

# Howard Schatz



P O R T F O L I O





dancers. I started with dancers first for the underwater work. One day, I called Katita Waldo of the San Francisco Ballet, and asked her, "Can you swim?" She could, and so we worked in the pool on studies that led to the book, *Waterdance*.

*So after this book came out, all the dance companies wanted to work with you?*  
Mostly, individual dancers. I did some advertising shots for companies, however. But dancers don't make a lot of money. We pay them by the hour, and they give their heart and soul to the camera.

*Have you worked with athletes, too, and is there a difference between working with athletes and dancers?*

Well, there are similarities. Both dancers and athletes are coachable. You can't be a great athlete or a great dancer if you can't take direction. They listen and do what I say. But dancers have much more physical ability. Athletes have great ability in their specific field whether it's running or jumping or throwing or lifting, but dancers can do anything well. They can twist a torso, or bend a leg here, an arm there and the head another direction... They can do anything. They are like puppets. They can fulfill the fantasy. Athletes are much more limited.

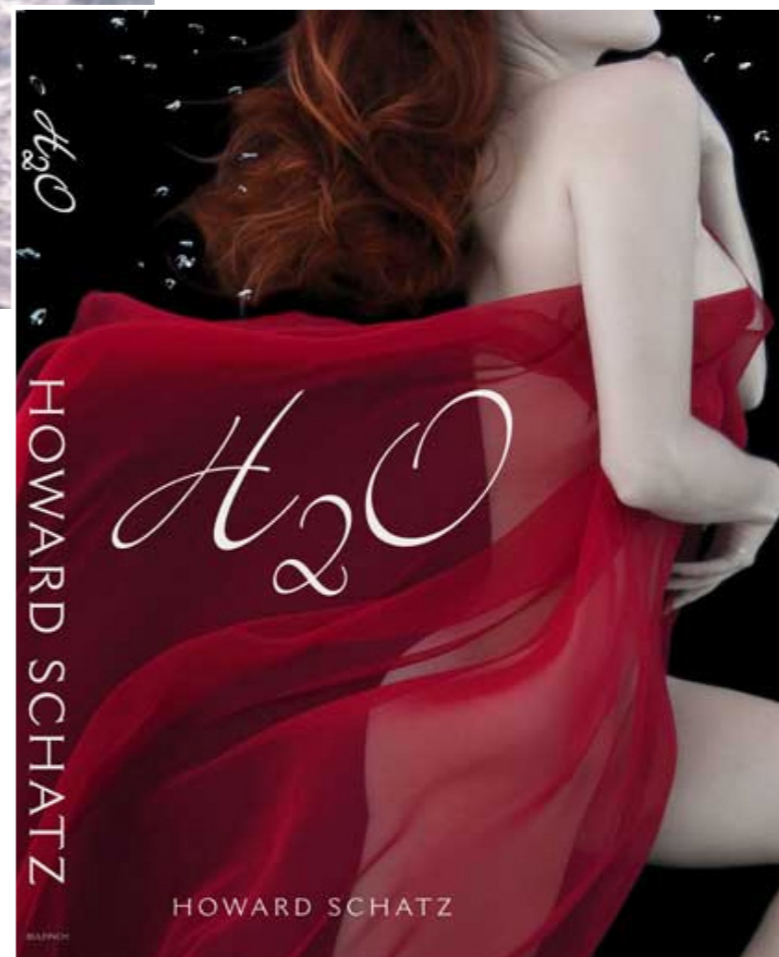
*How did you start working underwater?*  
I started working in a swimming pool. We had a home in California with a pool in which I worked. Then we moved to Connecticut, and we built a pool especially for photography. It is specially designed for shooting underwater.

*Why the human form?*

Are you married? Why did you marry him? You don't know... It's just because of some things inside that moved you. Certain things cannot be explained. Obviously, looking at my work, you can see that I am very interested in human beings and the human form. I am possessed with it.

*Do you plan your shots or let them happen? How do you help the model attain what you want?*

I direct. It's not so much planned. You climb the creative tree, climb up onto the branches, sometimes onto a branch that's rotten, and you fall down. Other times, you go out onto a branch, and there are cherries to pick on every inch. Just like if you write a sentence and it's bad. You say, "No," and start over. The way to compose something



Text edited by Gunild Symes  
All images by Howard Schatz

**Howard Schatz is an extraordinary photographer who captures the ethereal fluidity of the human body under water. A dazzling array of his underwater studies are now compiled in a new book entitled, *H2O*. Gunild Symes caught up with the effervescent Schatz to gain some insight into the stunning imagery found within the pages.**

*Tell us about your book, H2O...*  
Well, what happens underwater to a human being is very different from what happens on land. If you blow out a little air, you are neutrally buoyant. One experiences weightlessness. That allows all sorts of interesting things to happen. It could be silly, like astronauts twirling around in the space shuttle showing off their weightlessness. I am more interested in beauty. I work with dancers. The adversary of dancers is gravity. Under water, they are able to do things they cannot do on the stage. It allows for the mystical and the magical to happen. That's what is intriguing about water. The other interesting thing is the point where

water meets air. It's a reflective surface. Where water droplets on a body are reflecting the light, you can see reflections. The underwater surface is not only reflective, it also changes as it moves. It's a place to explore. Shooting underwater has a lot of problems in composition, resolution, clarity, comfort that you don't have to deal with out of the water.

The book, *Passion & Line*, was done with some of the greatest dancers in the world from American Ballet Theater, Alvin Ailey Dance Company, Martha Graham, and many others. I work with dancers all the time. Just yesterday, we were working in the studio with some



Underwater Study #3093, by Howard Schatz

Underwater Study #2727, by Howard Schatz

interesting and unique is to search and look for it. Don't close your mind to what's happening.

I often tell the dancer to bring music to the shoot, which moves them. For example, if something should be really energetic, I ask them to bring really energetic music they like. In this case, I say, "Wow! Look at all that energy expended. Let's play it loud and you perform to the music." But dancers can't just dance, they have to perform for the camera. They have to know how to place their bodies in the right way to get a good picture. But I let them perform and click away. I make 30 or 40 pictures, then I say, "Let's take a look. What's interesting here? You could bend your right foot more this way and twist the left knee more that way... Bring the foot up higher... Take the hand around your head and frame the face, then fling your head back and yell, YEAH!"



*What can you tell divers who are underwater photographers about any technical aspects or creative processes you have developed in order to get the images you want?*

There're a number of things. If you are not your own worst critic, you are your own worst enemy. You cannot be satisfied with 'pretty good'. You have to push yourself. I shoot in order to surprise and delight myself. And you have to keep working at it. Secondly, we take notes on everything, so if I go back on a shoot, I can start where I left off and continue to

grow and grow. The third important thing is to look at the images of other's and know what's out there. You have to have a vast image data bank in your head, so you can see, "Ah, someone has done this before." You can see it and do it in a way that no one else has done it before. You have to push yourself to make what is unique and valuable. Rather than tricks and specific details about film and cameras, what really makes a picture hap-

pen is the effort, the passion, the heart and soul behind it, and the ability to recognize what is generic and what is common and has been done before.

*What is your next project?*

I am working on several projects at the same time. These projects are very extensive. It's not like writing a book and you stay on the book until it's finished. I work on five to ten different projects all the

time. One can't work on one project every day because of scheduling, models, etc. Some of the projects I am working on include *Growing Up* in which we are following 100 children, boys and girls, over time; *Pregnancy*; *Boxing*; and other studies. It's continual experimentation. My photo studio is a research laboratory in which to make new things.

*Do you teach photography or work with*

*apprentices or assistants?*

Yes, I have assistants and interns — a whole team. Sometimes I teach, but I am really too busy to do it. For our interns, I do one lighting tutorial a year. We have one intern per year. I do a whole day on studio lighting for five to ten photographers. I do most of my work in our Soho studio, which is a regular photography studio with lights, all sorts of gizmos and everything you need for a shoot.





Atlantis #1, by Howard Schatz



Underwater Study #2778, by Howard Schatz



Underwater Study #2696, by Howard Schatz

*You had to learn scuba diving in order to do underwater photography. Did scuba diving lead you to underwater photography or visa versa? And why do you take the kind of pictures you take rather than, say, sea life or marine mammals?*

Yes, I can scuba dive, but I am not interested in documented what's down there. I am interested in directing what's in my mind, creatively, versus document-

ing what's already there. I don't want to be just an observer. I am more of a sculptor—an inventor of images.

*Did you start working in commercial photography first or fine art?*

I started in fine art photography first. Then, advertising agencies came to us to make pictures for them. I make enough to support the fine art experiments we

do. We do the commercial work in order to support the fine art work. Advertising work is like research grants. We only do enough advertising in order to support the fine art work.

*How did you first get into photography? Was it school or your parents?*

Not my parents. You get a camera and start shooting, that's how you begin. I

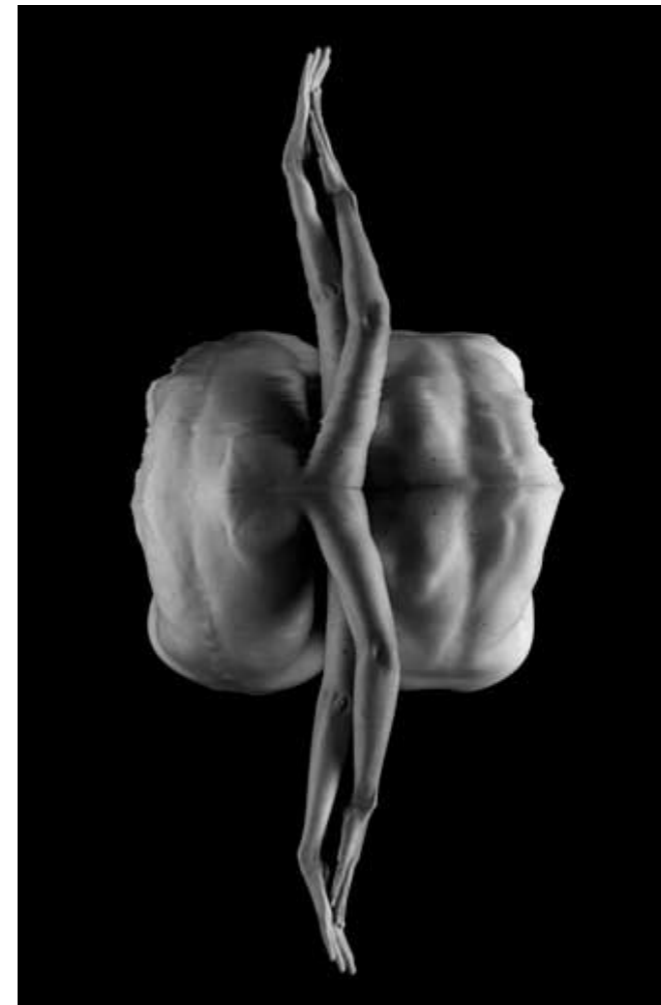
was a physician, a specialist in the retina—the back of the eye—ophthalmology and retinal disease. On weekends, I made pictures. After our daughter graduated from high school, I became serious about pictures. We came to New York City for one year as a sabbatical from teaching and doing medicine. I came to do photography fulltime and never left.

*That must have been a big switch from medicine to photography. Do you miss practicing medicine or have any regrets? No regrets. Medicine was very interesting and fulfilling. It was doing something good in the world. I enjoyed the patients, writing papers, and teaching—I was a professor at a university. On the other hand, photography is fun and interesting. I can learn as much in photography*





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:  
Underwater Study #2752,  
Underwater Study #2845,  
Underwater Study #2830  
All images on this page by  
Howard Schatz



as I did in medicine. But you have to be perfect when you are taking care of a patient. Everything must be done exactly as is medically appropriate. You cannot make mistakes. In photography, it is okay to make mistakes, to try new things. If you fail in photography, you are not going to lose somebody's life, or a limb, or an eye. It's a very different sort of exploration.

There's no danger. I take a lot of pictures that don't work. You put it together, if it doesn't work, rearrange it until you get the right moment, and then you say, "Ah!"

*What would you tell readers about the making of H2O? Insights or reflections?*  
In the making of the book, *H2O*, the joy was in the journey. A book is a nice

thing to have. But the great joy and pleasure came in the making of the pictures—in the work. The book is just an extra plus.

*A gift from your explorations?*  
Yes, that's a good way to put it.

*For more information, please visit:*  
[www.howardschatz.com](http://www.howardschatz.com) ■

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