

Tina Christiansen



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P O R T F O L I O



Tahitian Reef Shark,
by Tina Christiansen
Acrylic on canvas,
30 x 40 inches

PREVIOUS PAGE:
Swirling Fishes, by
Tina Christiansen
Digital composite of
two earlier acrylic
paintings 44 x 72
inches

Paradise Island,
by Tina Chris-
tiansen Acrylic
on canvas
24 x 18 inches



Text edited by Gunild Symes. All artwork and photos by Tina Christiansen

American artist Tina Christiansen creates swirling, color-rich paintings with themes inspired by the underwater realm. As a former architect, she comes to painting with an appreciation for structures found in nature. X-RAY MAG caught up with the artist to find out more about her art and what inspires her to create.

X-RAY MAG: Tell us about yourself, your background and how you became an artist.

TC: I have been painting for about 40 years. I started as a watercolorist and currently work in acrylic water media, which lends itself very well to images of the sea.

I am a licensed architect, now retired. I began my college study in fine art, and I switched my major to architecture. I studied natural forms and biological structures in nature. For example the dolphin is almost a perfect laminar form, it produces

very little drag as it moves through water. (Useful to know if you're designing ships or planes)

The bones of birds are formed by calcium deposits along the stress lines of the limb leaving the center hollow, very light and strong. Some of the tensile structures that architects and engineers design use the laws of physics and nature to span great lengths with very lightweight structures. The nautilus shell is a perfect mathematical progression, shared by many other natural forms.

Fractal forms are found through-

out nature, I can see these same structures in the paints I use, especially when I mix water with pigments that are mineral base, such

as cobalt blue, titanium white, copper oxide and so on.

I am fascinated by the sea, and I enjoy boating and snorkeling in the



Pargo, by Tina Christiansen. Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 60 inches

oceans surrounding North America and Hawaii. I recently was fortunate to travel to Tahiti and the Society Islands. What a place! I try to capture the spirit of the sea creatures I paint, the attitude of the turtle, the intensity of a shark, the electric swirl of fishes in the water as they sense and swarm so close together.

X-RAY MAG: Why do you paint underwater themes? How did you develop your style of painting and body of work over time?

TC: I've spent my life looking at the sea, above and below the surface of the water. I look at the play of light on its surface and crepuscular rays piercing the water. The refraction of light as it is bent

and moves over the sandy bottom is fascinating to me.

Coral reefs seem to me to be the treasure box of the ocean. I have only begun to explore the colors and textures there. In some of my paintings, I try to capture the space of the underwater rooms that I see below the surface of the ocean.

X-RAY MAG: What is your artistic method or creative process? How do you create your artworks?

TC: It's a very dynamic process, I splash water and paint all over in some of the images, sometimes I even finger paint. I layer many colors in washes to achieve the depth of field that I want. Sometimes I paint the environment of the "sea

room" first and see what sea creature comes up in my mind's eye (from snorkeling experience). I then paint the turtle or the shark in at the last moment. Sometimes I start with the fish or the leopard ray, for example, first.

Water color and acrylics painted in a water color style cannot be entirely controlled. The best paintings are often the result of happy accidents. I go with where the wash leads me as it dries and curls, like the water that washes sand and seaweed up on the shore. These images are in my main online gallery at TinaChristiansen.net. I also paint mermaids, those images are at Mermaidart.net.

X-RAY MAG: What is your relationship to the underwater world and coral reefs?

How has snorkeling underwater influenced your art? In your relationship with reefs and the sea, where have you had your favorite experiences?

TC: I have gone snorkeling at Tunnels Beach in Kauai and Sugar Beach in Maui; several islands in the Society Islands; the Gulf of Mexico in northern Florida; the kelp forest in La Jolla California; and Catalina Island, California!

It's hard to pick a favorite, but I think snorkeling with the blacktipped sharks of Tahiti was a life experience, and the turtles of Hawaii fascinate me, too. When I was painting *Flying Turtle* [next page], I didn't realize it was really flying around in the water like a bird until I finished the painting. And then when I looked at it,

I realized where birds evolved from. It was a real *aha* moment for me. So that is where the name of the painting came from.

X-RAY MAG: What are your thoughts on ocean conservation and coral reef management, and how does your artwork relate to these issues?

TC: I hope to share how delicate and beautiful they are with people who swim and people who don't. It's the most beautiful thing on earth. It's where we came from, and we'd better take care of it. Once you see it, you can tell how fragile and important it is. Nobody has to try to make you a believer once you've seen it.



Coral Reef Grouper, by Tina Christiansen. Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 30 inches

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X-RAY MAG: What is the message or experience you want viewers of your artwork to have or understand?

TC: I want them to stop and take a long look, and notice the intensity and depth of what it is that I am painting. I want them to get in the water and take a look for themselves... at how beautiful it is.

X-RAY MAG: What are the challenges and/or benefits of being an artist in the world today?

TC: For every hour I paint, I must spend 10 marketing and preparing my work for sale or show. I would prefer to just paint, but if you want people to see your work, you have to get out there and show it. Right now I am working on a series of silk scarves that have my coral reef paintings reproduced on them. They are quite beautiful. I have a line of silk sarongs I hope to market wholesale to the wholesale, high-end catalogue fashion world.

Watch for my silk scarf website that should be operational in June 2015. It will be **Artbytina.net**.

X-RAY MAG: How do people/children respond to your works? What feedback or insights have you gained from the process of showing your work to various audiences?

TC: I do "live" painting demonstrations. I try to get people involved in the splashy part of the painting process. It is really fun to see people try their hand at painting and to see them get fascinated by what the paint is doing. I find that people who can just play with the paint a little bit are the best prospects for becoming avid artists.

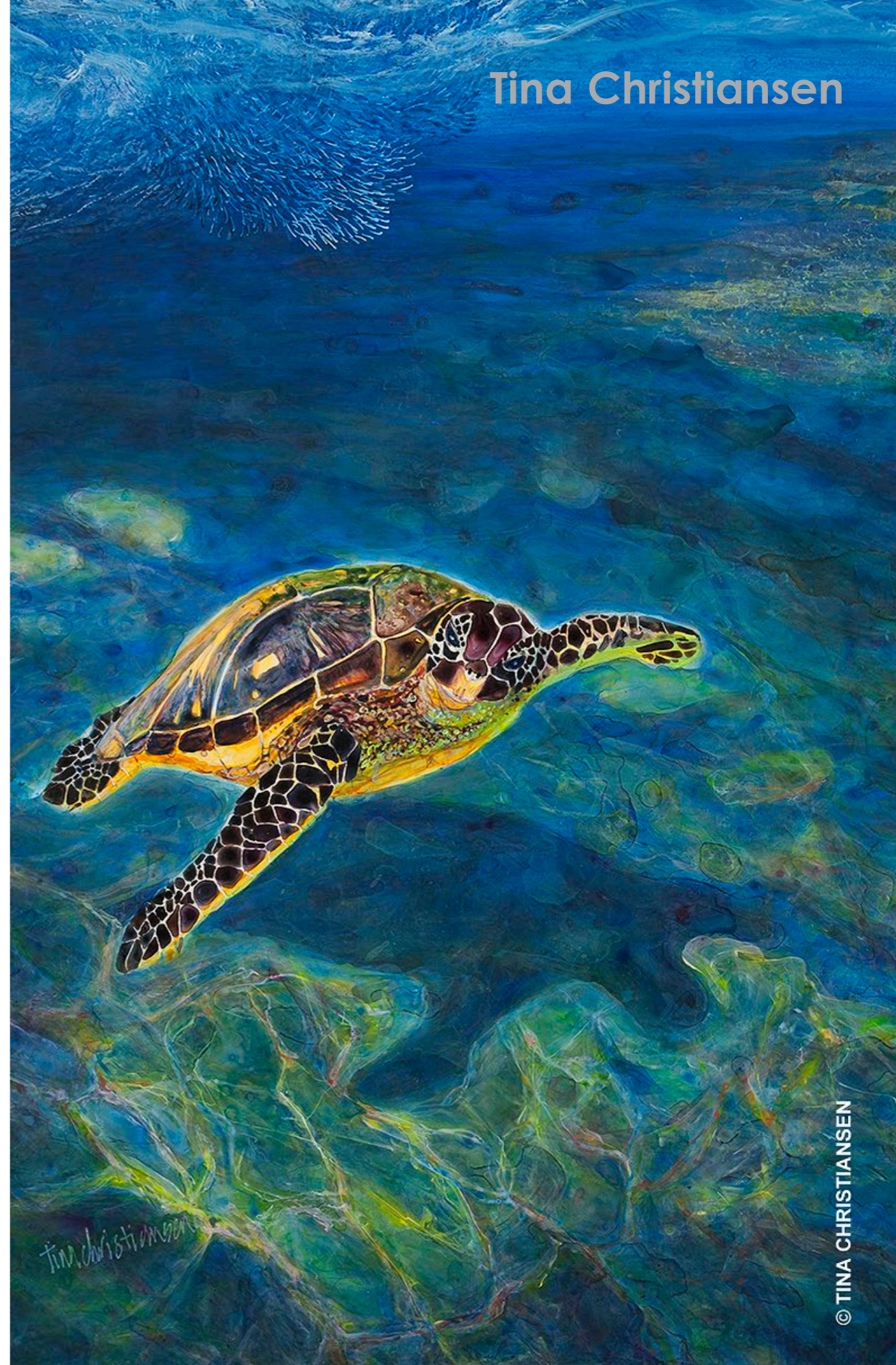
X-RAY MAG: What are your upcoming projects, art courses or events?

TC: I've just moved to Whidbey Island, so I hope to capture some of that north-

ern sea environment this summer, while boating in the San Juan Islands. It's a different light and color of water, and the sea creatures! Well they are pretty spectacular too.

Now that I've retired from architecture, I can focus on becoming a great painter. I had a Japanese watercolor instructor in art school who told me that I could begin to learn to paint within three years of practice. He said in about three years of practice I might be able to paint something well. He said that in 30 years I would know whether I was a good painter or not. Finally, he said after that it was up to me whether I would become a great one. I would like to see whether I can become a great painter. ■

For more information or to order prints, visit the artist's websites at: **TinaChristiansen.net** and **Mermaidart.net**... soon to come is the artist's paintings on silk at: **Artbytina.net**



Flying Turtle, by Tina Christiansen Acrylic on clayboard, 18 x 16 inches

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