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Usage of Rembrandt lighting is not limited to portraits. It creates a sense of drama and dimensionality even in small coral scenes.

Text and photos by Rico Besserdich

What is the difference between a snapshot and a masterpiece in photography? This is a question that is often asked but is often already answered. Even though some opinions may differ, there is one very correct statement: It is all about the light.



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The Large Self-Portrait (1652), by Rembrandt



Rembrandt Lighting

— *Creating Drama in Your Underwater Photography*

Master the light and you will master photography. Indeed, "drawing with light" is the meaning of the Greek origin of the word "photography."

However, if we want to work creatively with light, we need to think about shadows as well.

The good news is that we do not need to start from scratch. The old masters of art and painting developed specific lighting techniques hundreds of years before the first camera was even invented.

One of them was Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, the great Dutch artist who is known all over the world by his first name, Rembrandt. Rembrandt (1606-1669) was a draftsman, painter and printmaker, and is considered one of the

greatest and most influential artists of the Baroque Era. He is well remembered for his dramatic use of light and shadow, his versatility, and most importantly, for his portrait paintings. He was a true master of *chiaroscuro*, the artistic technique using

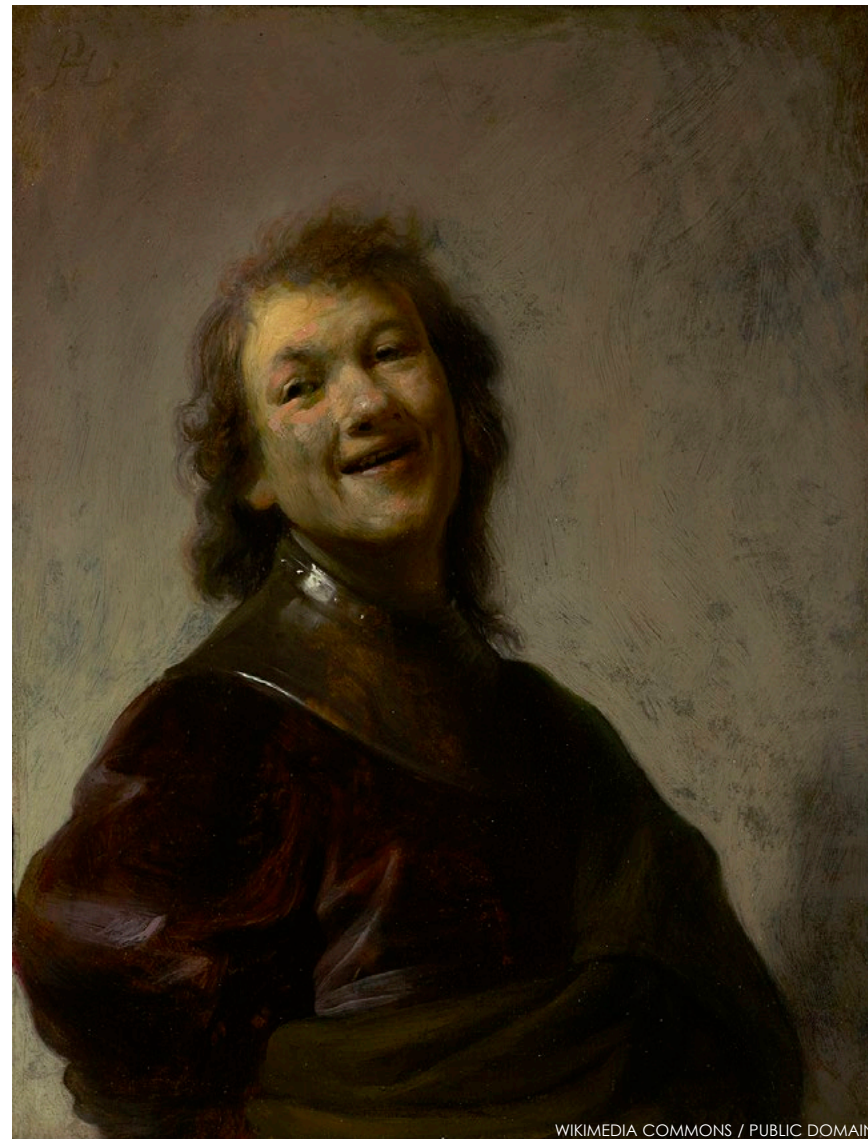




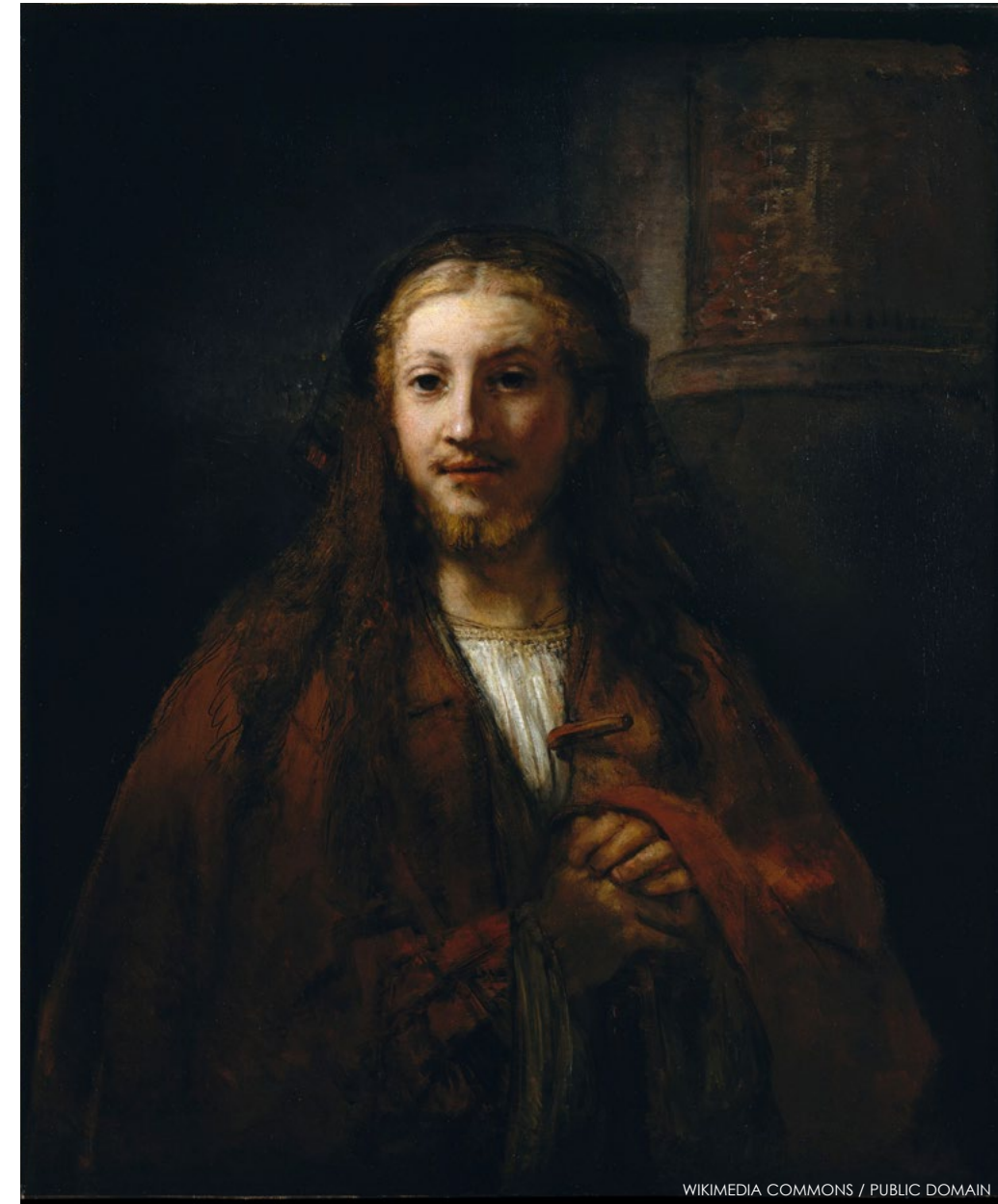
The Storm on the Sea of Galilee (1633) was created by Rembrandt many years before he became famous for his portrait paintings. Yet, this artwork shows his strong sense and dramatic use of light. Again, the light comes from the left, creating drama and contrast. Some of you may certainly agree that scuba diving is fun, but boat trips are not. Just look at the guy dressed in red. He does not seem to be enjoying the trip. Sadly, this masterwork of Rembrandt's is lost. It was stolen in 1990, and has not been seen since.

“Rembrandt goes so deep into the mysterious that he says things for which there are no words.”

— Vincent van Gogh



Rembrandt Laughing, self-portrait by Rembrandt. This very special painting might be the only one that shows Rembrandt happy and laughing. He loved to live life at its fullest, and this image also speaks to his sense of humor, painting himself with paint on his face, and wearing a rather strange costume. His special lighting technique had, at that time, not fully reached its greatest potential, but we can already see which direction it will go. Bare in mind, that when Rembrandt created this “funny” self-portrait, he was just 22 years old, but he already had his own workshop and atelier.



Christ with a Staff. This painting, created by Rembrandt in 1661, is a perfect example of “Rembrandt lighting,” as it is nowadays known and used in portrait photography. The light (in Rembrandt’s day, most likely from a window to the left) comes from a direction slightly above eye level (that is why some light touches the forehead as well), hits the face at a 45-degree angle, and creates the “Rembrandt triangle” below the eye, on the right side of the face.

light and dark values to create the illusion of three-dimensional volume on a flat surface, which is often represented in very strong contrasts.

Rembrandt’s legacy for image-makers (including photographers, of course) is the simple but unique lighting technique that carries the master’s name—Rembrandt lighting.

Light sources and angles

Its most common use is in portrait photography. It creates dramatic, high-contrast portraits, and was often used in a lot of old black-and-white Hollywood portraits. Instead of “flattening” a portrait by using several light sources (key light, fill light, hair light, background light and so on) from different directions (just think of commercial shots from the cosmetic industry),



A single strobe in a roughly 45-degree angle from the right (Rembrandt mostly preferred the light coming from the left, but let's not split hairs), combined with a closed aperture ($f/16$), eliminates the ambient light and allows us to "draw with light" on the subject. Very common underwater photo subjects and motifs can be photographed very differently by using a touch of Rembrandt lighting.

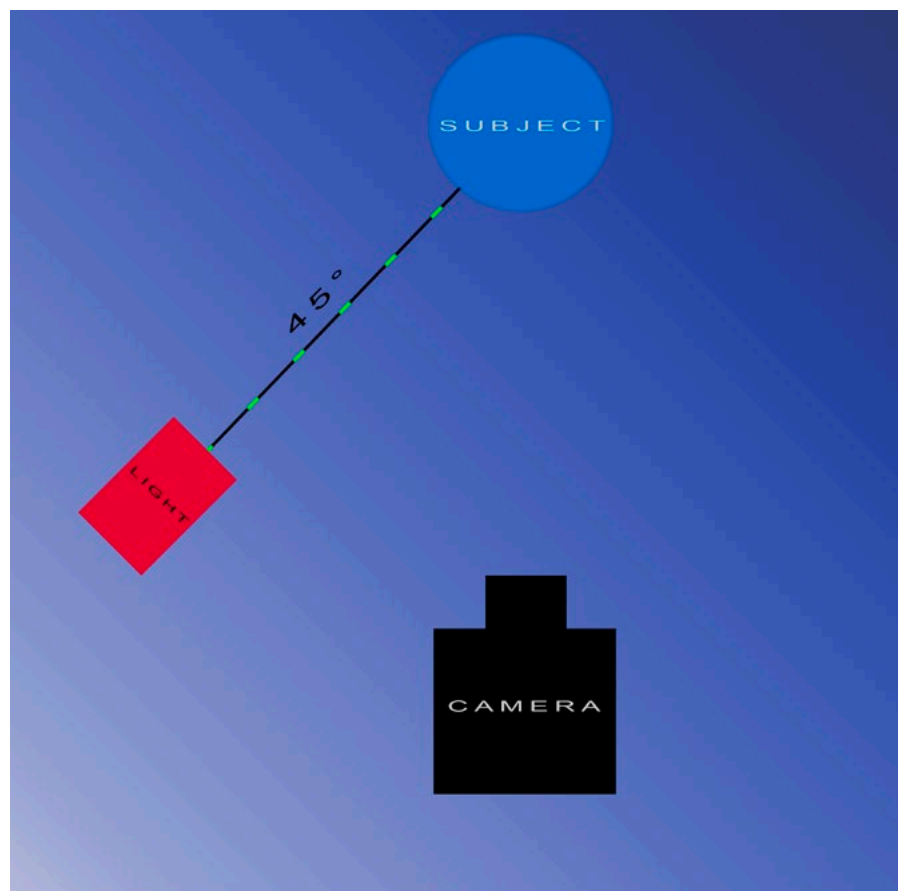
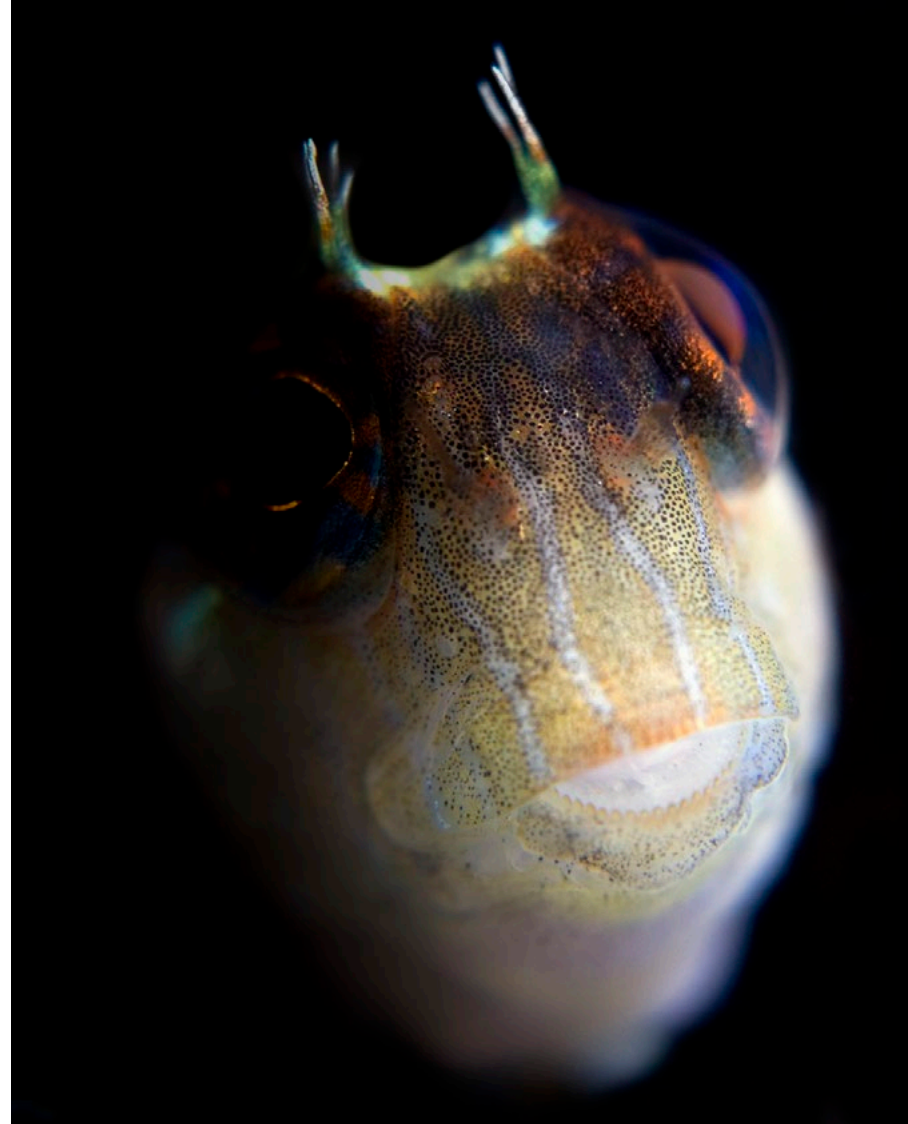
Marine species usually do not have a nose; otherwise, it would be possible to have the triangle of light visible on the darker side of this fish's face. However, Rembrandt lighting does not demand a "triangle." What is important is the direction of the light.

Rembrandt lighting works in its most basic form with just one light source.

In portrait photography, two characteristics define classic Rembrandt lighting. Firstly, there is light on one half of the subject's face; and secondly, there is a triangle of light on the shadowed side of the face.

At its most basic level, this lighting technique can be realized with a single light source offset approximately 45 degrees from the subject and a bit higher than eye level (please see graphic). The angle from which you take your photograph is not that important. What is important is the angle of the light source.

Furthermore, it is not that important whether your light source comes from the right or from the left. However, in the majority of Rembrandt's own works (especially the portraits), the light comes from the left side.



Creating visual impact

Now the question is, what does all this have to do with underwater photography? The answer is, Rembrandt lighting can add quite some drama, depth and dimensionality to underwater photographs. It works well with medium-size subjects, such as fish or corals, and any subject matter in macro photography.

The idea is to utilize shadows to create some more drama and visual impact.

Many underwater photographers tend to work with two (underwater) strobes to light up as much of the scene or subject as possible. This indeed brings back colors and detail, but it also often flattens the image, making it look two-dimensional, especially when both strobes are on the same power output setting, or even operating in TTL mode. This interpretation of "painting with light" might not deliver a result that differs

A Rembrandt lighting setup in its most simple form. It is very easy to adapt to underwater photography.

QUICK FACTS ABOUT REMBRANDT

- In the time of Rembrandt, cameras had not yet been invented. So, people who could afford the luxury had portraits painted of themselves and their families. For painters, this was quite a common business. Rembrandt gained a reputation as a great portrait artist, doing the job that nowadays is done by professional studio and portrait photographers. He created more than 600 verified paintings, including around 50 self-portraits.
- In addition to landscapes and portraits, Rembrandt produced mythological, biblical and allegorical scenes.
- Rembrandt loved dogs. One can often see dogs in his paintings.
- Rembrandt was known for his historical paintings and portraits commissioned by patrons, but he also pushed forward the genre of self-portraits. Indeed, he might be considered the "father of the selfie."
- Rembrandt always strived for uncompromising realism in his artwork. That led some critics to complain that he preferred ugliness over beauty.
- It is very likely that Rembrandt's most famous artwork, *The Night Watch* (1642) was "cropped." Large areas (almost 45 percent) of the original painting were cut away to make the painting fit into its second home, the Amsterdam Town Hall.
- Rembrandt's most expensive work, *Pendant portraits of Maerten Soolmans and Oopjen Coppit* (1634), was sold for US\$180 million in 2015. Rembrandt himself died in poverty.
- This year, 2019, is the "Year of Rembrandt," as it marks the 350th anniversary of his passing. ■



The usage of low-key photography techniques, combined with just one single light source (a strobe, in this example) creates a strong, dramatic chiaroscuro effect. A moray eel serves well as a “dramatic” photo model.

Sometimes, it is the things you do not see in an image that create a feeling of “old Hollywood,” even when the star is just a 3cm-high flamboyant cuttlefish.

“Choose only one master—Nature.”

— Rembrandt

from a snapshot. “The image is flashed to death,” as critics would say.

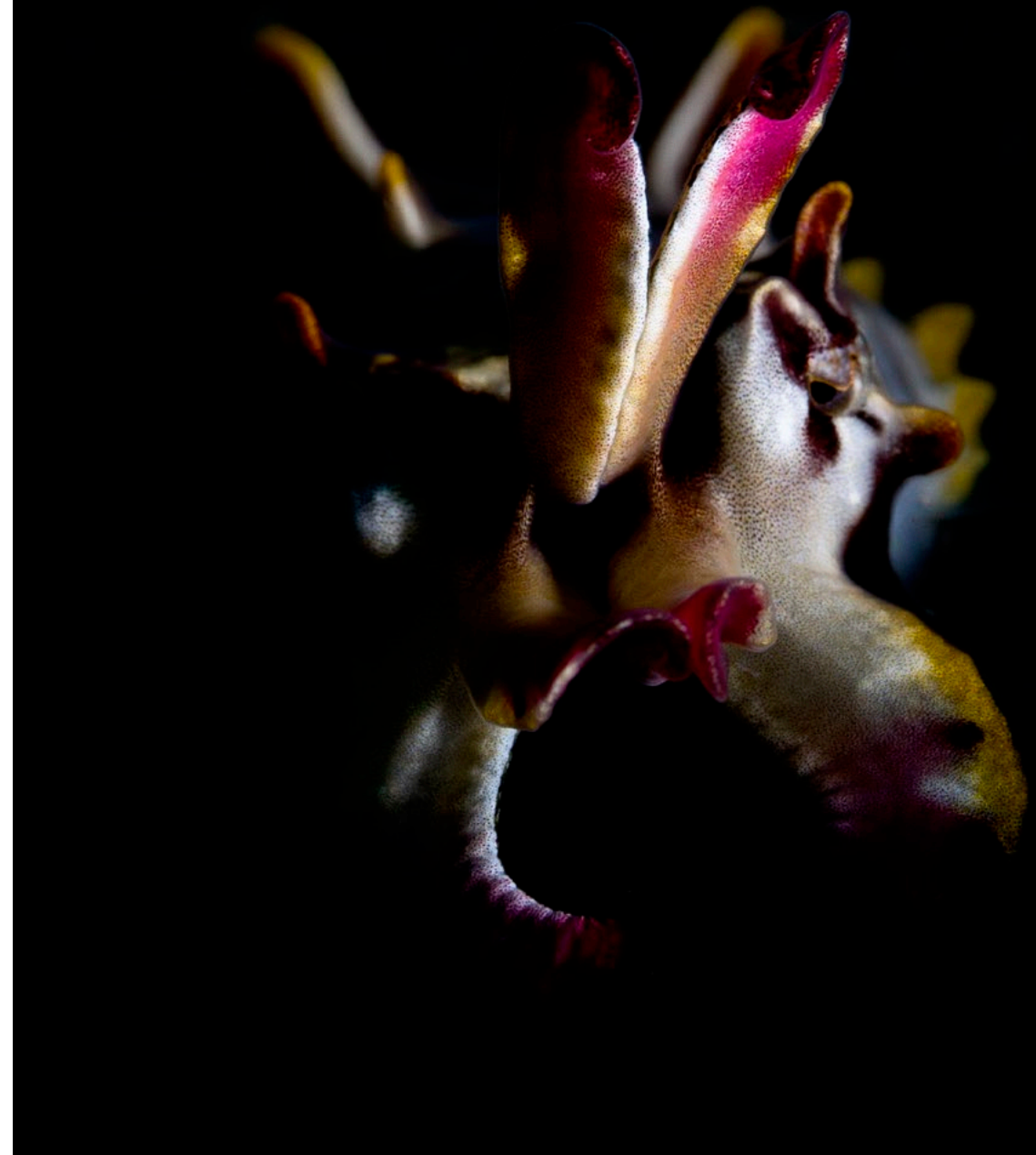
In contrast with topside photography, it may sometimes seem like shadows are undesirable in underwater photography. But in the areas of the scene not touched by light, it often makes a difference in the visual impact of photographs. Shadows (in images) add dimension, and thus, make them look more interesting and simply livelier. And this is where Rembrandt lighting comes in handy.

Don't worry, it is not the end of the world if the special “Rembrandt triangle” (a triangle-shaped area of light in the darker area of the image) is missed in your attempts to utilize this lighting technique in your underwater photography, as the creation of that triangle requires something that rarely can be found underwater: a nose.

This kind of lighting technique is absolutely not limited to fish (portraits) alone. The good news is that it requires only a very basic setup:

- A camera (plus underwater housing)
- An underwater strobe (or torch)
- Strobe arms (two segments with a total length of about 45cm is recommended)

The strobe arms are necessary to adjust the angle of the strobe (or torch). When pointed at the subject (from the side),



the strobe or torch should be angled at around 45 degrees. Built-in camera strobes are not suitable for this lighting technique, as we cannot achieve a 45-degree angle with them.

In case you always prefer to do your underwater photo dives with two strobes attached to your camera housing, just switch one strobe off. You can use your second strobe (in manual mode, on very low power) as a fill light to give a few more details to the shadows, softening the contrast. This then becomes a slightly

more advanced setup for Rembrandt lighting. However, a second light source or a reflector is not absolutely necessary.

In general, Rembrandt lighting is best used in low-key photography, as this is a necessary element in creating a chiaroscuro effect. This means we get into the dark. More shadows and darker areas in the image guide the viewer's eye almost automatically to the areas that are lit by the technique of Master Rembrandt—in other words, dark and dramatic. We still “paint with light,” but not the entire



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Not as impressive as an aged Clint Eastwood, but the chiaroscuro effect (Rembrandt was a master of it) adds "character" even to sea turtles.



(image) frame.

To achieve maximum control over the lighting when working with a strobe or torch, it is of great help to eliminate all, or at least most, of the ambient light coming from the sun. The most classic way of doing this is to set the aperture to higher numbers such as $f/16$ or even higher (depending on the light circumstances). This then keeps most of the

sunlight out and allows us to work entirely with the light of the strobe.

Often, this does not work well during dives under the midday sun or in shallow water, as the sunlight is simply too strong. Very early morning, late afternoon, or early evening (and, of course, at night) are often better choices when creating shots with Rembrandt lighting.



Give it a try—paint with light, play with shadows, be chiaroscuro, be dramatic.

As a matter of fact, many lighting techniques in photography have their roots in the paintings of the old masters. Taking a closer look at the old masters' artworks can provide lots of inspiration and ideas, not least for underwater photography. There is still so much more to discover.

Styles arise and disappear, or simply go out of fashion. Rembrandt himself saw his paintings lose popularity during his last years. At the age of 50, he had to file for bankruptcy. Fashion, however, does not really matter to an artist. Rembrandt is now univer-

sally considered one of the greatest painters who ever lived, and his unique way of "drawing with light" has become the gold standard, with which every image-maker simply has to be familiar. ■

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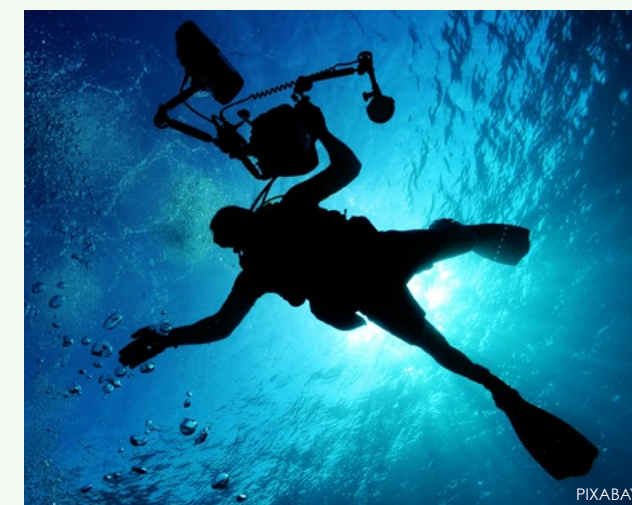
SOURCES:
ART-QUOTES.COM, BRITANNICA.COM, REMBRANDTRESEARCHPROJECT.ORG, SOTHEBYS.COM

Tip of the Day

by Don Silcock

Forgot something?

It is possibly one of the worst feelings in the underwater photography world. You spend all that money on the trip itself. Then, there is the considerable cost of getting to wherever you are going. And then, of course, there are all those last-minute "must-haves" that are going to make this upcoming trip so special! Finally, you arrive at the end location and are putting your gear together for the next day's diving, and the horrible realisation dawns on you that you have left something behind and not having it is probably going to ruin your trip.



before the trip. Two or three days before I depart, I carefully assemble everything and even draw a vacuum on the assembled housing to ensure that the light stays green.

I then test-fire the strobes at various power settings and double-check the camera's auto-focus system in the process; plus, I make sure that whatever zoom I am using can cover its full range. It is always a pain, as the closer you get to the departure date, the less time you have.

In the case of the Sardine Run trip, I was able to recover by asking my wife to deliver the oh-so-important O-ring to DHL in Bali and send it to Coffee Bay in South Africa. Not as straightforward as it sounds, but it eventually arrived, and I only missed a few days of bait-ball action! ■

Asia correspondent Don Silcock is based in Bali, Indonesia. For more information and extensive location guides, articles and images on some of the world's best diving locations, visit his website at: Indopacificimages.com.

I think we have all done it, and my worst case was last year when I realised two days before I left for two weeks on the Sardine Run in South Africa that the main O-ring for my Nauticam housing was in Bali—while I was in Sydney. Living in two locations (sounds ostentatious, I know, but I can assure you, it is not) and travelling a lot is a recipe for disaster!

So, you can kind of take me as a worst-case scenario—but my standard pre-trip routine, together with the assistance of my ever-supportive wife, saved me!

Assemble and test gear

For me, the only way to arrive at the end location with all my gear, is to completely assemble and test all my equipment

Rembrandt lighting adds a feeling of drama and dimensionality to images. Night dives are terrific for working with this lighting technique.



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MIDE 2019 Report & Lens Beyond Ocean Photo Contest Winners

The Malaysia International Dive Expo hit new heights in its 14th year, taking place at the Putra World Centre in Kuala Lumpur on 3-5 May 2019. This year, there was a 20 percent increase in visitors, totalling 12,656 from 50 countries.

There were 1,000 exhibitors from 12 countries, sharing their products, services and expertise with visitors. Overall sales generated over the three-day event was around US\$2.57 mil (RM10.7 mil), a 45 percent increase from last year.

New this year was the addition of watersports, which was warmly received, leading to many sales leads in the boating section. Interest was expressed by dive operators and holiday resorts regarding the various types and features of boats on display. The potential for this area to grow was evident.

Also new this year was the B2B matching platform, a MIDE meeting app that saw encouraging usage by both trade visitors and exhibitors, keen on networking during the show.

Lens Beyond Ocean Photo Contest

This year's Lens Beyond Ocean Underwater Photography Competition was another great success, with entries received from 25 countries. The winners for each category were:

Best of Show: Leonard Lim of Singapore and Peter De Maagt of the Netherlands.

Macro: 1st place, Navapan Janjarasskul of Thailand; 2nd place, Gaetano Gargiulo of Italy.

Wide-angle: 1st place, Gino Symus of Belgium; 2nd place, Miguel Ramirez of Reunion.

Portfolio: 1st place, Delbos Yannick of France; 2nd place, Tracey Jennings of the United Kingdom.

Compact: 1st place, Chong Wan Yong of Malaysia; 2nd place, Low Sook Wei of Malaysia.

Creative: 1st place, Pietro Cremone of Italy; 2nd place, Theresa Guise of the United States.



Freediving: 1st place, Yen Wen Chih of Taiwan; 2nd place, Andrew Tsz On Lau of Hong Kong.

3-Minute Video: 1st place, Simone Piccoli of Italy; 2nd place, Ros Syafiqah Roslan of Malaysia.

Honourable mention: Rosni Hussin of Malaysia and Kang Qiu Jian of Malaysia.

Prizes included dive packages provided by Amun Ini Beach Resort and Spa, Aquatica Dive Resort, Atlantis Philippines,

Best of Show (far right): *Sea Goddess (Tulamben, Bali)*, by Leonard Lim, Singapore

Macro – First Prize (right): *Coconut Octopus (Lembah Strait, Indonesia)*, by Navapan Janjarasskul, Thailand

Compact – First Prize (below): *Guardian in Lacy Palace (Bryozoan Goby with Eggs, Bubble Point, Ambon, Indonesia)*, by Chong Wan Yong, Malaysia



Creative – First Prize (above): *Sepia Nebula*, by Pietro Cremone, Italy



Wide-Angle – First Prize (above): *Mating Toads (Belgium)*, by Gino Symus, Belgium

Freediving – First Prize (far left): *Free Diver (Moalboal, Philippines)*, by Yen Wen Chih, Taiwan



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Atmosphere Resorts and Spa, Ceningan Divers, Cocotinos Hotels and Resorts, Fun and Sun Dive Travel, Mola Mola Liveaboard, Pura Vida Beach and Dive Resort, Scuba Seraya, Thalassa, Tiare Cruise and Waiwo Dive Resort Raja Ampat. Additional prizes were provided by Crest Diving and Enth Degree.

Forums and presenters

The much anticipated Ocean Rescue Forum brought experts from various fields together to discuss sustainable practices and educate visitors about what they can do to help the oceans and marine life, particularly regarding plastic pollution. The Cave Diving Forum featured cave diving experts discussing their experiences as well as the skills and training required. Various speakers gave presentations during the expo on topics such as marine conservation, dive medicine, underwater photography, technical diving, freediving, dive travel, dive training and blackwater diving.

Reaching out

There was a 15 percent increase in non-divers attending the expo, totaling 1,296, of which 36 tried scuba diving

for the first time in the on-site pool through the "Be a Diver" program and another 258 signed up for scuba diving courses. Dive Divas Fan Club welcomed 32 new female members to their community. In addition, 672 school children visited the show to learn about scuba diving from Neil Davidson of PADI, single-use plastics from Monica Chin of the Ara Dinawan Research, Education and Conservation Center (ADRECC), and sharks from Brendon Sing of Shark Guardian. There were 37 lucky draw winners of prizes with a combined worth of US\$10,816 (RM45,000), including dive holiday packages, dive gear, dive courses, underwater camera equipment and cash prizes.

Sponsors

MIDE is endorsed by the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation

(MATRADE) and strongly supported by the Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), an agency under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia. Other supporting associations include Malaysia Scuba Diving Association (MSDA), PADI, NAUI, TDI/SDI, SSI, Dive RAID, IANTD, DAN, ITDA, DDI and NDL. Media sponsors include X-Ray Mag, DiveLog, OZDiver, Action Asia, China Scuba Diving, Ocean Geographic Society, Underwater.com, Global Sports Mart, Malay Mail, Floatingasia.com and Travel Guide. ■

For more information about MIDE 2020, visit: mide.com.my. Email: info@mide.com.my.



Video Category – First Prize: *Whale Totem*, by Simone Piccoli of Italy (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=sYXRcav2_bE)



Portfolio Category – First Prize: Delbos Yannick, France *Fly on Air Turtle (Green Turtle, N'Gouja Beach, Mayotte Island), Infernal Spiral (Sardine Run, Moalboal, Philippines), Back to the Surface (Humpback Whales, Saint Paul, Reunion Island), The Ocean's Tears (Parrotfish, Etang Salé, Reunion Island)*

Best of Show (right): *Goby (on fluoro dive, Bari Reef, Bonaire)*, by Peter de Maagt, Netherlands



QUICK MIDE 2019 STATISTICS:

- 12,656 visitors
- US\$2.57 million (RM10.7 million) in sales
- 139 exhibiting companies
- 1,000 exhibitors attended
- 1,296 newbies attended
- 258 newbies signed up for dive training

