

Shooting mermaids

with Chris Crumley

Hasselblad asked American photographer Chris Crumley to illustrate their recent H4D-60 campaign with some legendary shots of legendary creatures using a camera that they believe is a legend in the making.

Virginia based photographer Chris Crumley has a successful career in commercial and advertising photography, but in recent years he has made a name for himself in a very unique niche: underwater Mermaid photography. For the H4D-60 campaign, Chris shot some Mermaid shots using a Hasselblad H4D-60 in an Ultima Underwater Housing.

"I love being and shooting underwater. About 25% of my work is in water, the rest is somewhat typical commercial and advertising; architectural, interior design and food work in Virginia and the eastern U.S.. I took my first underwater images in 1979, using an SLR in a plastic bag. That approach left a lot of 'room for improvement,'" says Chris, "that is to say they sucked. I thought if I could breathe underwater, I could get a better result. That led to scuba certification classes so I could get



underwater breathing air."

Chris now runs a decidedly more advanced operation, very high tech, and his studio is currently home to numerous high-end Macs with over 40 TB of on-line hard drive storage and his own custom built underwater shooting arena.

"In 1998 I built a cyclorama-like 22,000 gallon pool for doing underwater illustration work. It has medium gray walls and floor to make post production retouches easier."

That hasn't kept him from the open waters, however, and in 2002 Chris was awarded SSI Platinum Pro 5000 Certification for having logged over 5,000 dives. To date Chris has carried out over 6,000 open water dives; only 7 without a camera.

So how did the Mermaid shooting come about?

"Some years back," Chris explains, "I was working with a model





in Mexico and we started – for some reason – talking about mermaids. One thing led to another and we had a fashion design professor at an Illinois University design and fabricate our first tail. My idea from the start was just to use the whole Mermaid thing to create an interesting portfolio. The plan was for it to sell diving and underwater photography skills to advertising agencies needing underwater fantasy-themed ad images.”

His specialization in underwater shooting has proved very popular and he now has what is perhaps

the largest collection of realistic underwater mermaid images in the world, covering everything from studio shots in the specially designed pool to location shots in underwater environments around the world.

“In the last few years,” Chris says, “The Mermaid thing has grown significantly. And in the last 6 to 9 months it has caught on fire! In the past few weeks, I’ve done four book covers and a Norwegian auto ad, all centered on the Mermaid theme!”

“Shooting underwater, however, is both a blessing and a curse. There are a numerous obstacles to



overcome. The optical difference between air and water is huge. Water affects color, contrast and visibility. Red and yellow colors begin to disappear when deeper than 2-3’ so artificial light is needed to restore the color. Lights, along with everything else, needs to be waterproof and salt

water corrosion-resistant. Scuba gear must be transported and maintained. It is truly life-support gear and its use must be second nature. With the human body at 98.6 degrees farenheit, water at anything less becomes chilling (or freezing) in a short time. I can wear a wetsuit or drysuit, but



requires a housing that you can trust your very precious gear to. Most have leak detectors, but a single hair across the sealing O ring is enough to let in enough water to destroy your camera. So you really have to be careful and use good gear. Until Hasselblad approached me for this shoot, all of my underwater shooting was done using 35mm film and DSLRs. I had, around 1988-90, begun using my first Hasselblads (an ELX and SWC) for dry work, however, and was keen to get them into the water.”

“Shooting with the H4D-60 was a joy. It was just like an extension of my hand. Very easy to use. And the resolution! Wow! I also liked the True Focus feature. My H3D-39 doesn’t have the feature, so I wasn’t familiar with it. But, I learned to use it quickly and it worked perfectly. I could focus on an eye, and then reframe the shot and trip the shutter. It helped me nail the focus every frame.”

“During this shoot, I had no issues whatsoever, the system worked perfectly. It’s just as easy as any DSLR, but with, once again, that incredible sharpness and resolution. An amazing amount of detail. Even underwater, the sharpness of the model’s hair was extraordinary.”

www.chriscrumley.com
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the models might not be so lucky. Underwater models must love their job – and the water. They also need to be comfortable underwater and even for pool work, it’s helps if they are scuba trained. Once the model is on a breathhold set underwater, I have 10-20 seconds to shoot before the model needs air. So for each setup, even with the fastest firing strobes, I usually only manage to get four to six frames at a time.”

“Naturally shooting underwater

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