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**Underbathwater Photography Competition Inspires COVID Defying Creativity**

The results of the 2021 Underbathwater Photographer of the year competition have been announced, with winners and highly commended entries shot in bathrooms around the world from Basingstoke to Jakarta,

The competition, run by UK dive equipment company fourth element, was conceived in 2020 during the first coronavirus lockdown, is intended to give photographers, especially underwater photographers to opportunity to keep their photography skills honed and also to encourage the creativity of many who are unable to get out of their homes to pursue their unusual passions.

“What began as a crazy idea, has quickly grown to become something that has encouraged some remarkable creativity and certainly created unique images shot during a very challenging period,” said Jim Standing, co-founder of fourth element and originator of the idea for the competition. “The images are fantastic and tell so many stories themselves, but it has been particularly rewarding to us to learn just how much people enjoyed having a distraction from these periods of enforced isolation.’

The winning images in the professional and amateur categories show different techniques and very different results.

The whimsical image shot by Mikko Paasi in the bathroom of a hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia during quarantine shows incredible inventiveness using children’s modelling clay, hotel towels and the wonderfully executed technique of spinning the image through 180 degrees so that the surface of the water seen from is re0imagined as the surface from above.

The winning amateur image shot by Barry McGill is, a grittier representation of an underwater scene which vividly captures the excitement and experience of diving in UK waters, whilst bringing an element of fun thanks to the use of Lego toys

The competition had hundreds of entries in categories that had COVID themed criteria: Self (isolation) Portrait, Lockdown Lego, Zoom In (Macro – close-up) along with Indoor Animal Behaviour and Positive/Negative (black and white).

The photos were judged by Alex Mustard, the organiser of the prestigious Underwater Photographer of the Year competition, Saeed Rashid, an award-winning photographer and lecturer in Electronic Publishing at Bournemouth University, and Jim Standing.

“We all needed some outlets during the coronavirus pandemic,” said Alex who is also a winner of the prestigious Wildlife Photographer of the Year award himself. “This competition gave some underwater photographers the opportunity to unleash their creativity, work on their skills, perhaps familiarise themselves with new equipment, or merely have fun.”

The competition was organised by fourth element and supported by underwater imaging company Underwater Visions and camera manufacturer, Paralenz.

-**ends**-

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**Judges’ notes.**

Overall Winners

**Amateur – Barry McGill**

Barry is a diving instructor and technical diver who spends much of his time diving off the coast of Ireland and the judges were really taken with the feeling of authenticity that he achieved in creating a scene in Lego which captured the gloom of low visibility with the excitement of seeing objects, people and the seabed resolve from the murk.

Anyone who has tried to control the buoyancy of Lego in the bath (and there were many) will know how difficult it is. To control this many elements in one image is nothing short of masterful.

We had the added benefits of being able to see the behind-the-scenes images which demonstrated the lengths to which Barry went to capture the perfect shot.

**Professional - Mikko Paasi**

Mikko was last year’s winner and his entry this year epitomised what lockdown and coronavirus has meant for many. He created the image in a hotel room in Jakarta whilst in quarantine, using the materials which came to hand: his daughter’s modelling clay served to create a boat and a polar bear, whilst hotel towels and nappies produced the ethereal ice cave like effect. The almost perfectly still surface with associated reflection showed the control that was needed in a race against time before the modelling clay dissolved. The result, rotated through 180 degrees to create the surface of the sea, is stunning.

Incidentally, Mikko is also one of the now famous cave divers who participated in the rescue of the 13 Thai footballers in 2018.

**Lockdown Lego**

**Winner: mocean images**

This image was breath taking – not least because the judges had all seen real images which this sought to emulate. The use of materials to create the hole through which the light streamed was ingenious, and the effect left the judges wondering how such depth was achieved.

“It is quite an achievement to create an image using a Lego figure where your first instinct as a diver is to want to go and dive there,” said Jim Standing

**Highly Commended : Tro Rex**

This close encounter has great composition and made the judges smile. Here the creativity was not so much in the construction (the photographer used a standard Lego set) but in the great use of lighting and a wonderful juxtaposition of predator and prey.

**Self(isolation) Portrait**

**Winner : Tony Reed**

Whilst not exactly under the waters of a bath, this image took a very different approach to the category, telling the story of the experience of life in lockdown during the pandemic. It seemed logical, although a logistical challenge, to use a toilet for this purpose. The face in question has two distinct sides – as the photographers’ narrative explained – to show that people have experienced lockdown in different ways, not all of them positive. The lighting, leaving the left-hand side of the face shadowed, lends a solemn air to the image.

**Highly Commended : Elly Wray**

The control required to achieve this still surface interface is phenomenal, especially considering the model had to keep both eyes open, one of which was actually crossing the surface. The blue bathtub gives a very clean effect, allowing the face and its near perfect reflection to stand out.

**Highly Commended : Pia Bercic**

This unique image uses both UV lighting and Fluorescing make-up to achieve a dark yet ethereal effect. The judges were impressed not only with the effort that went into setting up this image, but also with the creativity in capturing the smoke-like wisps as the make-up washed off. A highly accomplished unique image.

**Zoom In**

This category was dominated by nudibranchs and the recreation of scenes often shot in the real world. There were so many contenders in this category that managed that near facsimile of the real thing. But what stood out were those that added a little something extra.

**Winner : Arnau Argemi**

The interaction of the eye contact between the anemone fish and her “eggs” is where the judges felt that this photo succeeded in bringing an added dimension to what was clearly an attempt to mimic one of judge Alex Mustard’s own ocean images. The negative space framed by the ingenious use of what looks like Christmas baubles as eggs draws the viewer in, before realising that this shows toys in the bath.

**Highly Commended : Tro Rex**

The cheeky humour of this photo – a recreation of many real underwater images, made the judges smile, but it was the addition of the tiny bubble reflecting the eyes of the fish which elevates this image into something more than a bit of fun.

**Positive/Negative**

**Winner : Laura @lgx\_95**

This photo is as much about the nature of the competition as it is about the image itself. Clearly taken in the bath, the judges enjoyed that the diver and shark silhouettes appear to be circling the drain, which lends an additional dimension to this image that according to the photographer attempts to capture the dreams of dives before lockdown.

**Highly Commended : @une\_plogeuese**

There were several attempts to create photorealistic images, especially in the animal behaviour category, but this one, presented in black and white required a double take which then revealed that the ice in the background was in fact plastic bottles and the subjects were models. The position of the orca was so lifelike that the only giveaway was the still surface of the water capturing the reflection so well

Note – the same photographer submitted a short video in this category that was ineligible due to not being a photograph, but the subtle recreation of movement using light over the back of a model of a whale shark was effective enough once again, to need a second look as it was so reminiscent of the real thing.

**Indoor Animal behaviour**

**Winner : Pia Bercic**

Timing is everything. The brightly coloured octopus (made from a fishing lure) against the dark background of swirling ink created a dramatic image which leapt out of the screen. The photographer also submitted the video showing how the shot was taken demonstrating the creativity and timing needed to capture this image.

**Highly Commended : Arnau Argemi**

This recreation of a classic image is given the full Underbathwater treatment by the use of Lego. A close contender in the lockdown Lego category, the image suggests motion beautifully and its almost possible to ignore that this is, in fact a toy.