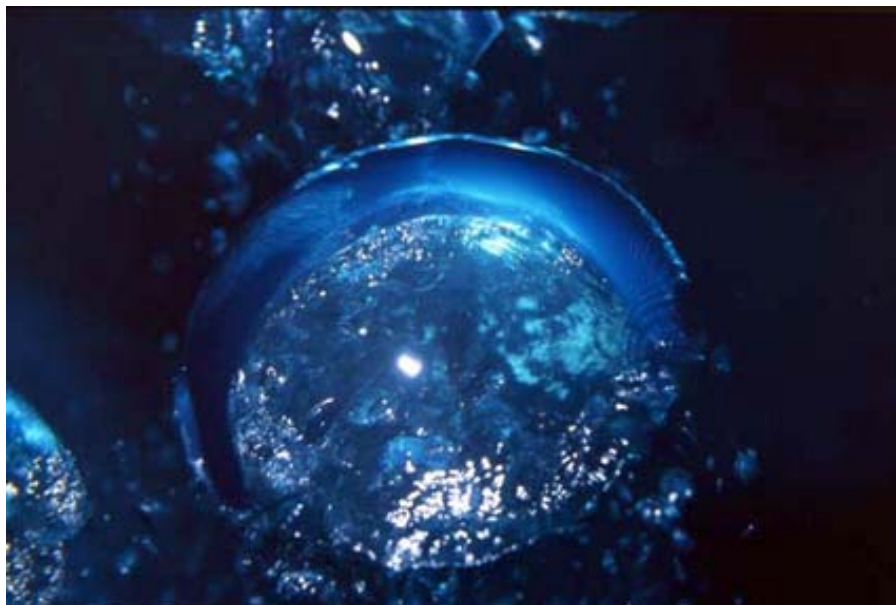


Bubbles

by Will & Demelza Posslethwaite

No, this is not an article about an amazing scuba diving chimpanzee but some thoughts and hopefully inspiration on the use of bubbles in your photography. It was a young girl who had just finished the first pool session of her course that set me thinking about this topic. Like many she was really thrilled with the idea of breathing underwater but beyond that the dancing of the exhaled air on its way to the surface she found very beautiful. I had to agree with the rest of the class that she was right. It was the freshness of the idea that struck me. Often it is difficult to step back and look at things clearly and in a new way. Invariably it takes someone without the accumulated baggage that we often call experience to see the simple beauty in things. For us conventional scuba guys bubbles are always with us. They are our tracks in the snow, the only signs that we've been there (hopefully) and can convey a great deal about what it feels like to be a diver to those who know the feeling and also to those that have yet to try it out. Inspired by this girl's insight here are a few ideas I had.

The first shot I decided to do away with was that of a near ground diver between breaths. In other words one in which the diver is the subject but not showing how he is staying alive. A dead shot emotionally. I looked back at the pictures I used to illustrate the use of reef hooks in issue 4 of UWP and realised



*(Above) Diver's bubble rising to the surface
Nikon F90X with 60mm in Subal housing with flat port, Fuji Velvia, 1/60th, F11, Sea & Sea YS90 on TTL.*



*(Left) Wreck of the Carnatic "breathing", Northern Red Sea
Nikon F90X with 20mm in Subal housing with compact dome port, Fuji Provia 100 F, 1/60th, F11, two Sea & Sea YS120 strobes on half power.*

none of them showed a diver exhaling. The impact of the bubbles streaming away in a strong current would have been far better.

If we look at the two shots of the diver staging her decompression tanks which works for you? For me where there are no bubbles the kit is more clearly in view as a sponsor

might wish but although there is action it seems somehow muted. Where the diver is breathing out not only do the bubbles fill some of the dead space but they track the diagonal and, more importantly, they show the concentration in the task and highlight the importance of the gas in these tanks on getting safely back to the surface.



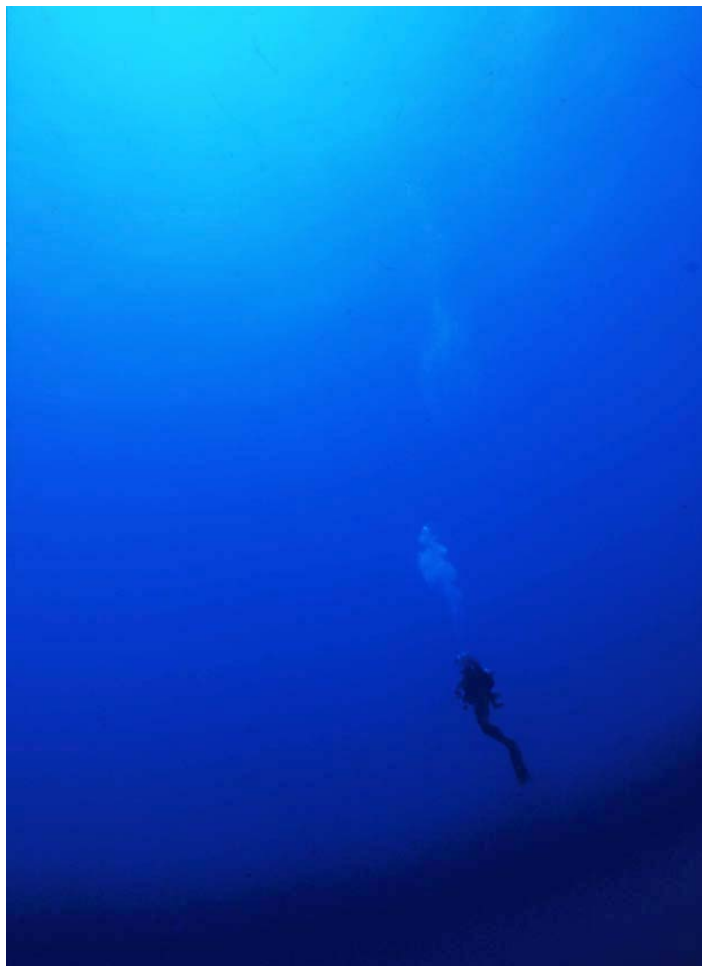
With and without bubbles. Nikon F90x with 20mm in Subal housing, Sea & Sea YS120 and YS90 Strobes, Fuji Provia 400 F (my favourite film for wide angle in indifferent vis. (i.e. UK), 1/60th, F5.6, Strobes on full.

Often divers are used more as a back drop to a near ground reef scene. Here the silhouette is all important but if we get the diver breathing out the silhouette of his bubbles can add more than just an extra dimension. Take the next shot here that I call 3meditations2. We were hanging in the blue just off the reef at the Brothers in the Red Sea hoping to see hammerheads and oceanic white tips. The dive was quite charged with adrenaline but when I saw our guide he looked totally at peace. His slow, deep breathing emphasised this and as each breath drifted up to the surface they placed him very much in deep space. There was so much going on in this scene that nothing in the fore ground was needed. Getting the diver fairly small was important for the effect of isolation but by using his bubbles the dead space is punctuated on the diagonal leading the eye from the dark depths below the diver up past him and link him to the sunlight and surface in the far corner. Without the bubbles the shot is lifeless.

I find the best shots with divers are around wrecks. For many people this is the essence of

diving. The exploration of the history of the sea and how the underwater environment claims its victims. The shot here of the wreck of the Carnatic has the divers in the picture but only visible because of their bubbles coming up through the structure. As I watched this it struck me that there was something more subtle in the picture where the wreck itself was perhaps being given life by the bubbles or perhaps those lives lost in the tragic sinking were haunting our presence? You might agree with me or you might think I'm trying a bit too hard here. I don't mind which because all I'm trying to achieve is to make you think how bubbles in the shot would work for you. Technical though underwater photography undoubtedly is, the final shot is still subjective in its appeal.

The last image takes me back to the girl in the pool and her fascination with the bubble itself. A safety stop can flash by if you've got divers below. As the air makes its dash for the surface, expanding as it goes, the friction of the water and surface tension bend the bubble into a great lens, splitting the spectrum and reflecting the light. As you are



“ Meditations “

*Nikon F90X with 20mm in Subal housing,
Fuji Provia 100 F, 1/60th, F8, ambient
light.*

shallow these shots can be taken with or without strobes. I haven't managed it here but I remember seeing a shot a few years ago where the photographer got a perfect self-portrait in such a bubble. He claimed it was just lucky. Here we are underwater illustrating diving and divers, again without having them in the shot and also giving the viewer another dimension (and perhaps a diving physics lesson!).

Like this bubble, you might think this is all full of hot air, but I bet when you next take a shot with a diver in it you will think hard about how his bubbles will affect the final image.

**by Will & Demelza
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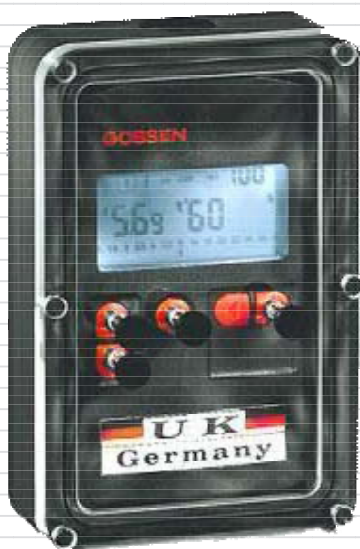
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