



Michal Štros
Underwater Art Photography

The Czech underwater photographer Michal Štros has developed an innovative technique to capture stunning images of the underwater world. In this interview, he shares his artistic vision and reveals a photographic approach defined by unique creativity.

A feast - two harlequin shrimp eating a starfish





Michal Štros on a banca boat

Por Mar Cuetos

- Who is Michal Štros?

I am a Czech biologist, scientist and underwater photographer. At first I photographed large animals such as whales, sharks and seals, but gradually I discovered the bizarre world of the smallest marine species and focused my attention mainly on macro and close-up photography. However, I am not only concerned with the accurate depiction of underwater life, but also with aesthetic expression with added artistic value. I try to take a creative approach to photography, playing with composition, color and light.

During the global COVID-19 pandemic, when I, like so many others, couldn't dive and take new underwater photos, I decided to take some of my previously taken underwater photos and run them through post-production experiments in graphic editors, resulting in a series of fractals and collages. I also like to experiment with optically modified vintage lenses to create interesting swirling effects and almost "impressionistic" blurred backgrounds. These lenses have never been used in underwater photography before.

I have won several awards for underwater photography, including the Ocean Art 2020 and 2021. My photographs are regularly shown at exhibitions and published in diving magazines such as the UK's DIVE and Oceanographic magazines. I have recently published a book "The Silent World through the Lens of Underwater Art Photography", which can be purchased from Amazon.



*Face to Face with an Oceanic
Whitetip Shark*



→ *Close-up of Bearded fireworm*

- What led you to become interested in diving, and how do you remember your first dive on the Great Barrier Reef?

For many years I dreamed of diving while watching movies and looking at underwater photos. I didn't realize at the time how different it was to see the underwater world from the screen and actually dive in the ocean. My first ocean dive off Australia's Great Barrier Reef 25 years ago is forever etched in my memory. I felt like I was in a dream in a "realm of silence" or more like a movie that was happening around me and I was just an observer with no way to intervene. So I just watched and thought. Other than the birth of my two daughters, it was the most powerful experience of my life.

- How did you combine your background as a biologist and scientist with underwater photography?

I hadn't really thought about it before, but I realized that when I write a magazine article about a dive site I visit, I try to get as much information as possible from various sources (using my expertise as a biologist and scientist) about the way marine species live and also about the possible threats they face from human activities.





← **Alien**

↑ **Nembrotha nudibranch**

- How would you define your style in underwater photography?

I try to photograph marine life in its natural habitat in a different way than many photographers have done before me. I do not always succeed, it takes patience and time and many tries and failures, but it is a challenge for me. To do this I mainly use macro or close-up photography with both modern and (modified) vintage lenses and various photographic techniques.

- Some of your images have been creatively processed. How do you decide which photos will be artistically edited, and what message do you aim to convey with those compositions?

-The selection of my underwater photos for further processing in the graphic editor is not arbitrary. It depends on the content of the photo, how well it captures the species and, of course, whether it suits my artistic intentions. In short, the selection is quite intuitive.

*Peacock mantis shrimp
in a burrow*



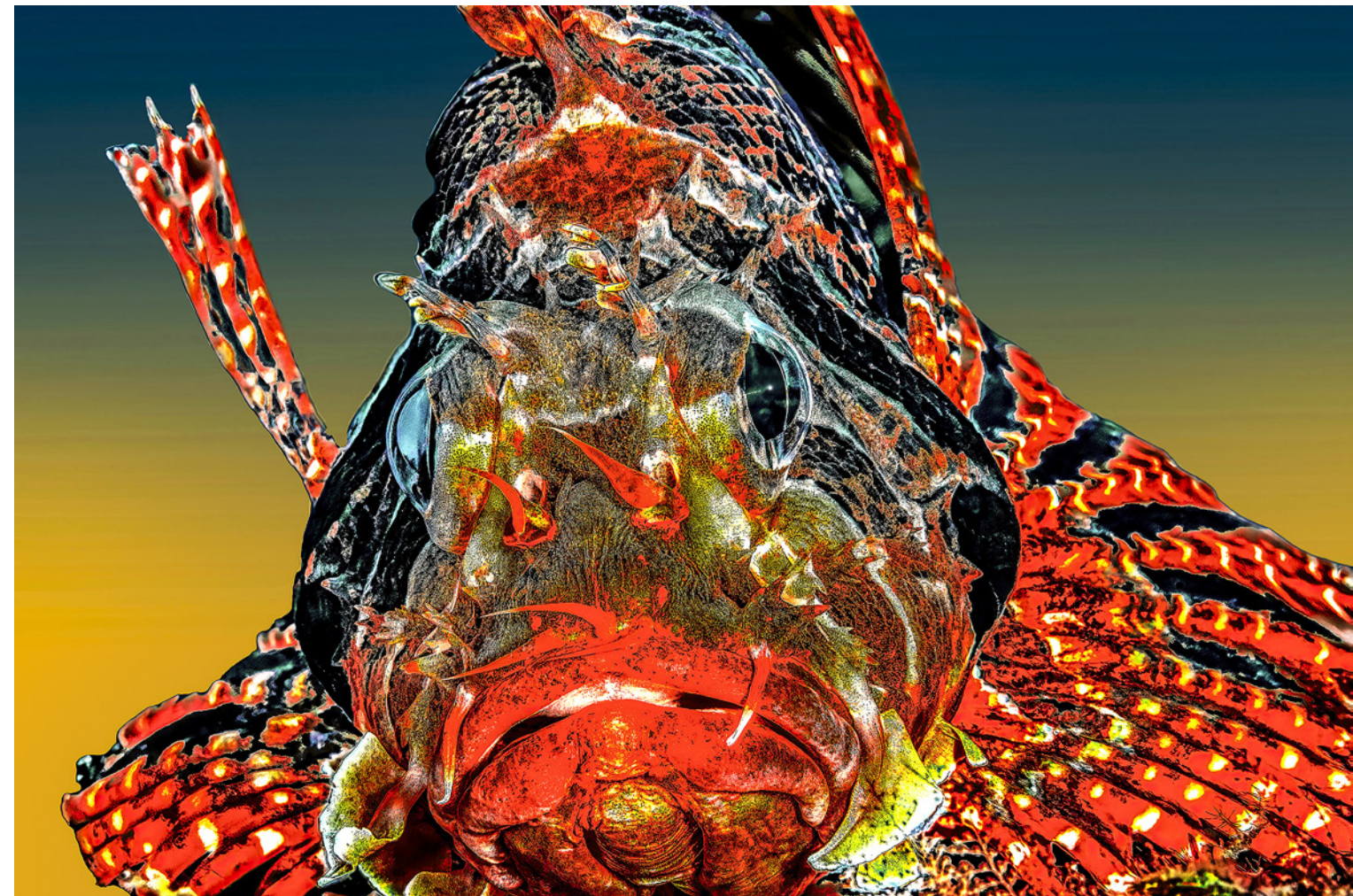
- *What is the biggest technical challenge you face when photographing underwater?*

Since I live in a country that is not close to the sea, I can only dive in the sea occasionally. So for me, the sea is an environment that I have to get used to over and over again, and where I have to be constantly vigilant when taking pictures. And the biggest obstacle for my macro or close-up photography is the strong current.

→ *Anemone shrimp*

↓ *Magic reef*

↘ *Dwarf lionfish*







Long-snouted seahorse



Under the stars



Emperor shimp atop a nudibranch

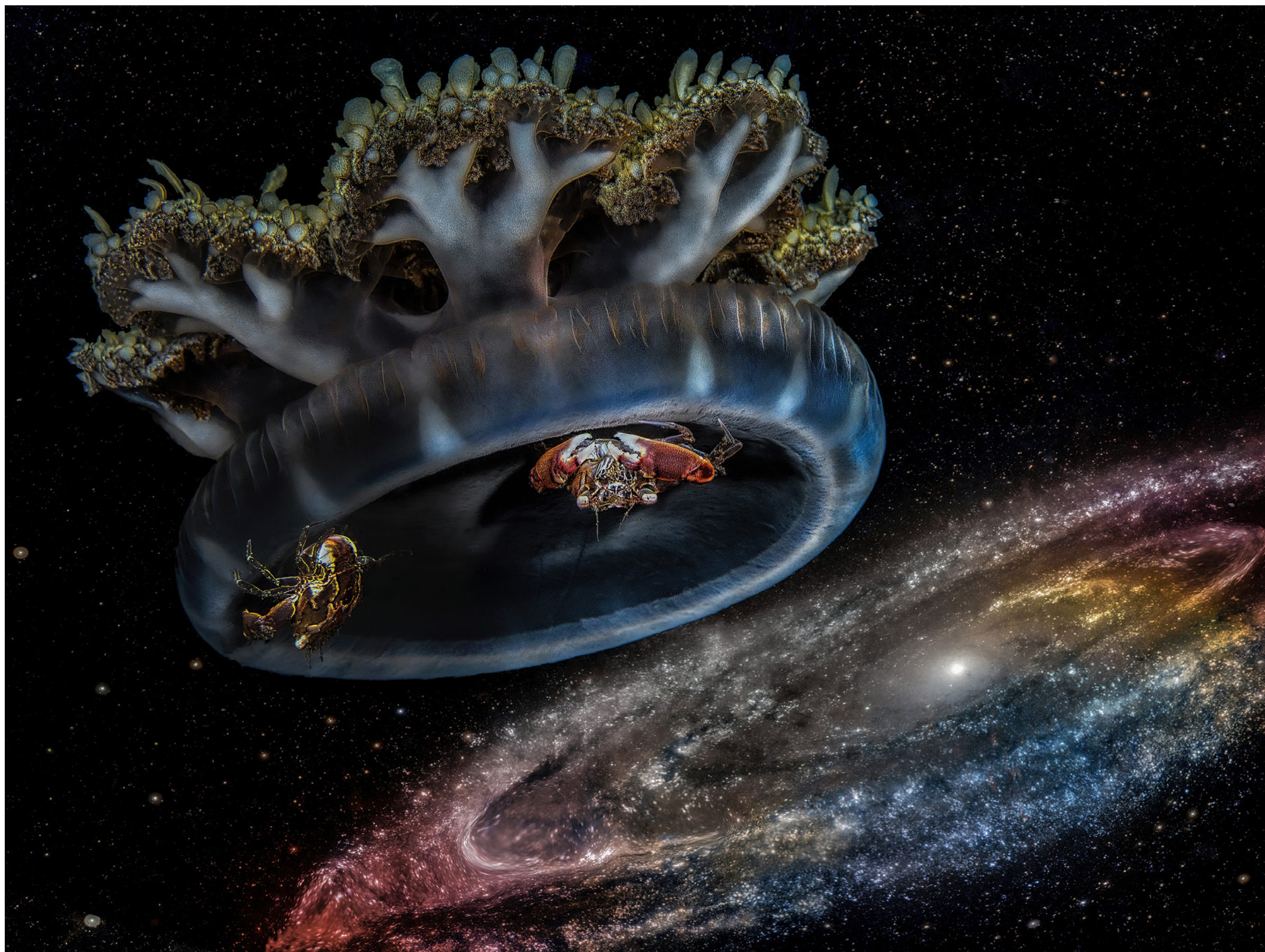


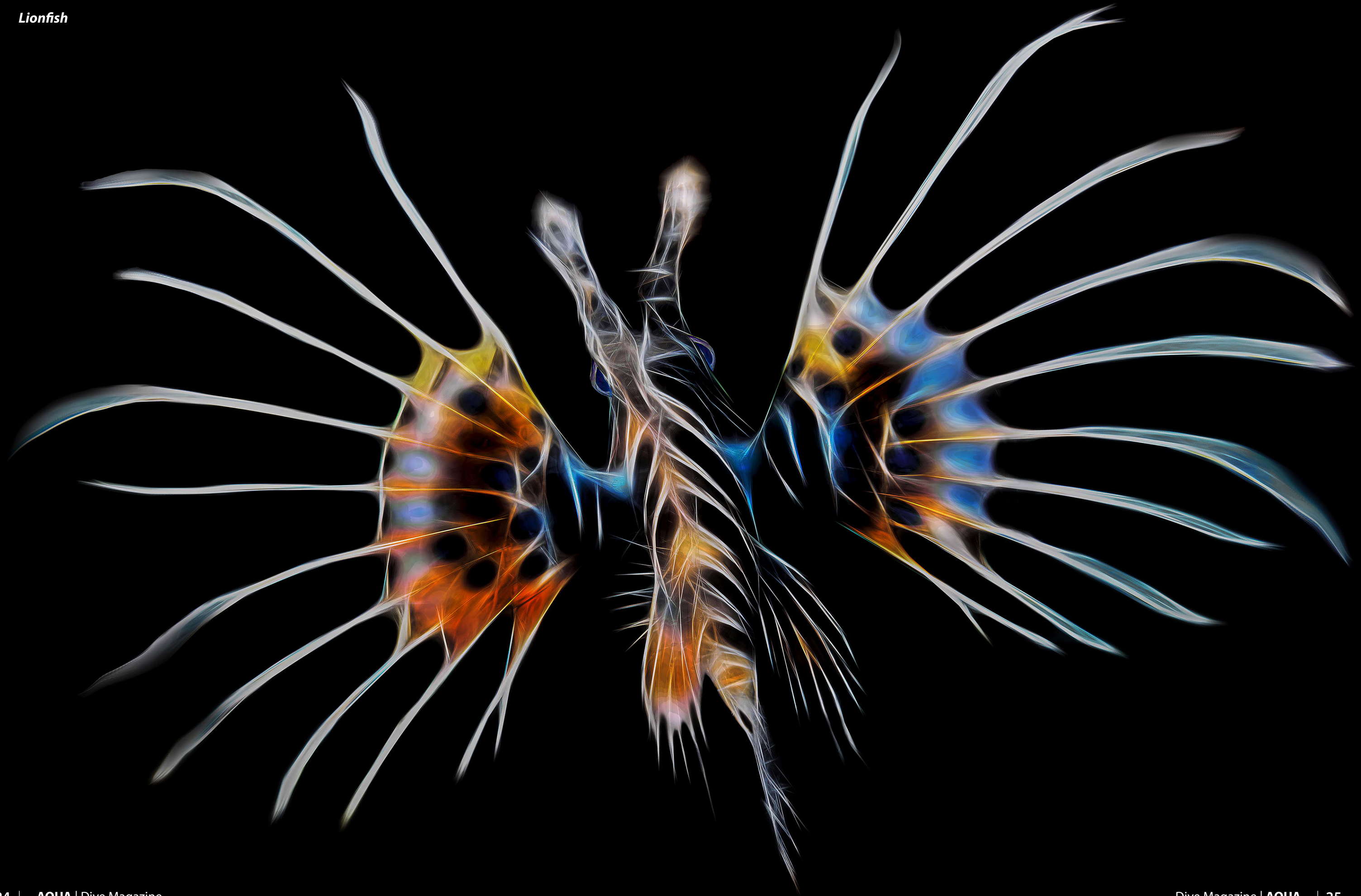
Hermit crab

- *What is the most memorable moment you have captured with your camera underwater?*

I had many interesting moments underwater, but probably the most memorable was when I photographed an upside-down jellyfish (Cassiopea andromeda) in the Lembeh Strait with two small crabs hidden underneath. I immediately realized that the jellyfish looked almost like a UFO and that it would be interesting to make a collage about its journey through space. When I returned, I created a collage called "Andromeda," combining an underwater photo of the Cassiopea andromeda jellyfish with an image of the Andromeda galaxy taken by the Hubble telescope. The resulting collage won a prize in the Ocean Art 2020 competition.

→ **Andromeda**

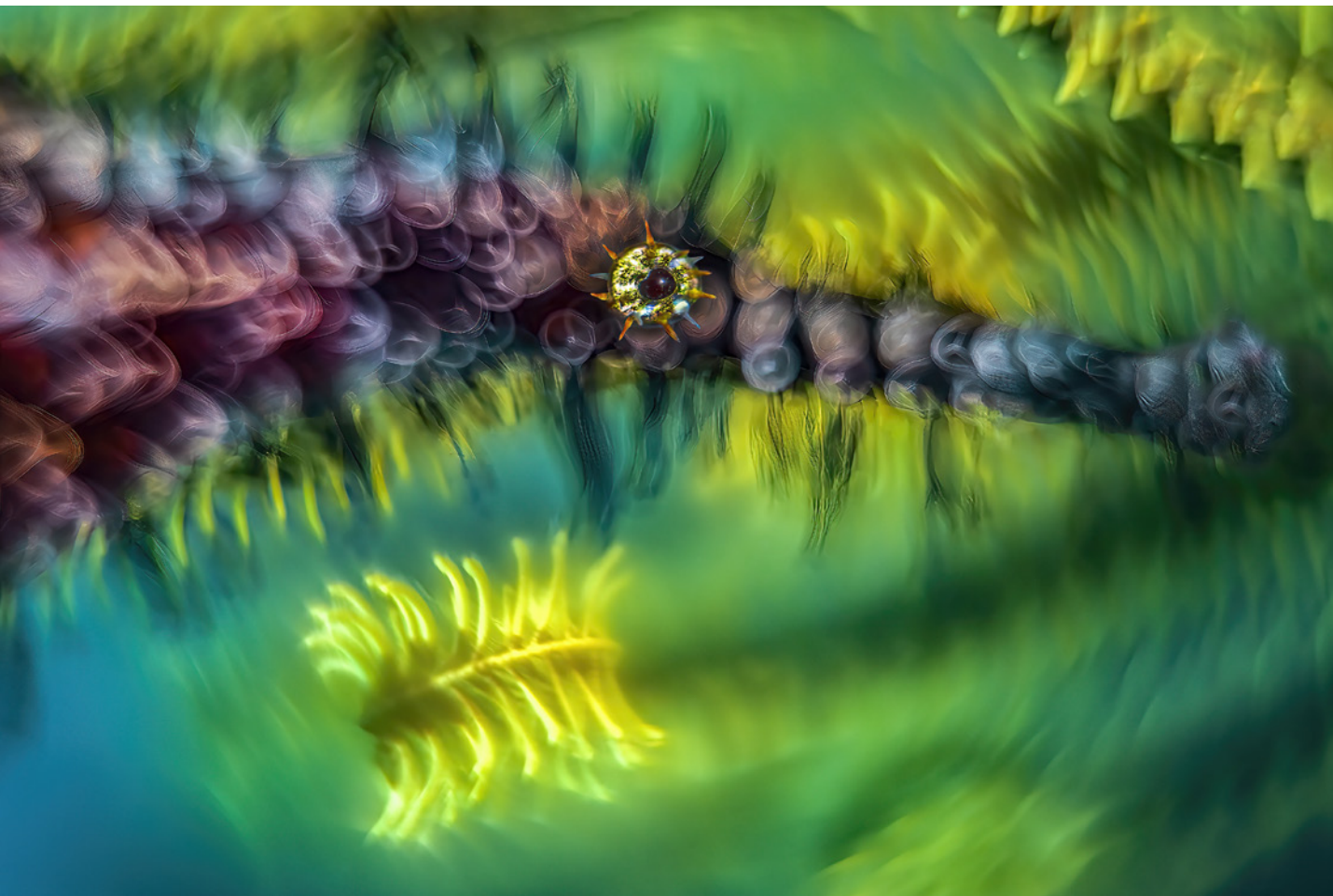




↓ *Ornate ghost pipefish*

- *You've traveled all over the world. What dive site or location has left the greatest impression on you, and why?*

SS Yongala wreck on the Great Barrier Reef (Australia) and the Lembeh Strait (Indonesia). Both dive sites are characterized by an incredible diversity of marine life. Large species at the Yongala wreck and the smallest in the Lembeh Strait.



- *What does winning awards like Ocean Art and participating in international exhibitions mean to you?*

When I succeed in a major international underwater photography competition like Ocean Art, I am just happy that my photos are liked. Of course, my success (and sometimes even failure) inspires me to take better photos and to try and master other techniques of underwater photography.

↓ *Mantis shrimp in wonderland*





*Inside the USAT
Liberty wreck*



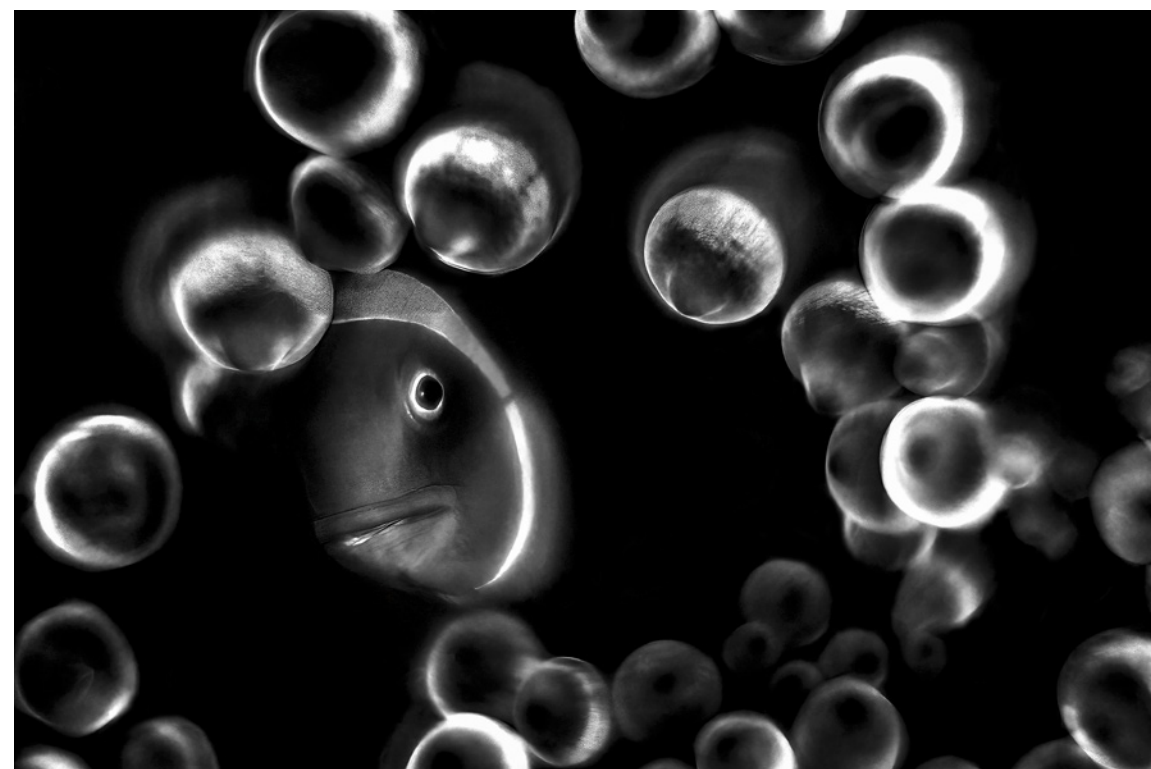
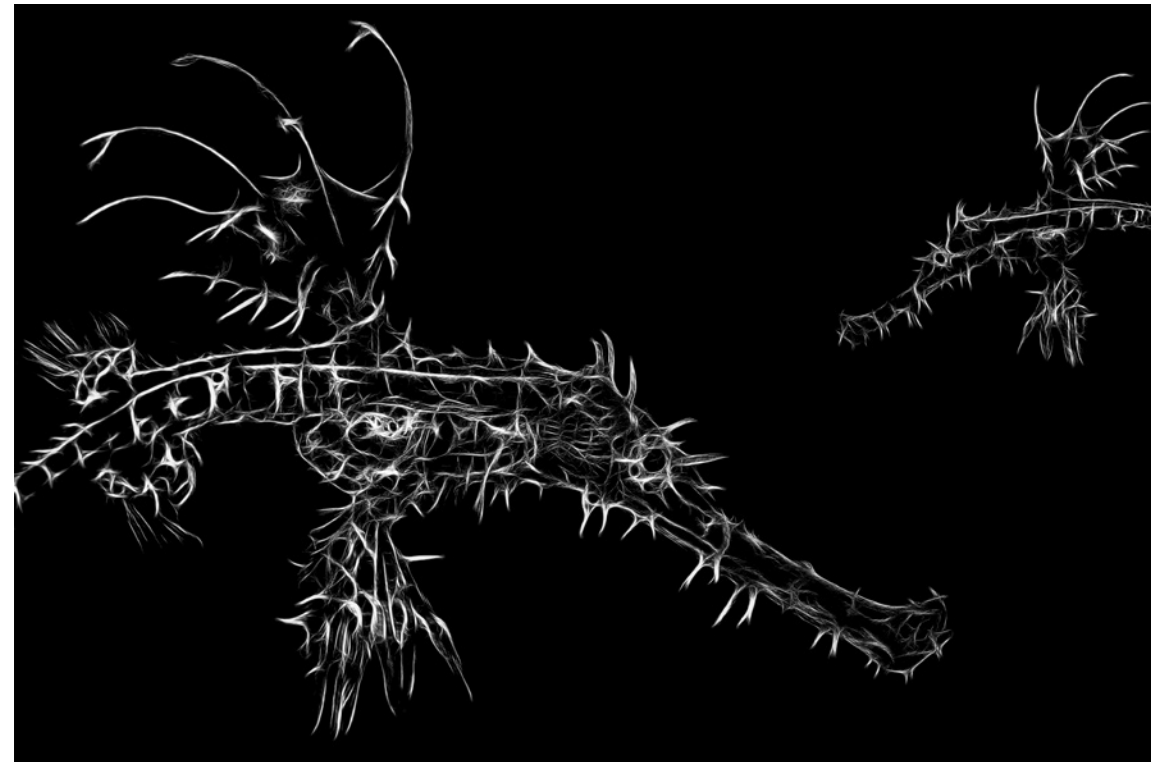
- As a biologist and photographer, what role do you think underwater images play in raising awareness about marine conservation?

The ability to share the wonders of the underwater world with others through photography is also a good example of how images from the “realm of silence” can raise awareness about the preservation of the fragile marine environment. It is often useful to show through photography and film not only the immense beauty of the underwater world, but also the negative impacts of human activities (such as excessive pollution, the effects of increased ocean temperatures, and the killing of some marine species beyond their carrying capacity) to raise awareness about ocean conservation.

➤ *Two Ornate ghost pipefish - fractal*

➤ *A lonely clownfish*

➤ *Close-up of a lionfish*





- Is there a mentor or figure who has influenced your career as a diver, biologist, or photographer?

I'm self-taught in underwater photography, but I've also learned a lot from books like "The Underwater Photographer" by Martin Edge and "The Art of Underwater Photography" by Tobias Friedrich, as well as from photos by numerous underwater photographers. I'm also inspired by the experience and advice of photographers who don't shoot underwater, and I sometimes try some of their techniques directly underwater. One such example was the use of vintage lenses with the front element reversed. Such modified lenses have only been used "above water" and so I decided to use them underwater for the first time (see my original article in the UK's DIVE Magazine Spring 2023).

← *Ascend from the depths*



← **The eyes of
Mantis shrimp**

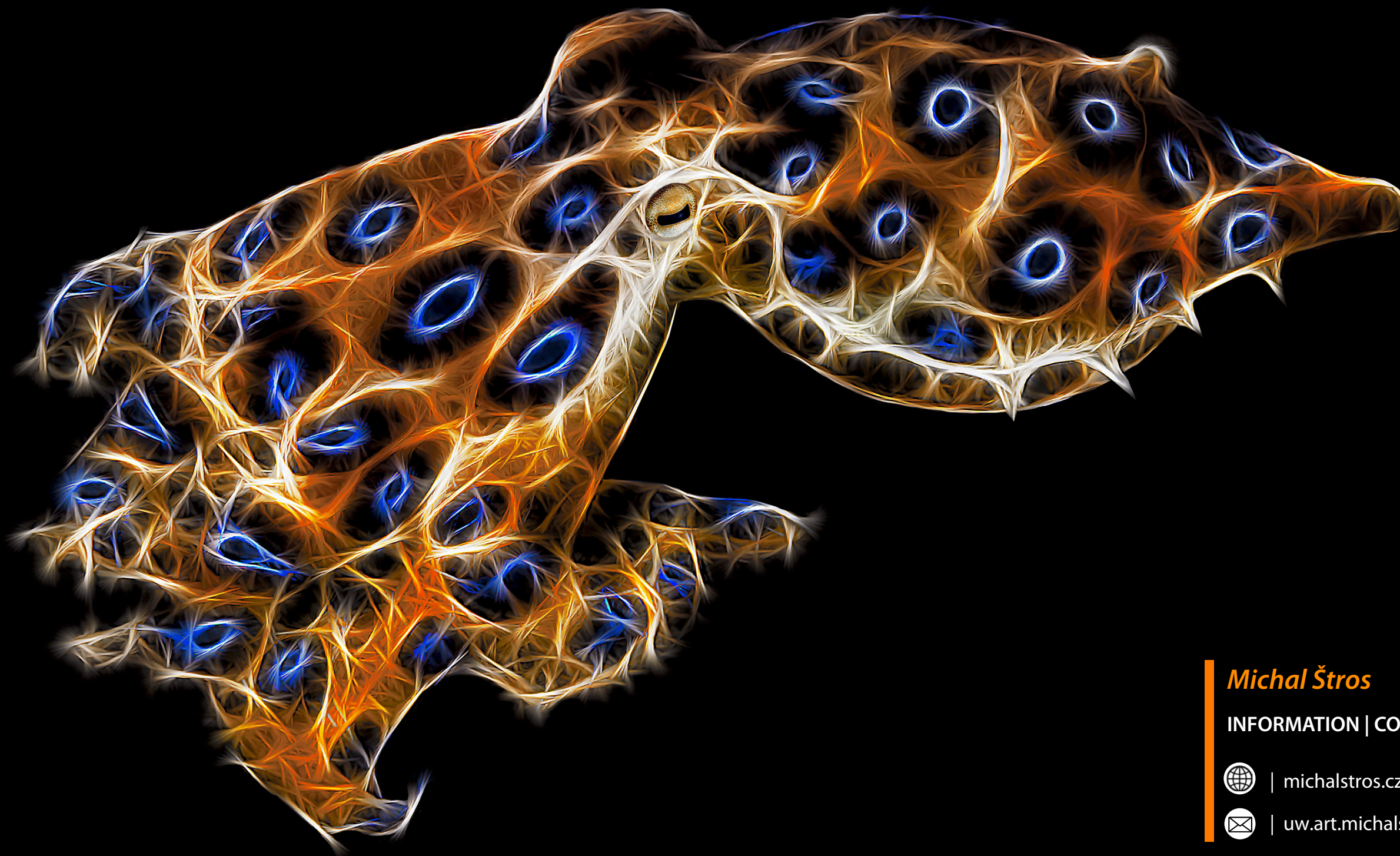
↓ **Our floating
universe**

- What are your goals or projects for the future?

I am currently working on my second book, in which I would like to show both original underwater photos (mainly macro or close-up) and photos that have been creatively manipulated in graphic editors. In my book I also want to briefly present my underwater techniques. The text of the book will be in both English and Czech so that readers in my country can also enjoy the book.



Blue-ringed octopus



Michal Štros

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