

Shooting Mermaids

By Steve Anton

Folklore has it that mermaids have been around for untold centuries. No fable can withstand the test of time without some truth. I am here to show you some truth and hope you can help spread the fable.

As a kid growing up in South Florida there were always the stories and myths about mermaids. Of course during my days of growing up, there were also TV programs about genies, witches and a friendly dolphin. The South Florida I grew up with also had brochures about mermaids at almost every diner and motel. It was a captivating thought, to be able to see them perform, and then one day I did. The beauty and grace was amazing and the mermaids seemed so real. In every child's life there comes a moment, when reality intervenes with perception. For most, it is when they learn there is no Santa Clause. For me...I still believe in mermaids.

As an older kid, I would always dream of the water and learned to scuba dive. I would learn to be a fish and once bitten by the photography bug, I learned capture the beauty that is the underwater world. I also never forgot the mermaids.

From the early days of Hans Hass, starting in 1938, the Austrian

photographer and his lovely wife Lotte, introduced their amazing underwater photographs and movies to the public. The public had never seen anything like Hans' world. This was many years before Mr. Cousteau began. This new world had its first swimming cameraman and he had a huge impact on so many others. In this new world, masks, fins and underwater cameras were still being developed. There is an amazing collection of his works still available on the internet and even by today's standards, they are the measure of underwater photography and cinematography. His mermaid was Lotte.

The lure of the depths has captured so many of us and at an early age. When I started diving, the pinnacle was to own a Nikonos camera. I still have my Nikonos II and the Seconic light meter. They still work and are on my shelf looking down at me as I type this. Today there are so many cameras and systems available, that to say one is the best is as say one car is the best. Which is best for you is the real question. For many, that best is determined by a budget. That camera budget is often in competition with all the other



Trina Mason's Sassy Tail-Sony-NEX-7, Nauticam Housing, ISO -100, 18 MM, F-6.3 at 1/100, Natural light.



diving equipment for your attention. I, myself, have learned that it is best to look at the housings you can afford and develop the camera system from that, since many of the housings can be double the cost of the camera and adding different lens to the housing can jump into large digits. The best news is that even inexpensive cameras, such as the point-and-shoots today, will do an amazing job. The photograph doesn't care what camera you are using, nobody ever asked Picasso what paint brushes he used.

As photographers, we are all consumed with seeing the finished product and digital gives us the instant gratification that film never did. But what you see in the camera isn't always what shows up on your screen. So practice and more practice are needed. If you are a beginning diver and/or beginning photographer, I have always recommended to my photography students, that time spent practicing in the pool, learning your camera and settings, will pay off well in open water. It's boring in a pool, but lots less expensive than coming back from a day of diving, wishing you hadn't made so many mistakes. So at the end of the day, reviewing your photos, should be your reward, not agony!

As an underwater photographer, especially if you are a critter shooter, mermaids are fun. They like to have their photo taken and don't run and hide. They are much easier to direct and also can assist in hauling equipment. They are easy to find, usually they have a Facebook page, websites and cell phones that text. Mermaiding is a very fast growing field of aquatic entertainment and fun to do. There are dozens of mermaid tail and accessory manufacturers that can also point you to mermaids and them to you. These mermaids



Finding Nemo- Sony-NEX-7, Nauticam Housing, ISO- 200, 18 MM, F-5.6 at 1/60, Natural light, pool location

range in age from three- or four-year-olds, to full adults, over sixty. So, wherever you find them or they find you, have your camera ready and skills to match. There are mermaid gatherings such as a Merpalooza, a mermaid convention, August 9th thru the 11th, 2013. www.merpalooza.com.



Mermaid Sun Angel- Sony-NEX-7, Nauticam Housing, ISO- 400, 18 MM, F-22 at 1/250, Natural light, ocean location

There is a Mernetwork, at www.mernetwork.com. There are mermaid magazines such as www.themermaidmagazine.com. The culture of mermaiding is huge and growing rapidly. There are several tail manufacturers and accessory companies, making amazing lifelike tails, such as the Mertailor,

www.mertailor.com, Mermaids R Us, www.mermaidsrus.com and Aquatails, www.aquatails.com to mention just a few. This is a new way of looking at underwater photography that many have not considered but should. We are all water types and sharing the love of what makes us, us, is very important.

Looking at them, mermaid tails seem like innocent fun. If the model has never swam in a tail, there is a definite, strong learning curve; a swim-ability lesson is needed. There have been several incidents where, new mermaids, in the new tails, didn't understand that their feet are bound and moving in a tail is learned and not a natural art. Just dropping them into the water and waiting for them to surface can be a very bad way to learn, that they are not waving "hi" from underneath, but need help to get to the surface. Holding their breath while waiting for someone to rescue them isn't the best way for a model to build the trust relationship necessary between a photographer and model. Make sure the model and photographer understand that the shallow end can be a very good start to learning mermaid photography. An experienced underwater mermaid will already have the swimming skills, modeling and breath-holding ability that an untrained model won't know. They will also know about makeup and have most of it. Makeup is important and there are make up artists who specialize in underwater makeup. Having a model who is completely comfortable underwater is the secret to good mermaid photos. I have found that sometimes, it is much easier to teach someone who is comfortable underwater, to model, than teach a model to be comfortable underwater. If you can find one that is both, then let the mermaid swim.

Once you have mastered the art of not

drowning your mermaid, it's back to the water, but which water? Many folks dive in cold water, wearing wetsuits. The bottom portion of a mermaid tail can help keep them warm, but the top can be a cool lesson in freezing. I always shoot wearing something that isn't any warmer than my subject. If I'm getting cold, then they most likely are also. I have learned that a model who is comfortable is a much better subject, even if they are professionals and they never let you see them shiver. The natural looks and expressions models give can give away what they are feeling and cold isn't very pretty; it also severely reduces the breath-holding times.

Mermaids usually do not wear masks, since it isn't as attractive and also smears makeup. Learning to communicate effectively is another big challenge. Time spent in a pool is time well spent. That is where you can develop the special signs you use and also to nurture that unknown little communication skill that sometimes develops between a model and photographer where nothing needs to be said and it just flows. I sometimes let the mermaid use a mask with no straps, that fits her, she can clear it and look for directions or as we move to another location. I let them gently hold it to their face and then have them hand it to me or the safety diver/assistant. It is always best to train as a team, you, the mermaid and the safety diver/assistant. Adding a unknown or new safety diver at the last minute can be tough. Developing the trust and also communications skills are very important, especially in open water.

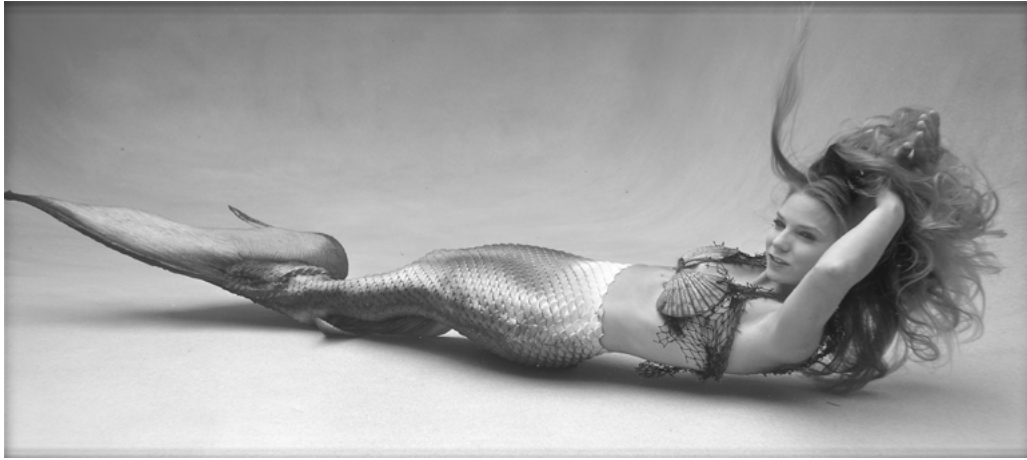
Adding color and balance to an underwater photo should be an easy thing for most accomplished underwater photographers. Adding the allure of a mermaid and new settings can open a creative door that many have never known existed.



Arlene Brooks -Sony-NEX-7, Nauticam Housing, ISO 400, 18 MM, F-5 at 1/500, Natural light, in Weeki Wachee Springs

It often takes practice and time on both the model and photographer to get the right shot. That one great mermaid shot will make folks take a lot closer look at your work, than about any fish photo could ever do.

In the end consider mermaids as a conservation



Trina Mason B&W- Sony-NEX-7, Nauticam Housing, ISO 200, 18 MM, F-6.3 at 1/80, Natural light, pool location

resource. People will identify with saving a mermaid's habitat, much easier than they will with a fish.

Steve Anton

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Steve Anton, a native of South Florida, started snorkeling at 4 years old and scuba diving in 1974, where he first learned underwater photography. Steve's passion for diving lead him to the U.S.Navy where he pursued his career as a Navy diver. In his time with the Navy. Steve worked on all facets of diving, from ship and salvage diving to dive supervisor and also as an explosive ordnance disposal diver. He

became a NASDS Scuba instructor in 1981. He was one of the founding divers for The Organization of Artificial Reefs in Tallahassee (OAR)

Steve is also an award-winning professional photographer and videographer, who also volunteers his time with the "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep," organization. He is also the vice commander, historian and archivist for the Submarine Veterans, South Florida base.

Mr. Anton is on the board of directors for the Boynton Beach Historical Society and is currently the father to three wonderful dogs who were all rescued. In his spare time he likes to take photos while snorkeling and scuba diving around his little bit of paradise in South Florida, where he still lives today.



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THE IMAGE IS EVERYTHING



Image: Adam Hanton

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