

Chapter 2

Underwater Seascapes in the Eye of the Diver

Olivier Musard

Abstract Photography is one of the ways in which to study underwater landscapes. Using this medium gives the opportunity to view the sensitivity of photographers and in particular that of divers to underwater seascapes. From this realisation, a national photography competition on this topic was held in 2011. A selection of the very best pictures offers an interesting overview of the representation, materiality and poetry of the submarine world's landscapes.

Keywords Réunion island · French polynesia · Port-Cros island · Coral polyp · Zooxantella · Kelp forest · Ripplemarks · Posidonia · Land-sea continuum.

As part of this seminar and thanks to a partnership with the *Fédération française d'études et de sports sous-marins* (French Federation of Underwater Studies and Sports), the *Agence des aires marines protégées* decided to organise a national photography competition on underwater seascapes in mainland France and French overseas territories.

The aim of the competition was two-fold:

- gather material to outline a semiological analysis through a set of questions: Which angles of view are preferred? What effects do the light and perspectives produce? What are the most recurrent forms of relief? Is an underwater seascape static or dynamic?
- illustrate the materiality of underwater seascapes, combining aesthetics and ambiance, reflecting the words of J.M Besse (1992): "Landscape representation is the continuation and transformation of what, since the Greeks, has been the subject of philosophy: contemplation (theoria) of the way of the world. Landscape is the way of the world revealed [. . .]".

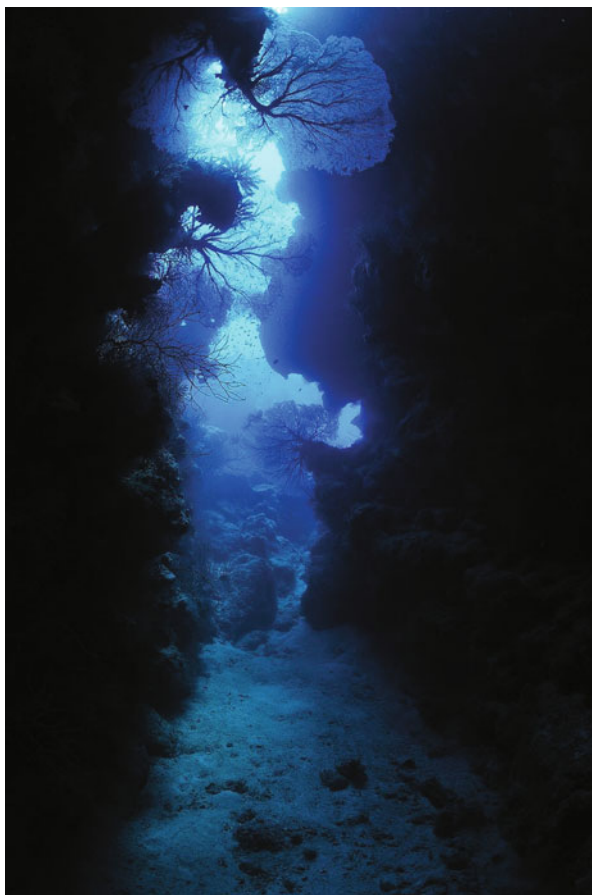
For these proceedings, some of the photographs are presented to illustrate this double aim.

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We once again extend our thanks to everyone who took part in this national competition and especially to the photographers who accepted to contribute to this portfolio.

Besse J.-M., 1992, Entre modernité et post-modernité: la représentation paysagère de nature, In: Robic M.-C., (Dir.). Du milieu à l'environnement. Pratiques et représentations du rapport homme/nature depuis la Renaissance, Ed. Economica, Paris, pp. 89–121.



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1st Prize, category: Underwater Seascape, Overseas territories

New Caledonia, Pacific Ocean

Playing on light, embracing the verticality, the photographer catches the instant delivering the underwater seascape from within like an eternal blue cocoon.



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2nd prize, category: Underwater Seascape, Overseas territories

Réunion Island, Indian Ocean

Land-sea continuum, half-air half-water; at twilight, the landscapes reveal a harmony that global change is successively disrupting: here, the branching corals, the structuring pattern of this underwater seascape, don a white colour pointing to the landscape imbalances that lay ahead.



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Category: Underwater Seascape, Overseas territories

Guadeloupe Islands, Caribbean Sea

Ideal transposition of a bucolic landscape: first image of a photographic tour setting out to discover hidden parts where the promise of new horizons lies at each twist and turn?



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2nd prize, category: Underwater Seascape, Metropolitan France

Marseilles, Mediterranean Sea

Leaving nothing to chance, the organised patterns evoke a structural complexity in which landscape and wildlife become one, denying access and inviting the diver to remain on the edge of this impenetrable, fragile scenery.



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2nd prize, category: Underwater Seascape, Metropolitan France

Port-Cros Island (National Park), Mediterranean Sea

Panoramic view of a rocky ledge portraying the geological forces at work thousands of years earlier and revealing a diversity of shapes in which the Posidonia grass beds, bathed in the sun's rays, and the school of breams suggest a perfect, enveloping harmony between water, rock and plant life.



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Special Prize, "landscape of life", category: Underwater Seascape, Overseas territories

French Polynesia, Pacific Ocean

Mobilis in Mobili: driven by the compelling need to move as the daytime and night-time tidal streams dictate, these fish are as intimate with this reefal seascape as the symbiosis of a coral polyp and a zooxanthella.



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All Categories Prize

Trebeurden, Brittany, English Channel

The canopy of this dense kelp forest filters a light captured solely by the epiphytes of the stipes and the grassy layer on the substratum, magnifying the impression of a vertical and mazelike plant landscape with no immediately possible horizons.



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Category: Underwater Seascape, Overseas territories

Réunion Island, Indian Ocean

Oblong shapes, traces of life, the gaze across the mellow landscape is lost in the languor of the ripple-marks and a diffuse horizon that the next tide or storm will restructure to build a new geography of shapes.

Underwater Seascapes

From geographical to ecological perspectives

Musard, O.; Le Dû-Blayo, L.; Francour, P.; Beurier, J.-P.;

Feunteun, E.; Talassinou, L. (Eds.)

2014, XVII, 291 p. 110 illus., 90 illus. in color.,

Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-03439-3