

Editorial

Fashion is the new fashion

There have been many, many 'fashions' in underwater photography as people try and produce images which are different and more eye-catching.

If you cast your mind back (which I unfortunately can) you will remember the craze for putting a red filter over your flash/strobes to achieve a highly coloured foreground. This became overdone and they were soon the first shots into the bin in competitions.

Then there was conventional land filters with split prisms, grads, spot focus and blur, all of which lacked subtlety and soon faded away.

Possibly one of the most groundbreaking fashions was 'double exposures' where part of the film was exposed, then rewound and reloaded to expose the other part to produce an exciting combination of scale or forced composition. Despite heralding from the film era I think it is still a relevant technique today and much simpler to achieve with computer manipulation. The results can be much subtler and as a result they have stood the test of time and so have never really gone away like some fashions do. Good ideas last.

Then there was the ability to capture blurred motion at the end of an exposure rather than at the beginning when rear curtain flash sync became available. This was superbly demonstrated by Tobias Bernhard's 2000 WPOTY winner of a Grey reef shark at speed where the motion trails were

behind the shark creating a superb feeling of action through movement. As with double exposures, I think this technique will still produce ground breaking images when used correctly.

In recent times we've had fashionable equipment - snoots, teleconverters etc and even fashionable subjects - sharks, pigmy seahorses, nudibranchs etc so there is no boundary as to where a fashion comes from.

Then there was (and still is) a period when a certain underwater photographer's style of images became the new fashion. Here I'm referring to David Doubilet's simple yet very effective use of a distant diver with a torch to give a tremendous feeling of depth and scale. They were signature shots which many others emulated without a feeling of plagiarism because it was a technique so suited to underwater and yet still subtle.

Now in the digital age we have a master who is producing 'genre' images. These are so unique that it is not possible to go anywhere near them technically without looking so obviously like a lame copy. Rather like trying to emulate Ennio Morricone's Gabriel's Oboe from the Mission or Mark Knopfler's Wild Theme from Local Hero. I refer, of course, to Dr Alex Mustard who has produced several images of a unique fashion/genre. Multi exposure sommersaulting divers entering the water, crisp sponges on spinning backgrounds,

something so simple as a jet back or gorgeous blue background, remote lighting perfection and taking split levels to another level (pun intended) to name just a few.

I am sure his photographic eye will continue to astonish us and I, personally, look forward to that but my job is to predict what the new 'fashion' will be and I think that mermaid photography will be very big for a while. I know it's nothing new but I suspect it will very mainstream for a while.

I've just spent a week on a Red Sea liveaboard where, unbeknowns to me when I booked, Katrin Felton was the assistant diveguide/mermaid and her presence and capability produced very exciting sessions of mermaid photography for all those on board and much to the amazement of the other boats moored next to us. It's not often you see a mermaid on the back deck.

The problem is that, like all fashions, once you have seen too much of it, it loses its visual appeal and you end up at the proverbial bus stop waiting for the next 'fashion'.

I guess the thing to do is enjoy it while it lasts, don't think it will last forever and look forward to the next 'fashion' when it comes along.

Hopefully in future issues of UwP I'll be able to tip you off as to what's up and coming :-)

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