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LIGHTS:** the art of
Francesco Pacienza

THE MAGICIAN OF LIGHTS

THE ART OF FRANCESCO PACIENZA

Words and Pictures

VIRGINIA SAZEDO AND FRANCESCO PACIENZA

I believe that students and teachers choose each other in some way, and when they dialogue and share, the work done together become unique and unforgettable.

Francesco Pacienza and I are in the beautiful Salento region for a customized photography course, without having specific targets; we go where our creativity will take us, in a special trip between colors, lights, scents and harmonies of our Mediterranean.

In this context, spontaneous reflections about underwater photography generically, and about underwater photography practiced in our beautiful Mediterranean Sea particularly, sprang out.

Virginia: You were already a successful photographer in the field of advertising photography, particularly "still life" and fashion. When and how did you approach underwater photography?

Francesco: In most cases, divers get into underwater photography. My case was the opposite, since I became a diver only in 2006 and started even to realize underwater images.

This difference, which may seem subtle, actually is not that thin, because I constantly apply all the technical knowledge, and 25 years of professionalism in the advertising industry, in underwater photography too. For this reason, my mental approach is totally different from the one most of the



underwater photographers have, whom in the end are merely photography enthusiasts trying to document as best as they can the beauties of the seabed.

Virginia: You have always said that it does not matter much what kind of camera you use. Your first camera was a compact, right?

Francesco: The camera is simply a tool that enables us to expressing ourselves, exactly as it could be the use of a typewriter or computer for a writer, or the canvas and the brand of colors and brushes for a painter. They are only tools. The person using such tools makes the difference. Therefore, taking pictures with a compact, a mirrorless or an SLR is nothing but taking pictures. It is not the instrument to make the difference. The same is true when you use a flash of a brand rather than another. The important thing is that I know the guide number of the flash I use.

If I know this data, using a flash rather than another makes no difference.

Virginia: I was lucky enough to dive often with you, and my feelings were of a professional working passionately. Why are your photos so special?



Francesco: Like all forms of art, the first satisfaction should be for who realizes the photo. It is clear that, in order for others to feel the same way, it is necessary that the graphical and / or photographic representation include every element so that others can perceive the same emotions and feelings the photographer felt first. Now, talking about photography, which in fact means writing with light, knowledge and management of light represent the essence of photography itself. It is obvious that light makes a difference. We can illuminate the same subject in an anonymous fashion or enlighten it to create emotions, and this is where the

difference is. Sometimes many fossilize on some aspects not so much "technical and practical" but "technical / trendy". Whenever it is trendy using a certain tool, then I realize all my photos using that tool. I might obtain the same effect without using that specific tool because I know the light, how to modulate and manage it according to the result I want. The knowledge of light is fundamental and basic to me. The light must always be consistent with the composition and with the scene we photograph. The consistency of light and composition are the two elements that make the difference between a souvenir snapshot and a photograph having its artistic and expressive value.



Virginia: You're an innovator. For your photographs, you use special techniques and instruments, ranging from a pleasant and harmonious white background, to the use of a mirror. Lately, we have seen some of your pictures with a blurred outline and a sphere in the center, bringing back to a feeling of a fairy, suspended world. What drives you to take pictures always different and to break the mold?

Francesco: We assume that today in photography, as in many visual art forms, is difficult to invent something really new. Pioneers were many. There were people who actually invented things innovative indeed. We can only take a cue from these things of the past, updating and developing these old techniques under our specific style. For example, talking about my photos with the white background, I did nothing but bringing underwater a technique already widely used in "still life" photography. I invented nothing. I only took something already existing and adapted it to a different environment. The important thing is to know, consciously, when and for what subjects using this technique, avoiding overusing massively and generically. Same thing concerns the mirror, which I applied to nudibranchs, some fish and situations of the underwater environment. My idea was to create images where you can see both side A and side B of the subject, for



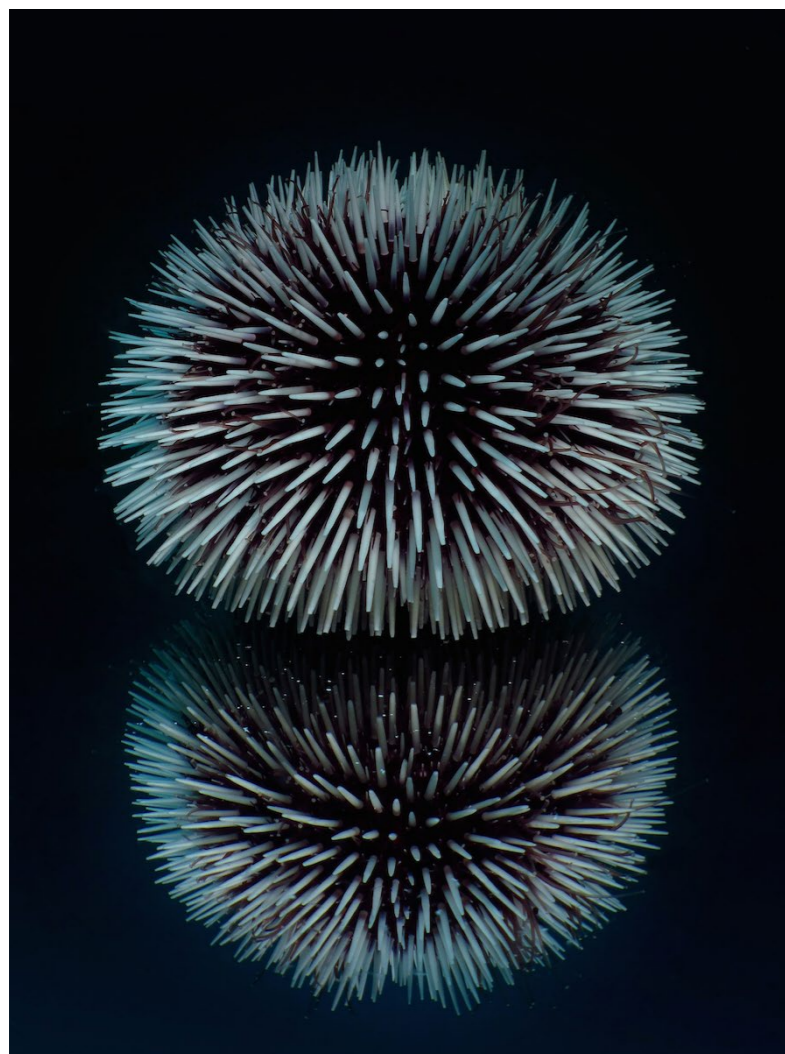
creating a three-dimensionality that otherwise is unlikely to obtain in photography. As for the sphere, however, I got inspired from a story I read in the Nikon monthly issue, which reported about a photographer from the Czech Republic who made a series of images where, in the middle of some squares and landscapes, appeared a steel sphere. Inside said sphere, he made to reflect what was actually behind the camera. From there I got the idea to imagine a sphere floating under water where to enclose another world. Then I started thinking about how to realize it, with all the difficulties you can imagine. Little by little I began to realize the first images, until I found the system (which still has to be refined) to create these very impressive images. A small part of the marine world is contained within this sphere, becoming in turn a world of its own, striking the observer's imagination.



Virginia: Scuba diving with you, I was impressed by your great knowledge of the Mediterranean, which is one of the most difficult sea environment to photograph, less impacting than the more colorful and bright tropical seas. Tell us about your Mediterranean, the way you live it, how you feel when you dive to photograph it.

Francesco: Even with regard to the choice of the sea where to dive there are undoubtedly trends. In fact, some people snub totally the Mediterranean, while others prefer some tropical seas despite others. I believe that you must understand distinctiveness of every

situation, highlighting its best features. This is why I love the Mediterranean, which is a sea where there is nothing taken for granted and where we can dive in the same place for ten times in twenty-four hours and find each time different situations. To the contrary, there are some tropical seas undoubtedly beautiful for colors and variety of life forms, but where is all too obvious. I'm always very happy in tropical seas, but having the Mediterranean at hand, I can find also inside it situations just as varied. For example, in Italy there are places that have nothing to envy, for biodiversity's quantity and quality, to the Indonesia's most famous muck dives. As well as we have a coral substratum, that has nothing to envy to the colors and the beauty of the tropical sea fans. Each sea, in my opinion, has its own characteristics, its beauty and its uniqueness. It is up to the photographer to have the ability to see what others cannot see.



Virginia: Which picture are you missing in your archives, the one that you still have to shoot?

Francesco: Everyone. To me, photography is a continuous discovery. Discovery of the seabed's beauties and discoveries of emotions brand new to me. Each new picture, even of the same subject, always causes different emotions compared to the previous. Therefore, to me, the photo I miss is the one I still have to shoot, without forgetting those I already made.



Virginia: Do you have a picture you are particularly related, a picture of the heart?

Francesco: My pictures of the heart are all those I shoot having the person I love to share these things with by my side.

Virginia: You taught photography for several years at the European Institute of Design in Rome and now hold underwater photography courses. I believe that you are a fussy teacher but also very generous. What is the relationship with your students? What do you like to pass on to them?

Francesco: I never thought of being able to teach until the director of the school where I studied photography noticed me out in this ability. One week after graduation, he called me and asked me two things: first, to write a book about using the optical bench (which in Italy had never been written before), second, to prepare a specific educational program to teach

how to photographing jewelry. While I felt flattered, on the other hand I was terrified because I did not know where to start. So, I discovered the passion for teaching. To me teaching means giving to others without omitting anything, and at the same time means taking something from every single student. Teaching means passing on knowledge, skills and experiences, but at the same time you also know that in that moment each of the students, through his mistake or his remark, is giving you as much. Therefore it should be a mutual growth. In my training period

I was taught that, in order to create images having a certain thickness and a certain communicative strength, you had to be very strict with yourself first. This would involve choosing of technique to use rather than selecting the images to be presented and more. This meant that my character became a bit fussy, indeed Virginia, as you love saying, a bit gruff. In fact, when I have a student in front, particularly when I realize that this person has a very high potential, I see myself again like when I was studying photography. Then I adopt the same methods adopted for me, because I want to pull out all the potential that person has in itself. The good Master should always be sincere with his student, even in the critique, pointing out mistakes and defects, always in a constructive manner, explaining what the mistake is and, above all, how to correct it.

Virginia: Concluding, your plans for the future?

Francesco: I am planning a series of workshops abroad. Another project is to continue creating new forms of communication and visual lan



guage, without freezing on a technique rather than another, trying to bring innovations increasingly, even to my style. In my future, there is still a strong partnership with Easydive and Fabio Benvenuti. Our friendship and cooperation relationship lasts since 10 years. Moreover, Easydive is the only Italian manufacturer for

universal housings, with a very high level of design and manufacturing. Personally, I could not say that if I had another kind of housing I would have done different things. To me a case is nothing more than a tool. If I know how to use it then I know it, otherwise, I don't. Good light to everybody.

