

Illumination

Text and photos by
Kurt Amsler. Translation
by Arnold Weisz

Nice subject matter and good visibility is a prerequisite for a great image. But just as important is correct lighting.

For underwater photographers, who are not only taking photos during night dives or in caves, there are two different light sources available. The first is natural light (sunlight during the day), and second, artificial light (strobe/flash light).

Daylight is a constant light source that influences the film or the CCD-sensor in a digital camera as long as the shutter is open. This creates a photographic rule; the longer the shutter remains open with the same aperture, the brighter the image will be. Another aspect in daylight photography is the speed of the subject. To catch the image of a rapid swimming pilot whale, you should not go below 1/250 second. If you do, your image will be blurred.

Strobes, on the other hand, release their flash in a fraction of a second and are always faster than the shutter. Hence, fast mov-

ing subjects are no problem for strobes, as the light emitted will "freeze" the subject in the image.

Exposure techniques

The most ideal subjects are sea mammals that swim near the surface. The best way to catch images of these animals is by snorkeling—in this way, a strobe is redundant. Additionally, images captured without a strobe are clearer than with one.

Even in the clearest water, you will always find particles that will reflect the strobe light. Also in wreck and landscape photography, you can often skip the strobe if the distances to the subject are

not too great. Images don't get more expressive (color rich) under water, because the



red color disappears already at three meters distance anyway.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Giant tube sponges on Cozumel's Columbias Reef; wreck propeller; scorpionfish

Image techniques for under water daylight images are no different from those used above the surface. But ideally, an underwater photographer should only

work with two kinds of exposure techniques: manual or shutter priority. These are the only ways which allow you to adjust the shutter speed according to the movement of the subject.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Stingray at the Maldives; Lionfish hovers over a reef; Whale shark eyes diver in Mozambique

In manual mode uses the built-in light sensor in the camera to measure the light intensity towards the subject and sets the correct shutter speed. Working in the automatic shutter mode, the camera will take care of these settings for you. Just keep in mind the following: if the subject doesn't fill at least 60 percent of the frame, the bright exposure values from the water will carry more weight than the subject, and the camera will adjust to this. In that case, your subject—for example, a whale shark—will appear very dark. To correct for the lack of light, modern cameras have an exposure control button that you can set on 1/3 or 2/3 Positive, and the camera will slightly over expose, so the whale shark will get a better exposure.

The strobes are always faster than the subject and the camera. It is therefore impossible to reduce the amount of light by adjusting the shutter speed. To counteract this, you have to use the aperture.

Which aperture setting to choose together with each specific strobe you can often find on a table, which usually comes along with the strobe.

The main point here is the distance between the subject and camera. For those who only shoot with strobes, don't worry too much about the ambient light. This is the case foremost when taking macro or close-up images. For these kinds of images, the ambient light doesn't really matter, as the aperture is too small anyway to allow much light to hit your film or CCD-sensor. Flash-only images, where the viewer has no idea if the image was taken during day or night, are used for close-up or macro subjects.

Mixed light

As soon as you want to include more of the surrounding area or blue water, you need to take into consideration the natural light. The trick here is to mix both the strobe light and the natural light.

The strobe should illuminate the foreground of the image, and the natural light, the background. This means that you have to set the correct aperture and shutter speed on each occasion.

For example, we are taking an image of a fish and want to incorporate a saturated blue color in the background. If one uses only natural light in the image, most probably the fish will appear blurry, and the background will shine in a radiant blue because of the longer shutter speed.

If we are only using the strobe, the fish will be well illuminated, but the background will appear dark and dull. To get this kind of image perfect, you need to mix the strobe light and the natural light.

So, what's the trick? Use the aperture for the strobe and the shutter speed for the natural light. To get

a clue on the correct aperture, you can read off the table, which usually is found on the strobe. For the background, you need to trust the camera exposure meter. Use this in-built function to measure the background light—not directly

behind the subject, but about 30 degrees above. This way, you will obtain a slightly darker background because the camera will give you a little faster shutter speed and the background will receive less light.



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The correct mix

For example, the camera exposure meter shows aperture 8 (which we need for the strobe), and the shutter speed is set for 1/30. With these settings the shutter is still open after the strobe has gone off, allowing for more natural light, making the background blue. To achieve the perfect mix, you need to practice. A good tip here is to train your eyes to measure the natural light, at different depths, at different times of the day and within a different range of visibility. Keep this in mind during any dive, and you will learn "to read the light". This will make you able to choose, without hesitation, the correct settings for mixed light images.

Practical tips for illumination

- Working with images in natural light



only, you have to adjust your shutter speed to match the movement of the motive.

- When taking images near the surface or in shallow water, a strobe is unnecessary. Often you may need to swim fast, and then the strobe will only slow you down.
- For natural light images, it is easier



Fan coral exposure series (top to bottom):
f8 125 seconds;
f8 60 seconds;
f8 30 seconds;
f8 15 seconds

to work with the automatic aperture. As you preset your shutter speed, the camera takes care of the aperture. You save time, and it allows you to concentrate on the subject.

- The built in exposure meter is of great help to under water photographers—specially for mixed light exposures. On the other hand, you need to have



a good comprehension of how to work with the exposure meter. Study the manual and train both on land and under water. This will help you to easily find the correct settings.

- Using strobes, there is only one rule: flash combined with aperture. As the flash-light from the strobe is always faster than the shutter speed, the only way to influence the image is by aperture.

- The exposure tables that usually come with strobes do

Illumination

not always reflect reality under water. You should always take some images with different settings of a subject exactly one meter away, and use the correct illuminated image as the foundation for your continuous work. With every change of distance by half a meter (away from the subject), you have to open the aperture by one step, or close the aperture, if you get closer to the subject. This way you can make your own table, which is adjusted to your equipment.

- Flash-only photography only makes sense when used in macro or close-up photography. For any other kind of images, in for example wide angle, you need to consider the natural/ambient light. The rules

that apply are: use flash for the foreground controlled by aperture, and get the saturated blue background by correct shutter speed.

- The background on mixed light images should always be darker than the foreground, to get a good contrast. Never measure the light directly on the subject, but about 30 degrees above (towards the surface). ■

For more information about underwater photography, Kurt Amsler and his photo workshops, visit: www.photosub.com

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SeaLife DC1000

The newest addition to the SeaLife line debuts the Easy Set-up mode — a graphic on-screen guide that takes the guess work out of setting up the camera for great pictures on land or underwater. A 10 mega pixel CCD, powerful a 25X zoom (Optical: 5X and Digital: 5X) and four new specially designed underwater modes makes this versatile yet powerful entry-level camera a safe bet for a first underwater camera.

sealife-cameras.com

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Subal 5D Mark II

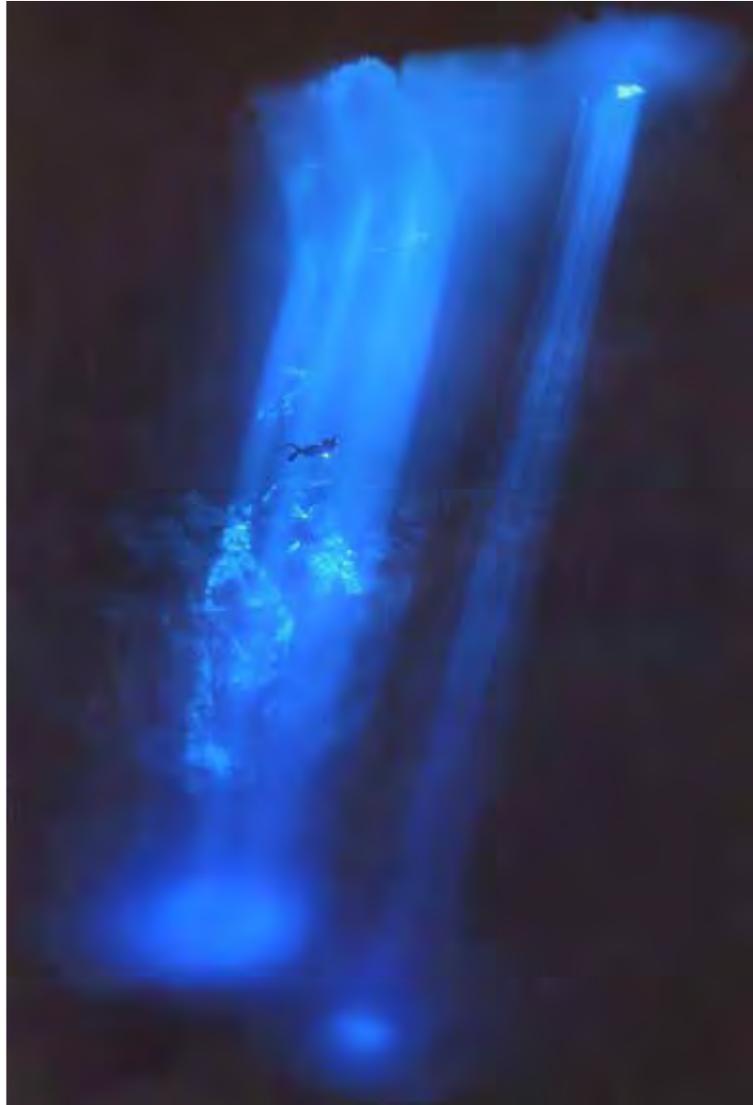
The CD5MII aluminium housing for the Canon EOS 5D Mark II is Subal's newest development for the DSLR cameras. Special attention has been given to the position of the front and rear main dials and the lever for the display illumination. There is a lever in the rear housing that allows one to activate the AF-On OR the AE/FE Lock button. Generous shading of the LCD-monitor provides a dazzle-free view to the brilliant image of the camera monitor and works well with the HD-video function of this camera. The housing can be delivered with the magnifying Viewfinder Optic GS 180 or the magnifying 360° rotatable Viewfinder Optic WS45. www.subal.com

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Beloshchin

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Inhabitants:
Alexandr
Safonov



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Black & White
Photography:
Marina
Kochetova



1st Place, Freshwater:
Mikhail Vedekhin

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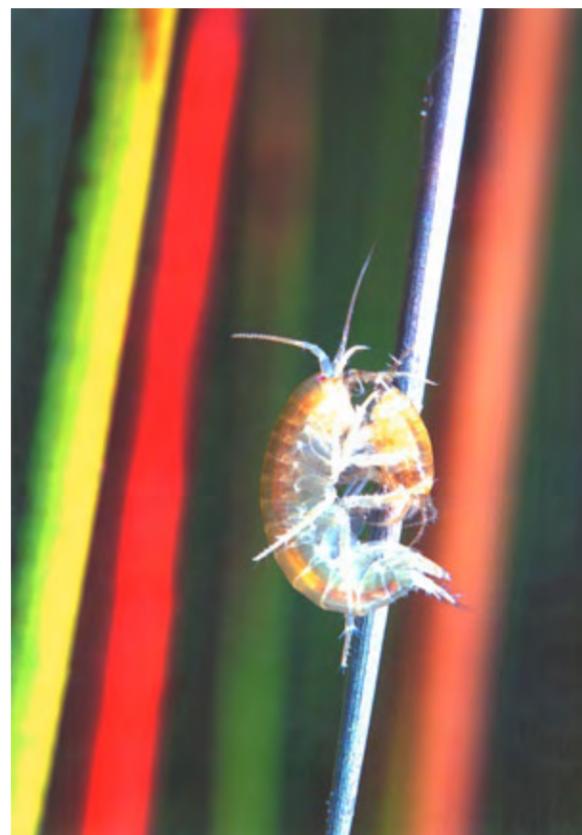
1st Place
Macro:
Andrey Narchuk



1st Place
Wide Angle:
Silvia Boccato



2nd Place, Underwater Inhabitants:
Alexandr Marinichev



2nd Place
Freshwater:
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ISSUE #3
MEGAMERICAN

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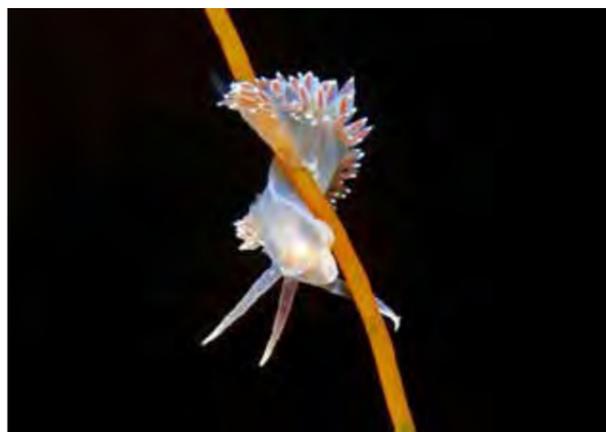
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Elena Azarova



2nd Place
Man and
Underwater
World:
Anatoly
Beloshchin



2nd Place
Wide Angle:
Olga Kamenskaya



2nd Place
Macro:
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Amazon

Our 23 day adventure started with an amazing soccer match in Sao Paulo and then into the wilderness of the Pantanal and to the Amazon. Long days in the sun, mosquitos, noisy nights with loud animal voices, thunder, rain and no cell phone, internet, or computers.

Adventure

Text and photos
by Amos Nachoum
Translated by Valentin Dosiere

Amos Nachoum Photography
Noro Aires, Amazon - Brazil
Foto catching fish
www.BigAnimals.com - 08/22/08
Canon 1Ds Mark III. Seacam housing
14mm lens, 800 ISO, 1/60 @ f-11



Unique Dive Site



We aimed to scout an expedition route to encounter Anacondas underwater, Jaguars in the wild, Piranhas in the river and the Pink Dolphin too. It was an amazing 23-day tour the force of Brazil's wildlife. We had a superb guide who planed everything and researched my unusual requests, he was very supportive and photographer friendly during the entire journey. Daniel De Granville is a celebrated wildlife photographer himself, whom I recommend highly to anyone who ventures into Brazil's wilderness. There are two more people in Brazil who were most instrumental in making this adventure a success. Mr. Lawrence Wahba, an old guest

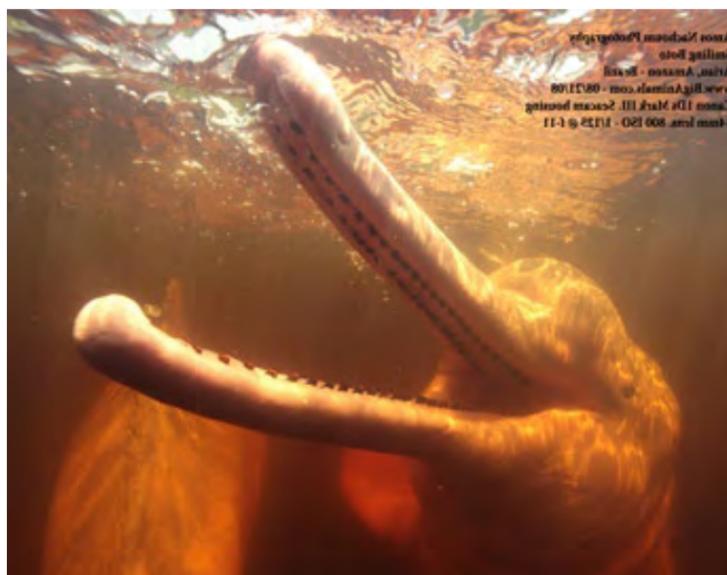
of mine during the first years of BigAnimals expeditions, who has become a national icon and a leading wildlife cinematographer in Brazil. Also Mr. Juka, the one maverick person who I attribute the successful Anaconda encounters, and a person who can do everything by one phone call — we ask and Juka always delivered.

Breaking new ground

It seems that nobody ever attempted and executed such an undertaking to find all these wildlife encounters in one expedition. We not only we broke new ground, found new locations for Anacondas, but we have

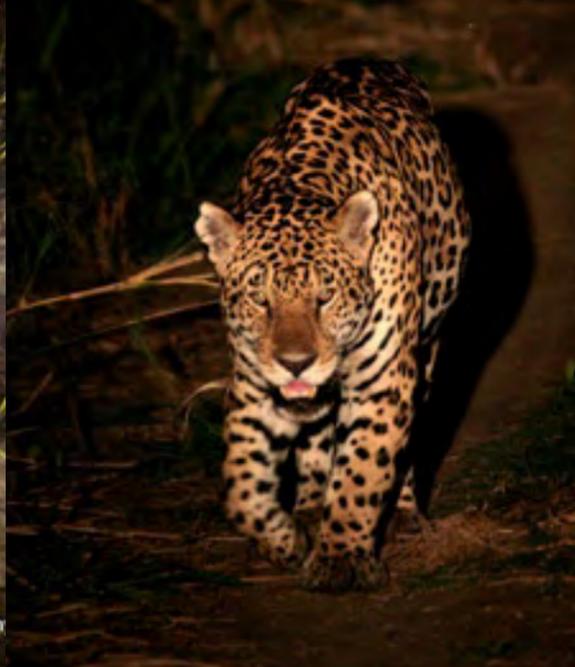
Pink Dolphin (left and above)

Anaconda snake (right); Pirana (top right)





Amos Nachoum Photography



Amos Nachoum Photography
Yellow Anaconda emerging through the grass & then light
Fornoso river, Bonito - Brazil
Canon 1Ds Mark III, Seacam housing
14mm lens, 400 ISO, 1/800 @ f-5.6
www.BigAnimals.com - 08/11/08

added value to the local tourism industry, as I will start a new photo adventure to Brazil through BigAnimals.com, offering the best of the findings on this trip at the prime time of the year.

The food was plentiful and wonderful too, in particular the fruits. The local people were always smiling at us and among themselves, touching you for affection and curious about what we were doing, ready to help, working hard for long hours, and glad to receive whatever we had to give them. My highest compliments goes to my partner who has been with me on many adventures in the past as a guest and for



Amos Nachoum Photography
Typical day at work on the river
Fornoso river, Bonito - Brazil
Canon 1Ds Mark III, Seacam housing
14mm lens, Superdome, 800 ISO 1/400 @ f-11
www.BigAnimals.com - 08/10/08



Amos Nachoum Photography
How wide is this Anaconda really? compare to my hand!
Fornoso river, Bonito - Brazil
www.BigAnimals.com - 08/11/08

FIRST ROW LEFT TO RIGHT: Diving in the Amazon River; Leopard stalking prey; two views of Anaconda snakes in the Amazon River
SECOND ROW LEFT TO RIGHT: Loading the river boat; Navigating the Amazon; Gently touching an Anaconda snake in the river

or as someone local named the river today as "amosconda river".
As for the Anaconda, we saw 16 animals in ten days. The biggest or the longest was eight

meters (25 feet) and mighty. We swam with them, inches away with no sign of aggression. We touched them gently, and we were smiling.

For more info, see: BigAnimals.com ■

the first time joined me on a scouting trip, Mr. John Hall. He has become a dear friend and just an amazing person to travel with, with a great attitude toward the adventure, passion about the people and the environment, and always ready to do more no matter how tired and how long we went with no sleep. Brazil is an adventure and a country which I will return to again and again.

Diving Brazil

To get better images you need to change everything... the voice inside of me was so loud... "the elusive and mighty Anaconda underwater will happen today" — and it paid off in a big way. It paid off to push the envelope in an effort to get the ultimate images. I have rarely returned empty handed from an expedition. There is little luck when it comes to working with wildlife. In the wilderness and within mother nature's law, preparation, determination and flexibility will always

bring results, sometimes many times better than I have expected, and "it's never over until the fat lady sings" ... and she sang alright on this hot, bright afternoon here on the river in Bonito,



Amos Nachoum Photography
Scouting & Private expeditions - participation
Fornoso River, Bonito - Brazil
Canon 1Ds, 16 - 35mm & Polarizer
200 ISO, 1/400 @ f-8

Ana Bikic



P O R T F O L I O



Originally from Argentina, artist and scuba diver Ana Bikic believes that art should play an active roll in environmental education and awareness. Her art work is designed and painted to inspire a positive message that provokes the audience to care and to participate in conservation. X-RAY MAG interviewed Bikic to find out what drives her work and inspires her artistic creations.

Bikic began her career as an artist after studying fine arts in Cordoba at the Figueroa Alcorta School of Fine Arts in Argentina. She then worked in art publishing and marketing in Spain, creating

designs for Moroccan Carpets and exhibited throughout Europe and the UK.

Bikic is currently based in Miami, Florida, and is an active advocate for various regional and International conservancy groups and community arts programs. With a profound fascination for the seemingly infinite designs of marine life and fauna, which continue to be discovered, Bikic has dived in sites around the Mediterranean Sea and now South Florida to explore the reefs.

Recently, Bikic introduced her thesis of Ecosymbolism to the international arts community at the Florence Biennale, Italy, as well as exhibiting some of her underwater paintings from her International Year of the Reef (IYOR) series, which she began in 2004. During the IYOR, Bikic exhibited these art works in South Florida at venues supported by regional groups and environmental

agencies. Her exhibits included petitions and literature, enhancing the visual experience of her paintings with facts and internet links to community conservancy groups.

Bikic edits several artist registries that promote educational and international arts networks and is currently writing a history of Miami's Freedom Tower mural for the Florida Museum and Miami Dade College. In 2007, the Reef Encounter Marine Science magazine featured her work on the cover.

Bikic's art work has been collected, purchased, auctioned and even stolen by a vast variety of people from various walks of life from colleagues in the arts to scientists to divers. Most recently, former governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, and his family acquired artwork by Bikic.



How did you become an artist?
My grandmother, Theresa Someraux, was an international fine artist who exchanged work with Picasso in the Paris café scene. Her home had a wonderful collection of Argentina's best painters, and my father, Dr Felix Bikic, was an avid art collector, too. I was fortunate

to have been surrounded by very good examples of fine art painting and sculpture from childhood on. I studied at Cordoba University and at the Firgueroa School of Fine Arts in the 1980's.

What is your creative process?
My art has been inspired by the

energy and power of creation, and so nature awakened my creativity at an early age. Because of my necessity of reaching others through my work, I have employed new symbols, ecosymbols and art that inspires 'hope' and solutions against 'fatalism' and 'contempt'. I invite you to follow the

trend of communication like the notes from a symphony; Symbols surround us all, uplift us or depress us. Art is linked to math, to learning, to investigation, to questioning, to try and try. We, the artists, have the gift of inspiration when we choose hope and communication. I am looking to inspire the 'art

world' and my peers with the art of 'Ecosymbolism'—to be a protagonist of hope, courage, dialogue and diplomacy; to exchange and engage a communication on modern contemporary art and the great responsibilities that we all are facing together.

LEFT TO RIGHT: *The Beginning*, acrylic on canvas, 26x58 inches; *Blue Tang & Sea Fan IV 2007* acrylic on linen, 18x14 inches; *The Garden*, acrylic on canvas, center panel of three, each 50x26 inches totaling 150x80 inches, from the Ecosymbolism series by Ana Bikic, 2006



portfolio

What is your mission as an artist?
My mission is to influence society and bring new ideas and a new Renaissance. Together, we need to find solutions, a new platform for change and protagonism. Our oceans, still undiscovered, are endangered; their beauty might not be witnessed by our grandchildren, so I paint to preserve that feeling of the quiet aquamarine depths. I find



Ana Bikic

TOP TO BOTTOM:
Manatee nursing ground
acrylic on canvas
66x20 inches

Loggerheads
acrylic on canvas
22x66 inches

Endangered Green
acrylic on canvas
21x53 inches



light. The kelp forests or the rain forests, the distortion caused by temperature differences in water or air, the underwater landscape can be just as vast even though you can't really see that far off. I spend hours pouring over other divers' wonderful photos and reading the latest marine biology reports. My environmentalist beliefs come from my family's scientific side. Reasoning, research and the rational solutions still leave us with the need for inspiring action. Art is a powerful tool to share concerns and provoke reactions. Last year, I wrote an art thesis and move-

ment called *Ecosymbolism*. It was presented at the Florence Biennale 2007 and as a literary piece at Books and Books, Coral Gables in 2008. Ecosymbolism art should be inspiring, positive and well studied. The current text is published on line at www.ecosymbolism.org. I invite everyone to read it and join my Facebook page, too.

Where would you like to dive in the future? Around the Indic and Western Pacific ocean would be a magnificent experience, having such diverse schools of colored fish and coral reefs.

that artists have created a reputation for themselves by their unwillingness to attempt difficult subjects and techniques. Symbols of banality abound in art shows, so I am very grateful to X-RAY MAG for this opportunity to talk. Art can catalyze awareness by its iconic or symbolic message; I paint to inspire environmental awareness.

What are your thoughts and feelings about the underwater world? The underwater world is mysterious, full of riches and spirituality, conceding an indescribable feeling. The sensation created by the combination of light, depth and diverse scenarios that this unknown realm has to offer us is truly magical.

Are you a scuba diver and how did you start diving? I'm not a professional scuba diver; I do it for fun and as a hobby, mainly as a working tool for my art work. In other words, I'm an enthusiast—an artist that dives into other people's underwater photography, too.

What are your favorite dive locations and why? Indonesia, Malaysia, and diverse locations around the Indic Ocean are some, due to their beauty and vast amount of different species they have to offer. I also promote and heavily support South Florida and the Caribbean for conservation.

How does the underwater world affect or influence your art work? It's all about the



portfolio

Who are your idols or mentors in art and/or diving? Most of us owe such a debt of gratitude to the Cousteau experience. Even in black and white, his films were so mesmerizing to me as a child. I sometimes wonder how great painters like Rembrandt and Da Vinci would have handled the underwater world if they had scuba dived and cameras to see nature beneath the waves.

What is your favorite quote about art or the underwater realm?

How inappropriate to call this planet "Earth" when clearly it is an Ocean. — Arthur C. Clarke

What are your thoughts on art and ocean conservation? I use my art world as a catalyst to create awareness, bringing humanity to understand we have a moral responsibility. Art has had an impact on society and politics. Everything that revolves around us has an influence on each other, and what we evoke, leaving a legacy of knowledge and dialogue for the future generations.

I hope these events will help us 'naturalist' painters to be taken more seriously and for the voices of conservancy to be honored with real policies that are based on science and not on short term profit gains. No matter how painful the facts that scientists acknowledge, we have a duty to at least listen. The message that some scientists are predicting is catastrophic.

Artists who create with these concerns for the environment will have plenty of challenges to find a more meaningful iconography for contemporary art tastes. I hope the fashion of concern for the conservancy movement really translates into a deeply cultural endeavor for everyone. The



annual beach and waterway clean ups are great local initiatives and spread globally, many artists around the world participate in bringing the media attention to the local culprits.

What are your current and future projects? The IYOR 2008 is ending, but I hope we can keep the awareness effort going, that we can join with other groups protecting rain forests and water quality, too, in order to explain how everything in nature is so indelibly linked.

Locally, I'm very interested in the problem of invasive species like the lionfish along our reefs; they are gobbling up the natural inhabitants at an alarming rate. I believe we are going to need to literally weed them out, like a vegetable garden needs weeding. I have concentrated on the Florida fauna recently, and I am currently researching the Barrier Reef's lat-



CLOCKWISE: *Face of the Reef*, acrylic on canvas, 52x36 inches; *Sponge Cave*, acrylic on canvas; *Blue Tang Sea Fan*, acrylic on linen





Ana Bikic

again with the brush. I want to encourage others to witness this, to explore the magnificence of the underwater realm.

Do you have prints available of your work, and if so, how can they be purchased? I have made most of my IYOR 2008 and Ecosymbolism series available on **fineartamerica.com**. I also donate 15 percent of my sales to the Reef Relief groups as well as some originals.



Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers about yourself, your artwork, and/or your relationship with the sea?

Through the dialogue of Ecosymbolism Art, I would like to continue promoting the oceans, educating society, since we need to bring solutions and positive outcomes to the dilemmas that humanity faces today. This year, I'd like to inspire and invite all the other art-

ists to participate and take on the challenge, and through this iconography, to find a new Renaissance of hope, optimism, change and creating a bridge between the sciences and the arts.

Ecosymbolism Art offers positivism expressed in art with sincere and intellectual emotion, empowered by the visual language of symbols. It aims to bring dialogue between audience and subject using inspiration of effort and integrity of content. It hopes to bring a more profound iconography for art, which aspires to create hope and noble solutions through the dialogue of humanity's symbols.

For more information, visit Bikic's website at: **Anabikic.com** and **Ecosymbolism.org** ■

est updates from Reef Encounter, which used my art last year.

www.fit.edu

This year, I'm also working on a theme of immigration and writing an art history article for the Florida Historical Museum about the Miami Freedom Tower Mural. I was involved with the Miami Artisans, and we are very proud to have a significant public art work included with this Landmark Status building.

Are you an underwater photographer and if so, how do you use this in your art work?

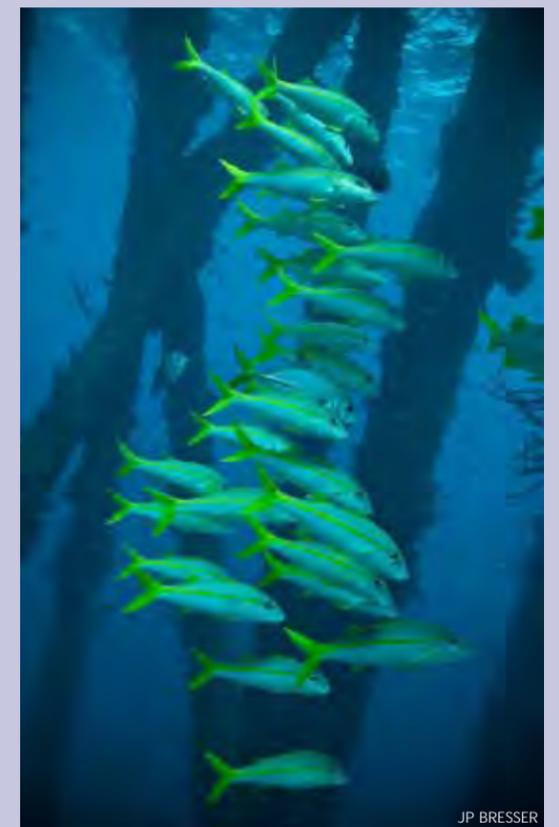
I'm not exactly an underwater photographer, I'm more of an enthusiastic, demonstrating my fascination of its environment through my paintings. Everyone has been so generous sharing their images on the net. The advantage of painting an underwater landscape rather than enlarging a photo is that I can create the picture composition and control the light, movement and color. The drama and the ballet of life begin to come to alive

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

*Fiji
Bonaire
The Amazon*



SCOTT JOHNSON



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Redreef, acrylic on canvas, 18x24 inches (above) and *Turning Point*, acrylic on canvas, 30x54 inches (top left) from the Ecosymbolism Art series by Ana Bikic, 2006; portrait of the artist (center inset)

