



Diver explores cenote

*“There are no rules for good photographs, there are only good photographs.”  
— Ansel Adams*

Text and images by Matt Weiss and Joseph Tepper

**What is Composition?** In its most basic definition, composition is the arrangement of elements and their relationship to one another within an image. It is composition—as well as lighting—that is the primary tool with which photographers put themselves into an image and emphasize the subject(s) in the frame. So, it’s important to put your own creative touch on composition. There is no right or wrong to composition—it’s definitely an art, not a science.

That being said, there are a few tried and true fundamentals of composition that are almost guaranteed to make your images more visually pleasing to audiences.



MATT WEISS

# Composition

**Composition doesn’t just happen** Beginning photographers often see a subject they like and just start shooting. While it is often easier just to be a shutterbug, taking the time to think about how the subject would look best in the frame and within its environment can dramatically increase the impact of the image.

This guide is intended to provide you with some basic composition tips that will help improve your images and serve as a starting point from which you can eventually develop your own creative vision. Many of these tips are not only applicable to underwater photography, but can also prove useful in your topside

photography endeavors as well.

When first approaching how to compose a shot, the first thing you must consider is the best way to generally orientate the shot—horizontally (landscape) or vertically (portrait). Be sure to approach every subject with an open mind. Feel free to shoot both portrait

and landscape images of the same subject; sometimes you might surprise yourself and find the orientation that you wouldn’t have originally chosen is better than you thought.

**Enough ‘fish butts’ & dorsal fins** When diving we are in a three dimen-



Cuttlefish (left)  
Lizardfish (center)  
Blenny (right)

### Don't cut off your subject

Avoid cutting off parts of your subject with the edges of the frame. Sometimes it is okay to not include the entire subject in the photo- this is usually true for creative macro

## Composition

Just as we show a lot of expression in our eyes, so do our fishy friends. Therefore, it's only natural for us to be drawn to the eye in an image.

If you are shooting with large apertures or with high magnifi-



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shots where the frame is filled with a strategic part of a subject. Cutting off parts of the subject with the frame is best used consciously as a creative tool, like shooting face portraits or eye-shots. However, cutting off part of the subject otherwise meant to be included in its entirety will result in an image that subconsciously reads as being incomplete.

### Focus on the eyes

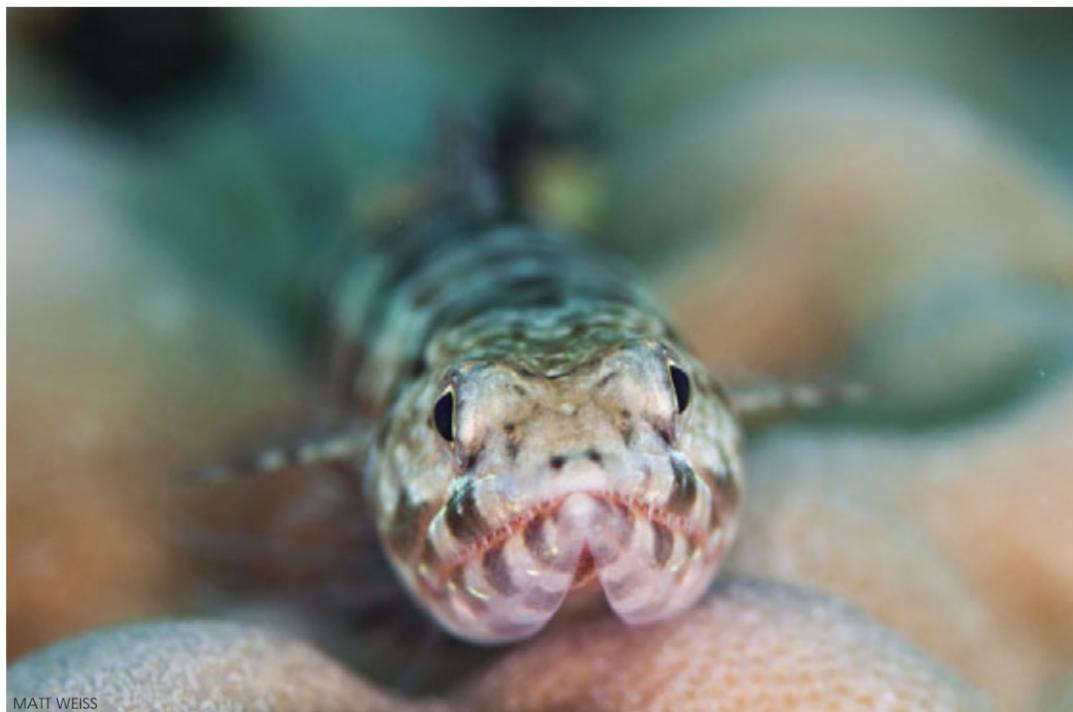
Some people say that the most important rule of wildlife photography is making sure the eyes of the subject are in sharp focus. Out of focus eyes means often results in the loss of your audience's focus.

When using high magnification macro lenses that have shallow depths of fields, it is very important that you ensure sharp focus on the subject's eye. Luckily, eyes usually offer good contrast and auto-focus can pick them up well. By locking the focus on the eye, and then composing your image, you have the best chance of keeping this important feature sharp.

### Give fish room to swim

You should always remember to place any subject, or potential subject for that matter, well away from the frame's edge with room "swim into the frame". In other words, there should be more

sional world; and when swimming over a reef, we are usually looking down on the life below. Resist the urge to just start shooting the top of the fish. You will usually need to get below the fish, or at least at eye level, in order to make a pleasing image. Therefore, always remember this when composing your shots—"get low and shoot up." No more dorsal fin shots!



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Instead, be patient and take the time to wait until the subject is facing you. As to be discussed later, eyes are the most important part of the subject: a viewer can't relate to a subject without eyes.

Another common mistake is scaring the subject and then chasing after it to get the shot. Fish swim faster than you. You will never catch up. You will end up with "fish butt" shots.



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Anthia (right)  
Diagonal Blenny  
(far right)  
Turtle and  
angelfish  
(lower right)

space in front of the swimming fish then behind it. If the moving object is close the edge, it looks like it may "swim" off the edge, which subconsciously makes the viewer uncomfortable.

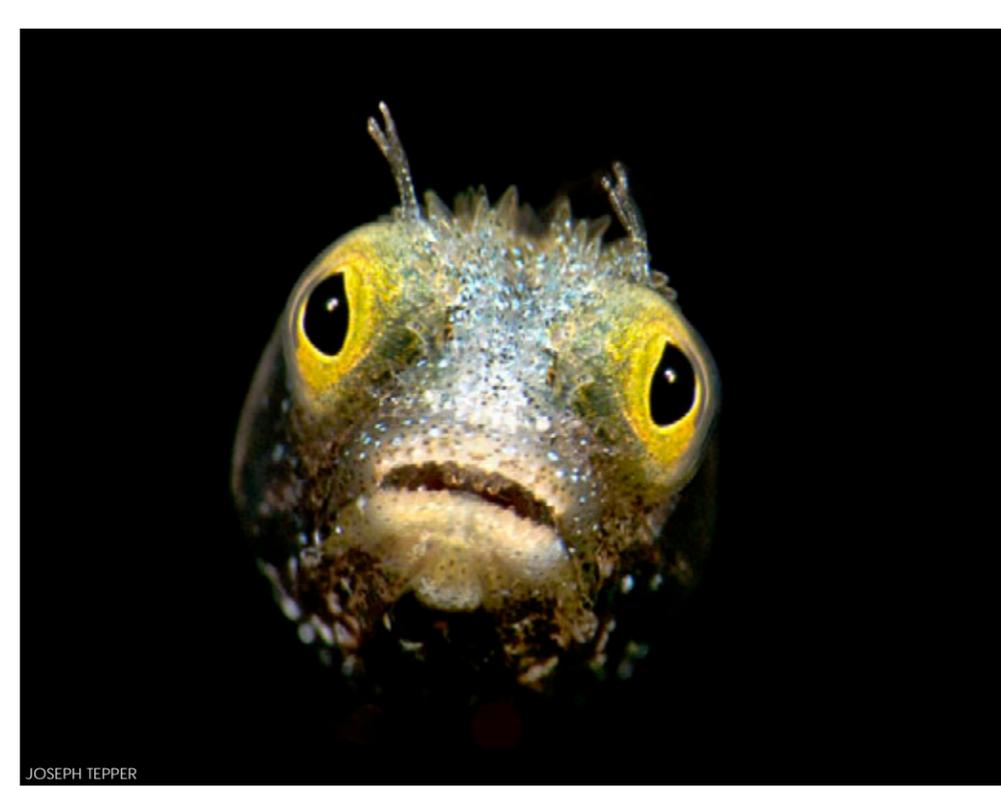
## The rule of thirds

—Don't aim for the bulls eye

The rule of thirds might as well be called the golden rule of photographic composition. This rule dictates that an image should be divided up into thirds both horizontally and vertically, and that the important elements of the image should fall on or close to the



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intersections. Aligning key compositional elements of the image with these intersection points will make an image more interesting.

You will notice that most great landscape images have key subject matter offset from the center and do not have the horizon smack dab in the middle, but closer to one of these lines. The rule is mainly applied so photographers avoid placing the main point of interest in the middle of the frame, which is referred to as "bulls eyeing" and will often produce a boring image.

## Lines, shapes and colors

### Diagonal lines

Adding a diagonal flow to the placement of your subject(s) and/or background, can be one of the major ways to make your images more dynamic and create more interest for the viewer.

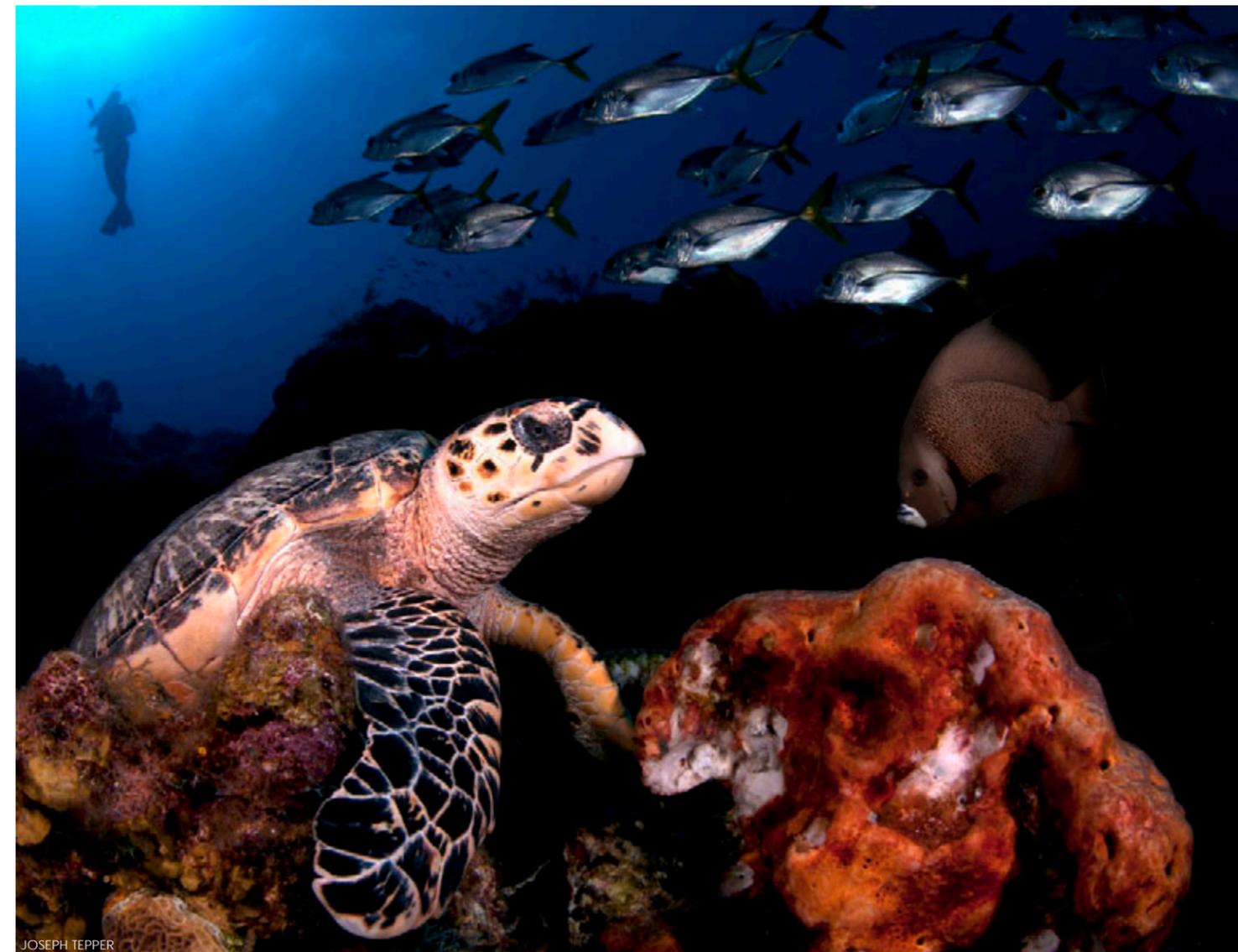
### Non-diagonal lines

Lines are everywhere in the underwater world; you just have to pay attention. Using these lines effectively can help improve an image's composition.

Different types of lines have different qualities that can change the impact of the image. For example, vertical lines imply strength and power—if you wanted to emphasize the size of something, say, large barrel sponges or massive stalactites, shooting them vertically can help.

Horizontal lines are said to indicate rest or leisure. Shooting a goby resting on coral horizontally may imply that the goby is not moving and perched on the coral.

### Leading lines



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Lines are often essential in creating “eye flow”, or in other words, the path the viewer takes when looking at an image. In a well-composed image, the photographer will have dictated where the viewer starts looking at the image and the path their eyes travel across the image using careful composition. The audience’s entering and exiting points when viewing the image should not be arbitrary.

Leading lines are lines that lure the viewer, either through the image or to important features. Often diagonal lines act as leading lines by starting in one corner and leading the viewer’s eye to the



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opposite corner. Try aligning your leading lines with your rule of thirds intersections.

### The S-curve

S-curves are an interesting type of leading line. An S-curve need not be strictly an ‘S’ shape, but rather some sort of curved or zigzagged line. The point of the curve is to allow viewers to really get into the image as they follow the line through the frame. S-curves in topside images are often used in peaceful scenes, such as winding streams in the countryside, foot-paths in forests, or fences on farms. The organic shape of the line naturally lends itself to creating “eye-flow”.

Underwater, an s-curve can be almost anything. When shooting macro, you can incorporate s-curves by shooting long subjects such as pipefish or gobies in a curved position, or subjects that naturally curve in multiple directions like seahorses or sea snakes.

When shooting wide angle, you

can use the s-curve similarly to top-side shooters, finding lines within coral formations or among larger animals that pull the viewer in and through the image. Additionally, large schools of fish often form s-curves, and when captured in an image will give the school a sense of order.

### Beware of the background

Creating contrast between the foreground and the background is sometimes difficult, but always essential. Failing to do so can lead to the viewer being distracted from the main subject by the unsightly background.

A common situation: you have spotted a rare nudibranch (or other subject of interest) and overcome with excitement you adjust your strobes, focus and fire. You take a quick a look at your LCD screen to review the shot, and notice it’s well exposed but you can’t find the subject. Well, the little guy is hard to find because there are a few different colored

Moray eel (left);  
Ornate ghost  
pipefish (far  
left); S-curve  
shark (bottom)

## Composition

sponges and soft corals in the background of the image distracting the eye from the subject. As a diver and underwater photographer, if you cannot find a subject on your display screen, it is highly unlikely an untrained eye will be able to.

The human eye can easily distinguish between different elements in nature; however, once photographed, subjects have a tendency to melt into the scene, merging the background with the foreground. Thus, the aforementioned nudibranch stands out to your eye, but not in your image.

Often, subjects are not situated against a good background. The challenge is to figure out a way to create proper contrast between your subject and your background. The most obvious way to eliminate distractions is to change your position or angle. Sometimes we are so excited to

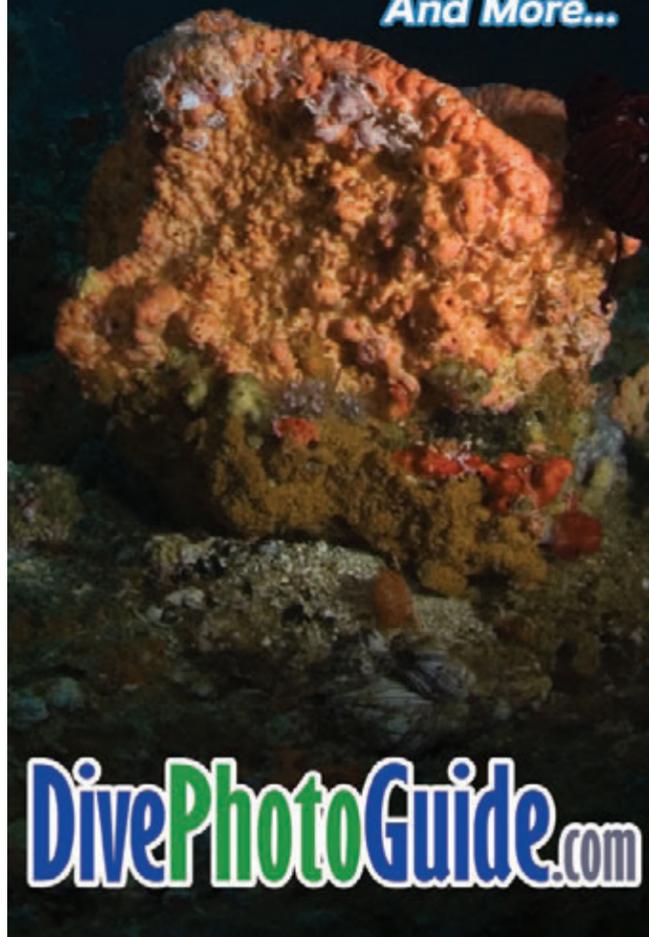


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find a subject that we try and shoot it in whatever way we first approach it. Step back and think —what is in the background and is there a better background from a different position or angle?

Shooting at an upward angle in order to get more open water in the frame is a common way photographers remove distracting backgrounds. By minimiz-

ing the amount of “stuff” that is in the frame you add emphasis on the subject. Having more than a few primary points of interest in an image is very distracting.

**Tip:** If you can't frame the foreground so that it is separated from the background, adjusting your settings may help. Try closing your aperture and increasing your shutter speed, thus

Bokeh  
lizardfish (left)  
Juvenile  
spotted drum (bot-  
tom)

decreasing the amount of light that hits the sensor. If you use extreme side or top lighting, you can light up the foreground subject, while minimizing the light in the background, thereby reducing its effect on the image.

Alternatively, you can use a large aperture to blur the background. Sometimes this lets too much light into the background, but an out of focus distracting background can be better than an in focus one. Sometimes if there is a distracting coral in the background, using a larger aperture can blur it out so it's actually an interesting background. This technique is called *bokeh* and is a more advanced technique.

### Contrasting colors

Setting your primary subject against a contrasting color is a surefire way to create images that pop off the screen or page! Choosing the color of a background to complement the subject, be it blue or green water, a blacked out background or the colors of another object can make or break an image.

For example, an image of a beautiful red soft coral is more visually striking when taken against a blue background



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of open water rather than against a busy background of the various life forms on a wall. While you may know that the subject was the red coral, it may be hard for your uniformed viewer to tell what the subject is.

Macro photographers often isolate subjects on monochromatic background like plain black or flat blue. A lot of times a colorful macro subject looks good when contrasted with a pure black background.



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### Negative space

Using the negative space—the part of the frame that has no shapes or objects—can become a major element of your composition. In underwater photography

we ordinarily refer to the blue (or green) water or black backgrounds as the negative space.

Of course, good use of negative space implies that the subject is an area in which negative space can be utilized properly.

Given that underwater photographers are shooting wild animals that have not been posed in anyway, this is not always possible. In these cases, you just do the best you can. Just because you spot a subject doesn't necessarily mean it is in proper location to be shot—this can be the most frustrating of all!

### Framing your subject

Framing subjects with other objects or with negative space is more challenging, but can yield very pleasing results. A cuttlefish with a black background can be nice, but if you can also light up two nice red sea fans that it's swimming between, the image becomes more interesting. See the whole frame. Think about if it can be improved. Then shoot.



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## Composition

Flounder eye (above); Clownfish (top left); Underwater photographer and sea turtle (lower left)

### Creating a sense of scale

Wide-angle photographers often utilize objects in the background to increase the appeal of the image. Often a model (another diver) is placed in one of the upper corners of the background, following the rule of thirds, to create depth and show perspective. With just open water in the background, it's impossible to get a sense of the depth. Placing a relatable subject in the background will create perspective. The key here is that we can relate to the size of another human, and use it to get a sense of size and depth in an image.

If you don't have a model off-hand, including another object, like the silhouette of your dive boat, in the background can also achieve similar effects. With patience, an interesting animal like a shark or turtle may swim in the frame in a way that can provide a similar sense of perspective.

### Fill the frame

Lastly, if shooting macro you can get in closer to try and fill the frame as much as possible with the subject. Sometimes a close-up portrait is better than a full body shot with a distracting background.

### Rules are meant to be broken

These rules are just guidelines. As with every rule, there are always exceptions. Really great composition comes from a photographer's imagination, and truly fantastic images are products of creativity—not a list of rules. Think outside the box, but keep these guidelines in the back of your head when first starting out. Remember, rules were meant to be broken!

*For more information about underwater photography, check out the comprehensive Techniques Guide on [DivePhotoGuide.com](http://DivePhotoGuide.com) ■*



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## Fantasea 3D Housing & Camera Package

Fantasea has announced the release of a package containing the Fujifilm FinePix REAL 3D W3 camera and the RecSea WHF-3D W3 polycarbonate housing. The housing was released at DEMA last year, and has a depth rating of 40m, and a fiber optic mounting port.

The Fujifilm FinePix W3 features 10 megapixel resolution and is capable of shooting both conventional and 3D stills and video. [www.fantasea.com](http://www.fantasea.com)



## Equinox Canon 5D Mk II Housing

Equinox has announced the release of a housing for the Canon 5D Mk II camera. Somewhat of a departure from the company's line of video specific housings, this reflects the popularity of the camera for video rather than stills use. The housing is designed around the use of a Canon 16-35mm lens, although other lenses can be accommodated by special request, and it provides access to shutter release, menu button, menu select/scroll and play controls. The housing also features Equinox's ballast release handles, which allow the user to make the housing positively buoyant if some contingency demands it.

[www.equinoxhousings.com](http://www.equinoxhousings.com)



## Panasonic Lumix LX-5

Ikelite's housing series for the excellent Panasonic Lumix LX-5 camera features Ikelite's proprietary conversion circuitry, which allows two-way communication between the camera and Ikelite Substrobes, providing true Panasonic TTL exposure. In addition to providing the most accurate automatic exposure, this ensures a faster recycling time and longer camera battery life as compared to fiber optic TTL systems. All camera controls except the Flash Open Switch are fully functional through the housing and depth rated to 200ft (60m). An included flash diffuser improves lighting quality when the camera's built-in flash is used. A built-in flash is effective between 1-3 feet (0.3-0.9m) from the subject in clear conditions.

[www.ikelite.com](http://www.ikelite.com)



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## Sea & Sea MDX-D7000 housing

Sea & Sea has announced the release of the MDX-D7000 housing for the Nikon D7000 camera. It is machined from a solid block of aluminum, protected by a highly corrosion-resistant coating. Other features include a port lock mechanism, two fiber optic ports and one optional electronic port and a built-in leak sensor. [www.seaandsea.com](http://www.seaandsea.com)



# The River Rhône

Text and photos by Rémi Masson  
www.remimasson.com

—Diving in the French river Rhône with  
European catfish

The Rhône is a large French river, which is 545km long. It flows from the Alps, across Lake Geneva and joins the Mediterranean Sea. Cloudy in appearance, as if to preserve her secrets, it is difficult to have strong views about this type of river. On one hand, we locals highlight the return of iconic species such as salmon—indicating an improvement in water quality—on the other hand, we denounce the pollution—PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls)—found in the river. Moreover, because of this pollution, eating fish from this river has been prohibited since 2007.

## Diving adventure

For a long time I thought that it was impossible to dive the Rhône River due to the very bad visibility and strong currents. Then one day, after much hesitation, I decided to do a test near the city of Lyon. What I saw that day far exceeded my expectations.

When I explored this new environment, it was as if I entered a sanctuary. I moved slowly, almost blindly, taking a long time to note details, every form, every object.

Initially, the signs of life were rare. Occasionally, there were a few furtive shadows moving in the dark, green water. There was not much detail, not

A long eel hides  
among the rocks





## Rhône

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Freshwater sponges; Beautiful fall colors along the River Rhône; A shoal of nases shimmer with sunrays

could see two long whiskers, then a huge head split by a grin. A European catfish of over two meters was now facing me. No sudden movements. He just rubbed against me, while I stood on my knees on the river bed. I dared not move. This behaviour surprised me every time, and I could not always explain it.

When he decided it was time, he went—slowly and gracefully,

much light, but a strange atmosphere. The water was often so hazy that if I held out my arms, it was very difficult to see my fingers. It became a little bit better after a few minutes when my eyes become accustomed to the dark.

The rippling shoreline and shallower parts of the river were by far the most populous. Large shoals of breams, common nases, barbels, crucian carps and perch were playing hide and seek there, while huge eels slipped silently through the stones.

Some carp were swimming through,

At the bottom of the river, often in less than 50cm of water, I could see zanders sleeping.

There is enormous diversity in large rivers. They bring together, in one place, most of the species of the running waters of the surrounding streams and lakes.

Vegetation as it was, although small, was not necessarily absent and even took many surprising forms, such as large freshwater sponges branching out, attached to the rocks like stag horn coral.

In the quieter areas, there were also the

too, alone or in shoal. It was not uncommon to see a group composed of fishes that belonged to several different species.

long, developing fronds of milfoils, aquatic plants native to Europe, which served as lookout points for pike. The aquatic plants sway in the current like the hair of mermaids.

### The lord of the river

Diving deeper down to the river bed was to enter another world—a dark world where the rules were reversed. Here, it was not the diver who came to see the fish, but the fish that came to meet the diver. Carps were very curious and didn't hesitate to approach the diver to try to understand what a strange and clumsy creature a he is. Curiosity satisfied, they continued along their underwater stroll.

But the real lord of the river prowled the diver, too. First, there was a shadow that grew gradually bigger until it became, oftentimes, bigger than me. Suddenly, I



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Carps of the Rhône River are very curious; Crucian carp in the shallows; Zander sleeping on the river bed



## The mystery of the wels catfish gathering

It's also possible to witness some other unusual fish behaviours in the River Rhône. Sometimes the fish gather in certain places to form a compact shoal of several dozens, or hundreds, of individuals. Such groups have already been observed for roach, bream, barbel—and to a

lesser extent—predators such as zander. But the most impressive of all is probably the amazing

gatherings of wels catfish (*Silurus glanis*), with dozens of fish piled up at the bottom of the river. They form a moving ball several meters wide, reminding me of a shoal of common catfish (*Ameiurus melas*).

The reasons for these winter gatherings still remain a mystery. This is why I collaborated with a researcher of the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) to study and understand the origin of this strange behaviour.

Rivers surprise me with their amazing biodiversity, but there

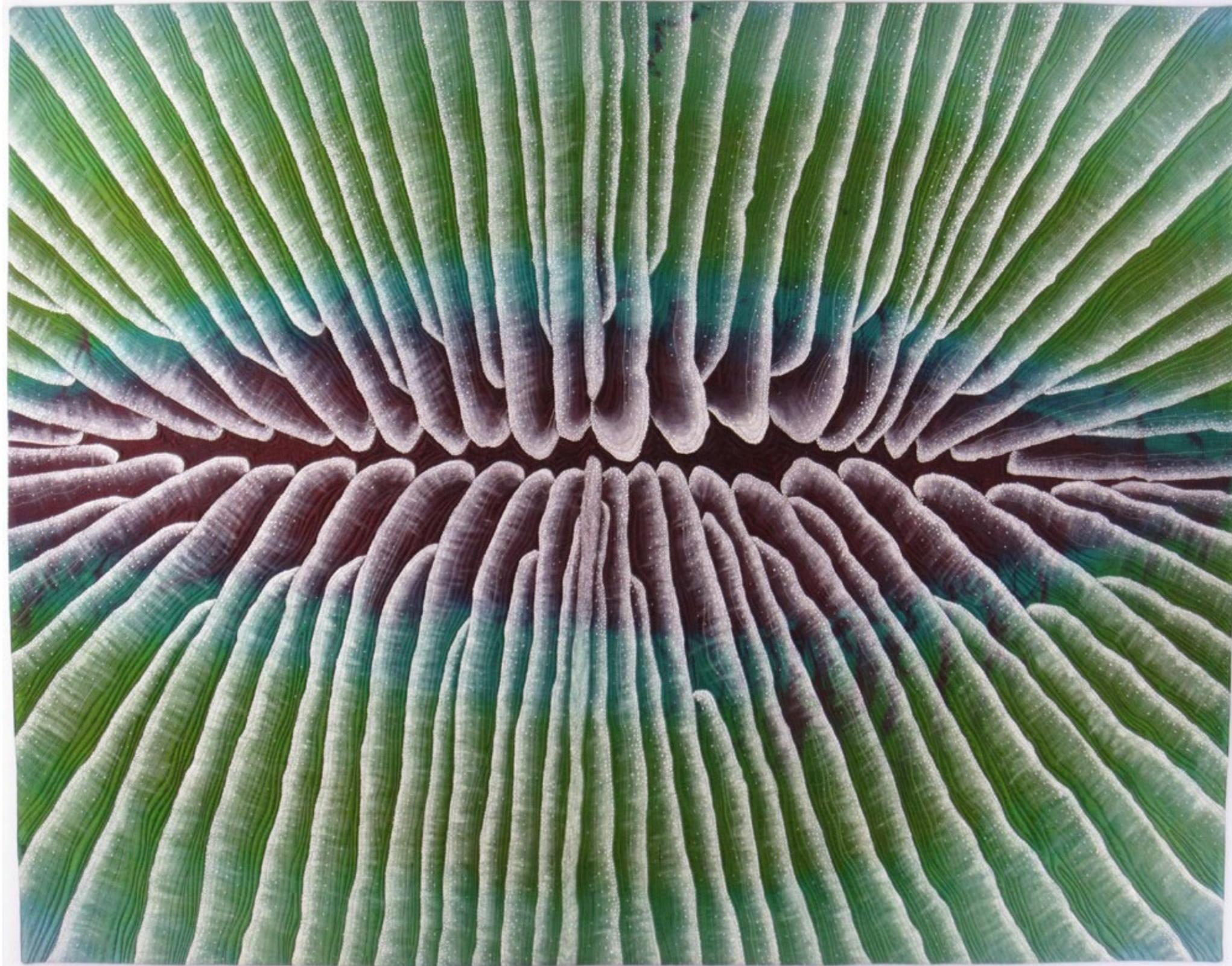
is still much to learn about them. It's a dark world populated by mermaids and monsters that gradually reveal its secrets.

*Rémi Masson is an underwater photographer and dive writer based in Grenay, France. For more information or to order prints, visit: [www.remimasson.com](http://www.remimasson.com)*

*Want to see a catfish as big as a shark? Watch this video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaldhRtYmJM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaldhRtYmJM) ■*

undulating with majesty. This kingdom belonged to him, and he knew it.

# Betty Busby



**P O R T F O L I O**



PREVIOUS PAGE:  
*Fungia, Waterscapes Series*, by Betty Busby  
Quilt, 42 x 53 inches



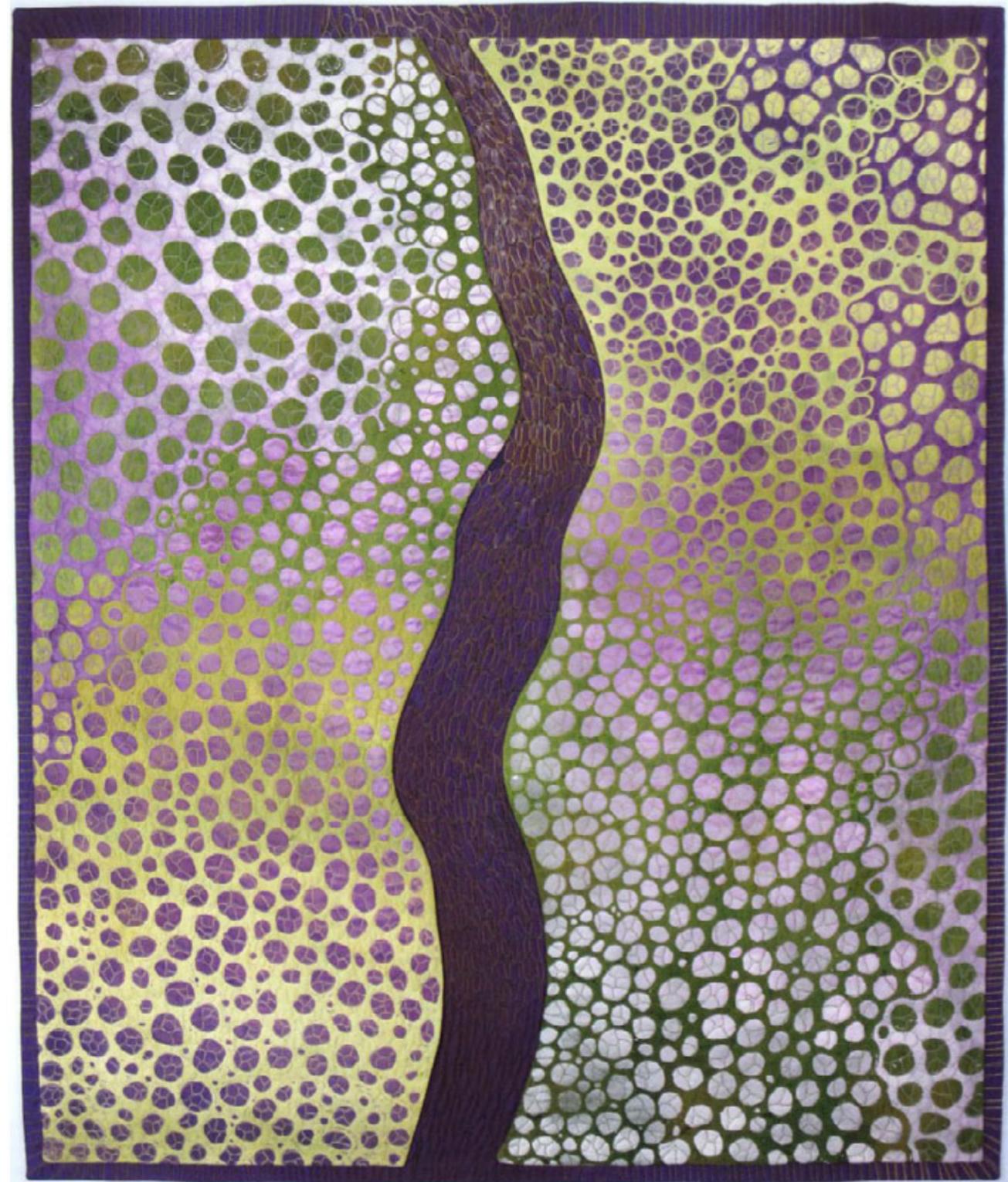
*Triggerfish, Waterscapes Series*  
by Betty Busby. Quilt, 52 x 42 inches

American textile artist, Betty Busby, has captured underwater scenes in a unique and remarkable way on visually stunning quilts exquisitely crafted by hand, bringing fresh contemporary concepts to a centuries old traditional art form. In addition to brilliant, colorful reef scenes, Busby has delved into the microscopic world taking inspiration from the super macro perspective informed by molecular biology of ecosystems above and below the waves. *X-RAY MAG's* Gunild Symes asked the artist to share her insights into art and ecology and how her work speaks to the magic of the underwater world.

Edited by Gunild Symes  
All quilts by Betty Busby  
All images courtesy of Betty Busby

*Tell us about yourself and your work, where you are from and how you've gotten to where you are today.*

My father was in the U.S. Navy. I was born in Japan, and we lived in Hawaii, Washington and



*Plexus, Macro Series*, by Betty Busby. Quilt, 44 x 49 inches

Philadelphia. The ocean was a huge part of my childhood, from the wild breakers in Hawaii to summers at the Jersey shore and the rocky beaches of California.

I moved to the high desert of California in 1994, and although this is a wonderful place to live, I miss the ocean. Creating my own fantasy water scenes helps to keep it close by in spirit.

The macro series comes from my life long fascination with molecular biology, with a physician sister, it's a frequent topic of discussion. I'm constantly exploring new materials and



*Urchin II, Macro Series, by Betty Busby. Quilt 28 x 30 inches*

techniques to use them. I purchase batiks from Bali, dupioni from India, and silk from China that I paint and acid dye.

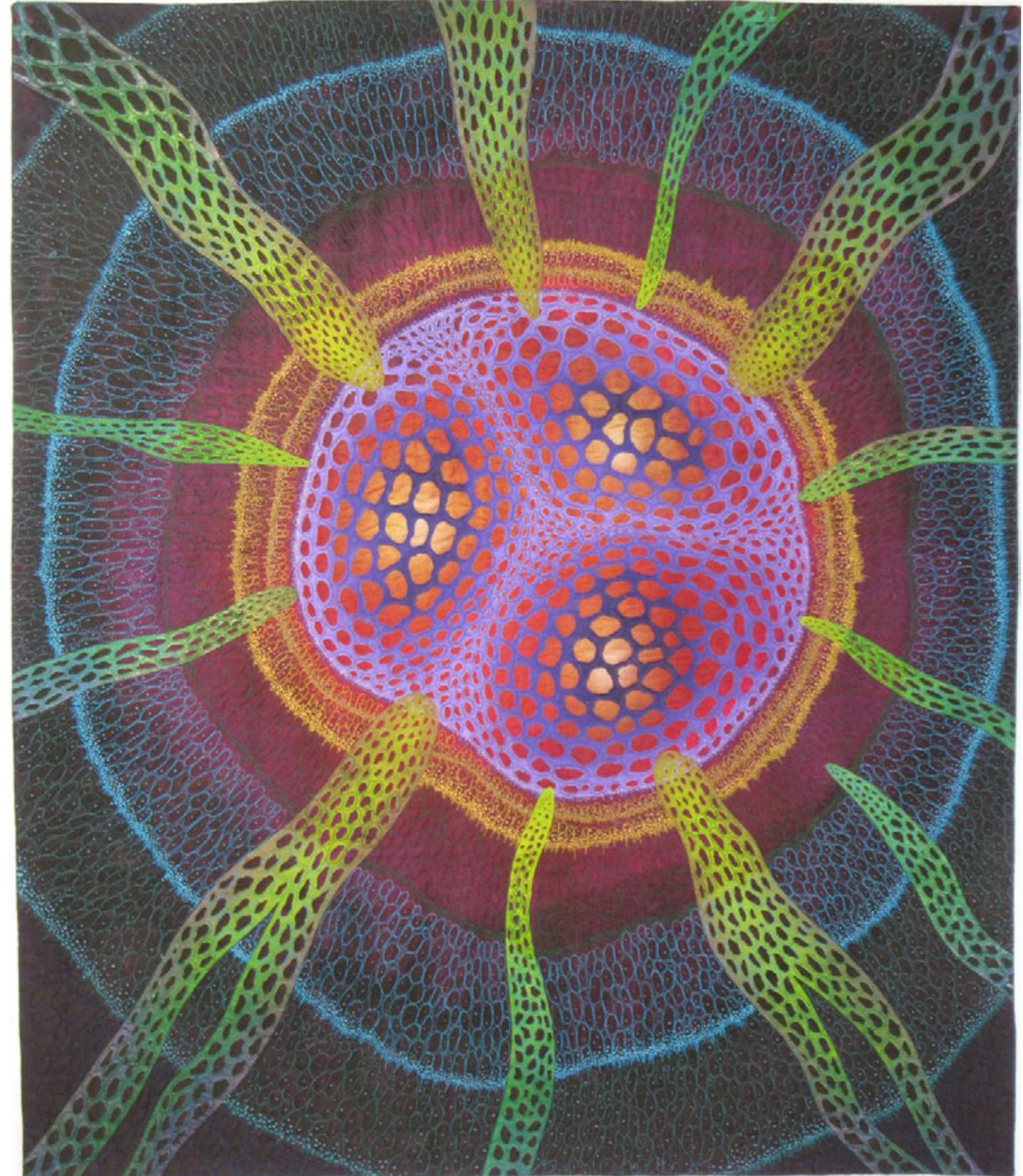
Various non-woven spun polyester materials are also used in nearly every piece, as well as an extensive

array of mixed media. I feel that using a large variety of products helps to reflect the incredible diversity found among living things.

My creative process begins with an idea of what I want the piece to be about. I construct the elements

and work in many stages, adding, subtracting, and evaluating along the way.

*Tell us about your training and education and how it relates to your artwork. Who, if any, has been*



*Push, Macro Series, by Betty Busby. Quilt 49 x 41 inches*



## Busby

*Coral Spawn,*  
*Waterscapes Series*  
by Betty Busby  
Quilt, 45 x 18 inches

*an inspiration to you artistically speaking, and why or how have they inspired you or mentored you?*

I received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Ceramics at the Rhode Island School of Design on the east coast of the States. Jun Kaneko, my senior year professor, was a huge influence on my career. Although our work is very different, it was an amazing example of what you can accomplish by putting art first in your life.

After graduation, I founded and operated a custom ceramic tile manufacturing company in southern California. I ran it for nearly 20 years before selling it to retire to the mountains. That experience has been central to my work in fiber -- the necessity of being able to figure out technical solutions was an every day part of life in the plant.

*Are you a scuba diver or a snorkeler? If so, what is your favorite place to dive and what do you like to see underwater?*

Snorkeling in Hawaii has been an incredible experience for me. I'm a huge cephalopod fan, I love to see octopi and cuttlefish in their native habitats.

*Tell us about your relationship to the underwater world, the sea and the reef. What inspires you about the ocean and the underwater realm?*

Maybe because I'm a Pisces, I have always been drawn to water. It represents another world to me of fantastic dimension, color, and variety.

*Tell us your thoughts on the role of art in conservation and environmental awareness.*

The more the public can be educated about the wonders of the world that they might not

*Metaphase,*  
*Macro Series,*  
by Betty Busby  
Quilt, 33 x 41 inches



## Busby

*Pod, Macro Series,*  
by Betty Busby.  
Quilt, 63 x 39 inches

necessarily see every day, the more they will be willing to protect it.

### *Why art?*

I feel art is a vital part of what it means to be a human being. From the earliest days in the evolution of humans, bone carvings and cave paintings have been found.

### *What do you want to say with your art?*

Every piece, to me, is about communication. I want to express an idea, or convey a feeling.

### *What future projects do you have planned?*

New materials are on order! They will be experimented with and used in new and unique ways.

### *Where can readers find you online and in exhibitions?*

My website is **bbusbyarts.com**. It has updates on shows and events, and a nearly complete catalog of my fiber works.

My store on Etsy.com is bbusbyarts: **www.etsy.com/shop/bbusbyarts**. Items that are for sale are available, depending on exhibition schedules.

I am represented by Gallery 101 Main in Collinsville, Connecticut

*Flow, Macro Series,*  
by Betty Busby.  
Quilt, 62 x 42 inches





Busby

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT:  
*Fish Lips, Waterscapes Series*, by Betty Busby.  
Quilt 24 x 43 inches

*Tentacular, Macro Series*, by Betty Busby.  
Quilt 59 x 52 inches

*Betta, Waterscapes Series*, by Betty Busby.  
Quilt 49 x 49 inches

I enjoy keeping fish, the wet pets join my dogs and chickens in our small desert oasis.

For more information or to purchase artwork directly from the artist, visit: [www.bbusbyarts.com](http://www.bbusbyarts.com) ■

(USA): [Gallery101main.com](http://Gallery101main.com).  
I have a very busy exhibition schedule in the States and internationally.

*Do you teach art? If so, what is your approach?*

I have extensive experience with children and adults. Helping each student to find their own voice while teaching them about the fundamentals is my aim.

Particularly with children and beginners, it is a joy to see the breakthroughs experienced by those who never realized their own potential.

*Anything else you would like our readers to know?*



OUR NEXT ISSUE

JUNE-JULY 2011

*Happy Diving!*



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