

# WET DREAMS



**“I’m not freezing action; I’m finding moments in a dream,” says photographer Howard Schatz.**

It’s something in the water—the unique quality of the light, the effervescent effect of the bubbles, the uncanny reflections. Combined, these elements drew photographer Howard Schatz, choreographer Laurie McLeod and sculptor Jason de Caires Taylor to create work underwater.

Each went through patient periods of trial-and-error, trying to bring to reality the underwater images they had imagined. They all felt compelled to do this work. This underwater imagery is so appealing to the viewer because what they’ve created is pure magic.

## **Mind-Blowing Beauty: Underwater Photography**

Howard Schatz was an eye doctor, a renowned retinal specialist, with a photography hobby. One of his personal projects—a book of photos celebrating redheads—was seen by a Clairol executive who then hired him for a major photo shoot. After that gig, Schatz left medicine for a second career in photography. Since 1995, he has become one of the most in-demand commercial photographers working today.

The inspiration to shoot underwater came when Schatz switched his exercise regime from pickup games of basketball to a daily swim. In the pool, Schatz was intrigued by “the beautiful world of light, bubbles and reflections.”

But the idea of taking an underwater photo and making it work required months of experimentation. After several failed attempts at getting a decent underwater image, Schatz put his medical training to work. With the methodology of a scientific researcher, he analyzed pool water, studied underwater nature photography, consulted with dive photographers and searched for the right equipment. One by one, he solved the problems of shooting in a pool: color correctness, lighting, buoyancy, clarity, water temperature and the correct pH for eye protection.

He shot countless rolls of film using a wide array of human guinea pigs as subjects, but he couldn’t quite achieve the desired outcome. Then Schatz had a big idea. He realized that dancers would make the perfect underwater models. They had near perfect control of their bodies; they could respond instantly to direction, and dance itself was another gravity-defying art form. And that, after all, was what Schatz found so alluring. Not the water itself, but that it allowed him to defy gravity to capture “fluid dynamics.” Images so beautiful they make you want to cry.

## **Rhapsody in Blue: Underwater Dance**

Throughout her career, dancer/choreographer Laurie McLeod would swim for relaxation and to relieve muscle tension.

One day, she went to a French Dance on Camera festival at BAM in Brooklyn.



She saw a short film of abstract shapes shot underwater and had an instant inspiration. "In my mind's eye," McLeod explains, "I saw a panicked bride hiding in the deep end of a swimming pool to avoid her wedding."

Four months later, McLeod, dancers and a crew were in a pool shooting. That piece, *Yes, She Said*, has been seen all over the U.S., at Lincoln Center and on PBS.

"Initially, I had absolutely no idea what I was doing," McLeod continues. "I just knew I wanted to make a work on camera—something that would last beyond the moment of performance. I think it's part of the artistic evolution for a choreographer."

McLeod has gone on to make several gorgeous short underwater videos pairing imaginative dance with beautiful music: *Teatro Otana*, *Teatro Iva*, *Waterhaven Project (Luo Yong's Dream)*. They've been shown at prestigious dance festivals all over the country, at Mass MoCA museum in North Adams, Massachusetts, and at The High Line Festival in New York City.

"Working underwater is extremely challenging," McLeod says. "The dancers need to modulate their movements and use their breath in a specific way. And, no matter how warm the water is, they always get cold. So, the performers and crew are often pretty uncomfortable during the creation process. The magic is that the end result is so lyrically beautiful."

"I love working underwater," McLeod concludes. "I'm a sucker for its mysteries and its endless beauty."



### Poseidon's Paradise: Underwater Sculpture

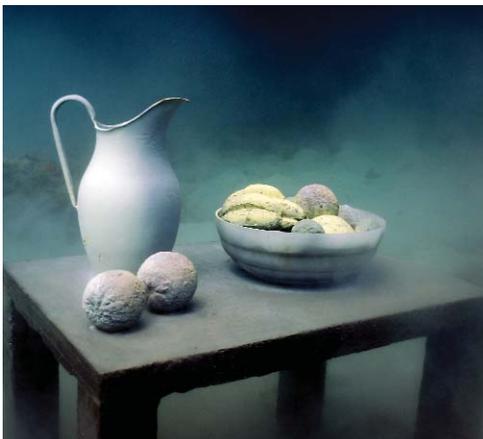
Growing up in Malaysia and the Caribbean, sculptor Jason de Caires Taylor went snorkeling most days after school. But by the time he'd graduated art school in London some 20 years later, coral reefs worldwide were disappearing due to environmental and manmade onslaughts. Taylor decided to use his talent for a greater good.

Taylor's underwater sculptures, all based on traditional figurative imagery, are stunning works of art created with an ecological purpose: they form artificial reefs, attracting marine life in areas where the natural reefs are under threat. In May 2006, Taylor gained international recognition by creating the world's first underwater sculpture park in Grenada, West Indies. The sculptures are placed in clear shallow waters to provide easy access to divers, snorkelers and those in glass-bottomed boats. Several dive tour operators in Grenada offer trips to the Sculpture Garden.

The work *Vicissitudes*, a life-size cast of a group of ethnically-diverse children holding hands, is meant to evoke the idea of unity and continuum. And just as the marine environment is in constant flux, so too are the underwater sculptures as they become covered in algae, barnacles and other underwater life forms.

Taylor is working on numerous new projects including an installation on a shipwreck in the Virgin Islands and the first phase of an underwater project within the National Marine Park in Cancun, Mexico. "In addition to doing something beneficial for the environment," says Taylor, "taking art off the white walls of a gallery offers the viewer a sense of discovery and participation."

"The buoyancy and weightlessness of a person in water provides a unique viewing experience," Taylor explains. "Under the sea, colors change and light from the water's surface, altered by movement, produces kaleidoscopic effects. The result is a dramatic, personal encounter with the art."



**"Underwater, you give up control for a kind of beauty that could never occur elsewhere," says choreographer Laurie McLeod.**

**Taylor's *Vicissitudes* is an unearthly work of beauty. His *Un-Still Life*, set in the constant flux of a marine environment, reminds us that change is inevitable.**