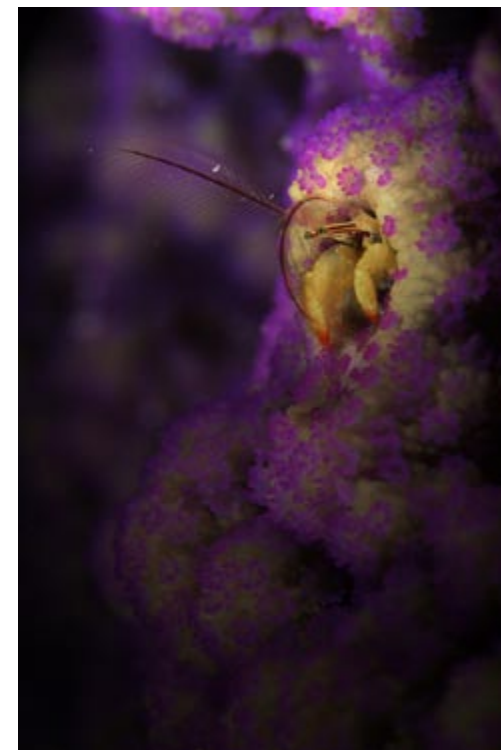


Festival Mondial De L'Image Sous Marine 2006

Report by Alex Mustard



Four of the ten images from the winning portfolio in the colour slides category won by Tobias Bernhard

The World Festival of Underwater Images moved this year to new premises right in the heart of Antibes, and apart from getting a little hot in the unseasonably warm afternoons, the new location was given a hearty thumbs up by all. The huge Festival marquee backed straight on to the old town of Antibes

and a street packed with bars and restaurants, ideal for taking the photo chat somewhere more relaxed, which after all is the essence of the event.

The Antibes Festival is typically French, and all the better for it. The films run and the slides are projected, but for most the main reason for attending the event is the chance

to chat to your peers. And unlike any other event I know, the Festival timetable and ambience is simply perfect for conversation.

Of course the serious business takes place on the Saturday night, when the Palmes for the films and the Plongeurs for the still images are awarded. The Palme D'Or for films

went to Satoshi Okabe of Japan for "Equator – rivers of the sun".

The Antibes Festival is very much regarded as one of the big two in underwater still photography, alongside the Wildlife Photographer of the Year. Both competitions encourage both pros and amateurs to compete, and while they may not



Jane Morgan's winning entry in the Black and white prints category

offer the biggest prizes the prestige they carry is unrivalled. The Antibes Festival does not attract as many entrants as the Wildlife Photographer, but it does encourage entries that have won other competitions, as it wants the very best of the best images. I recognized many entries from the winners' circles of other competitions in Antibes, so you

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Jane Morgan and I with our trophies

know the competition is of the very highest order.

The top still photo prize, the Plongeur D'Or for the 10 slide portfolio was most deservedly won by Tobias Bernhard. Tobias is without doubt one of the most dedicated, artistic and inventive underwater photographers in the world (as well as being a UWP contributor). His winning portfolio contains striking and beautiful images and shows great diversity in photographic technique, environment and subject matter. I particularly love how he perfectly marries photo technique to the story he tells through his subjects and compositions.

Tobias was the first photographer to be the overall winner of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year with an underwater image and is a

regular award winner in that event, including a highly commended in this year's competition. For many observers Tobias's win at Antibes was long overdue. Second and third in the slide portfolios were Magnus Lundgren and Michael Aw, who like Tobias were also winners in this year's Wildlife Photographer.

Two other victories were widely applauded; first Mirko Zanni's beautiful new book "Water Vision" winning the prize for coffee table books and second Jane Morgan winning the Plongeur D'Or for black and white prints. Jane has been winning many underwater awards at a national level here in the UK, but this first victory at the highest level, surely marks her arrival on the international stage. It is also great for underwater photography to have a female photographer winning again in international competitions.

The colour prints were won by Laurent Kbaier of France, although the judges' choices of first, second and third in this category left many photographers scratching their heads. Even the judges themselves admitted the colour prints had been tough to judge.

On a personal level I was very pleased to come home with a Plongeur D'Argent for my black and white photo "Stingrays at Sunset", but equally I love visiting the Festival to chat with friends old and new, and just enjoy a few magical days on the French Riviera. I hope to see you there next year.

Alex Mustard
www.amustard.com