

MonacoEcoArt.com

By Maurice Abatti – July 27, 2023

"Planète Mer" photo exhibit unveils the Ocean Underwater World as the best work of art.

While visiting Monaco during summer, you can admire the underwater beauty through a unique photo gallery. **Planète Mer** (Planet Sea) will be displayed **until the 31st August 2023** in the **Galerie des Pêcheurs** in the **shopping arcade** below the **Oceanographic Museum**. The initiative, with the support from the Environment Directorate of the Government of Monaco, was **unveiled in the presence of H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco** on the **16th June 2023**. A set of unprecedented portraits of emblematic marine species parades under the eyes of passers-by, revealing seabed wonders of marine protected areas located in the *Mediterranean Sea*, the *Red Sea*, the *Azores* and the *Indian Ocean*. Thanks to the great ability of **Olivier Jude**, great fan of underwater photography together with *Sylvie Laurent* (diver and model), the underwater life reveals as if it came out from great artist.



Photo >> H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco welcomed by Olivier Jude and Sylvie Laurent during the vernissage of 'Planète Mer' photo exhibition (Galerie de Pêcheurs, 16th June 2023) © Direction de la Communication

It is not the first time that *Olivier Jude* has amazed viewers' eyes with unique nature portraits. Between October and November 2020, the photo exhibit *Profondeurs* set at Maison de France under the high patronage of H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco aroused great interest, sending a strong environmental message of preservation and natural environments with the help of human creativity.



SOUS LE HAUT PATRONAGE DE S.A.S LE PRINCE ALBERT II DE MONACO
ET AVEC LE SOUTIEN DE LA DIRECTION DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT

Olivier Jude et Sylvie Laurent seraient ravis de vous accueillir pour assister à une visite privée de la nouvelle Exposition Phoctopus

Planète Mer

Photo >> Official poster of 'Planète Mer' photo exhibition at the Galerie des Pecheurs from the 3rd of June until the 31st of August 2023 © Gouvernement Princier

Marine creatures express an extraordinary biodiversity, still largely unknown up to 91% species to be classified according to estimates by scientists. Discovering the bizarre shapes and extraordinary colours of living beings that inhabit the sea is at the same time paying tribute to Mother Nature and highlighting its powerful fragility which is inextricably linked to human eco-responsibility. **Planète Mer** aims at triggering a proactive reflection on how can we make a real contribution to the cause of *protecting the seas*. Let's stay connected to the Blue Planet considering it the Origin of Life. ***


Olivier Jude and Sylvie Laurent: underwater photography has never been so “ocean engaging”.


His great passion for ocean ecosystems and its creatures led him to develop a unique approach of naturalistic photography aimed at transmitting the beauty and fragility of the underwater world from which life on Planet Earth derives. The result is a visual storytelling that does not leave us indifferent, making us feel part of the Blue Planet. **Olivier Jude**, native Monegasque with French descents, immediately showed his great love for the sea. In 1989, he joined the *Club d’Exploration Sous-Marine de Monaco* – C.E.S.M.M. that provides adequate equipment for lovers of scuba diving. In 1993, he achieved the CMAS 3 diving license issued by the *World Underwater Federation*, highest international authority in the field. In 2001, his multidimensional creativity allowed him to compose the official hymn of the Federation, currently used in the five continents. In 2004, Olivier Jude’s photography career started with the first awards right away to pay tribute to its uniqueness.



Photo >> Sylvie Laurent and Olivier Jude saying hello while diving in underwater world
© Olivier Jude et Sylvie Laurent

Attending the 7th underwater photography competition of Monaco (Coup de Coeur Award) marks the beginning of the collaboration with **Sylvie Laurent**, CMAS 3 diver of the C.E.S.M.M. who becomes her underwater model. In May 2009, the first PHOCTOPUS exhibit was held in Monaco. In 2011, he was awarded the 2nd *Prix Espoir* at the *European Underwater Image Festival* in Strasbourg while on January 2012 he was given the 2nd Expert Prize at the 14th International *Diving Show in Paris (Porte Versailles)*. In Summer 2012 a second edition of **PHOCTOPUS** showroom entitled “Treasures of Mediterranean Sea” was held at the Oceanographic Museum. Further acknowledgments followed at international competition of underwater photography MIMA (L’Estartit, Costa Brava) and further Monaco International Underwater Photography Challenge editions. In 2015 he attended the Universal Exhibition ‘*Milano 2015*’ at the Pavilion of the Principality of Monaco and in October-November unveiled ‘*MédiTerra*’, a photo exhibit set in Naples by the will of the city Mayor and the local Consul of Monaco. In December 2015, on the mandate of the Sovereign Prince, he attended the record dive challenge at *Satit Eilat* (Israel) within the operation ‘*Silence of the Sharks*’ to raise awareness against the indiscriminate killing of sharks. In April 2016, Olivier Jude got the hyperbaric class 1-B diving certificate by the National Institute of Professional Diving in Marseille. In May 2016, he was given the Artistic Prize 2016 awarded by the International Police Association in Monaco. In June 2016, a new exhibition was opened at the *Yacht Club de Monaco* as part of the *Fête de la Mer*. In December 2018, he was invited by **Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation** to expose at the **Yacht Club de Monaco** as part of the World Co-Chair of the Principality of Monaco for the protection of coral reefs. From the 3rd of June until the 31st August 2023, ‘*Planète Mer*’ (Planet Sea) was organised at the *Galerie des Pêcheurs* in Monaco under the Princely Patronage.

MONACŒCOART®: *Olivier Jude, you have been carrying on an awareness project to boost ocean protection for more than ten years. PHOCTOPUS aims to show the beauty of underwater life from a fresh point of view. What does it mean for you to convey underwater wonders through iconic photos?* 

 **Olivier Jude:** Honestly, I think we still know little of what lies beneath the surface of seas and oceans. At that time, Commander *Jacques-Yves Cousteau* said that only 10% of underwater natural wealth had been explored. And he devoted his life to it, as we all know. Therefore, the role of the underwater photographer is in my opinion to try to show to a wider audience of all generations, particularly to the youngest, what the richness and splendor of that world are. My partner *Sylvie Laurent* and I have no pretensions. I mean, we are neither scientists nor biologists nor «specialists» in the technical sense. We are certainly passionate about underwater life but we practice only artistic photography, trying to give a visual meaning full-of-ideas.

For sure, our work can serve the cause of protecting the underwater environment. Anyway, we are willing to show natural wonders from the point of view of human beings plunged in that pure beauty. This should make visitors think about it, including those who have not had the chance to be in contact with underwater wildlife. The more we approach nature the more we realise its fragility. Taking photos without destroying or damaging it would be then the best practice. I do believe that we are not yet sufficiently aware about the importance of preserving oceans.

This is often the message we try to convey to all those who come to see our underwater pictures, known as “*ambient photos*”. The presence of Sylvie usually serves to give a proportionate scale of the place where we are as well as the size of a given fish or gorgonians. Viewers are often amazed by this comparison since they do not imagine finding so much life and colour palette under the surface of the water and they increase their eco-awareness since we are prone to protect what we consider charming.

Taking 'macro' photos allows you to grasp more details about small creatures, sometimes smaller than a nail, generally impossible to see in their real forms. Thus, we decided to enlarge them fifty times to show at the *Planet Sea Exhibition* on panels, measuring 180 x 120 cm each. I am therefore convinced that underwater photographers' main role is to unveil what is usually hidden. Think about anthias fishes we photographed. They are quite common fishes of only 2 or 3 cm wingspan. Their design and colours show us that nature has already invented everything before us. So, why destroying or damaging the underwater life offered us without any manipulation?



Photo >> Komodo National Park: Green Coral, immersed in a strong current at a depth of 25 metres with fauna who takes advantage of the coral reefs shelter to hunt or protect themselves from predators

© Olivier Jude et Sylvie Laurent

MONACŒCOART®: *Where does the pun PHOCTOPUS come from?* [▲](#)

🔦 **Olivier Jude:** PHOCTOPUS was created by my son Julien in 2009 when he was studying 3D graphic design. Now he lives in Montreal (Canada), but he still loves octopus that are considered one of the smartest and most fascinating animals ever. Knowing my passion for photography, the contraction of PHOTO and OCTOPUS was born in his mind as well as the corresponding logo where the octopus tentacle shapes the letter "P".



Photo >> Pygmy Seahorse shot in Indonesia, depth 30 metres within the specific gorgon that houses this creature, smaller than a nail, perfectly camouflaged - © Olivier Jude et Sylvie Laurent

MONACŒCOART®: *What do you consider decisive in shooting underwater?* 🏠

📸 **Olivier Jude:** Unlike a «land» photographer, divers face a “hostile” environment. The water, namely the underwater world, is not the common dimension for human beings. A diving photo session cannot last more than 45 minutes since the oxygen needed to breathe is not infinite and you have to get used to. We must therefore first consider our safety before defining our photo objectives. Most of the time, weather influences shootings. Nature leads! We must be aware of it without focusing only on sports physical performance. Being accepted by the natural environment is prior, then creativeness arises accordingly on the basis of your experience.

What we consider unique while taking photos is certainly the rarity of the species encountered, or simply the implementation of an underwater vision where colours will triumph with the graphics of what is before us. Nothing is predefined. It is essential to provide the audience with a precise photographic profile in order to make viewers sharing the same point of view of who is behind the lens. We have always refused to use photo editing programs except for a soft cleaning post-processing to keep authenticity.



Photo >> April 2021: Amazing Red gorgonians in the Red Sea, depth 33 metres, off Zabargad - the red colours contrast with the blue and the clarity of the waters while a multitude of reef fish find refuge in this pristine ecosystem
© Olivier Jude et Sylvie Laurent

MONACŒCOART®: Your photo series are always the result of something you have experienced personally, in different places of the world, including the seabed of Monaco part of two marine protected areas. Do you have an anecdote or a special encounter with a sea creature that you will never forget? [▲](#)

🗨️ **Olivier Jude:** We are often told that the Mediterranean is heavily polluted due to anthropogenic impacts that destroyed biodiversity more than in the Red Sea or the Indian Ocean. However, we must consider that Mare Nostrum is smaller than the others so that some endemic species have evolved and adapted. Thus, you can find anthias 'dancing' in Port Hercules waters as well as pretty good size tunas swimming in front of Monte-Carlo Casino, just 30 meters below the sea surface. We have witnessed all this. At *Planète Mer* Exhibition you could also find a *Flabellina*, a small slug of 2cm long belonging to the *Nudibranchs* Family who lives in seabed at 20 metres depth.

This dragon-shaped creature shows off fantastic colours. The photo was taken in summer 2020 near Ustica island (Sicily). Mediterranean Gorgonians still offer amazing red or yellow colours at 40 metres depth where you can find colder waters. In April 2021, we were lucky enough to find Red Sea seabed quieter than usual diminishing the number of underwater tourists. We could then enjoy an abundance of creatures including an iconic Napoleon fish (*Cheilinus undulatus*) of huge dimensions. But Mediterranean represents for me my roots.



Photo >> April 2021: A huge Napoleon fish pictured in the Red Sea near Sharm El Cheikh, a dozen meters deep after an unexpected meeting - an underwater plateau immersed in crystal clear waters where marine life lives quietly for the reduced human presence - © Olivier Jude et Sylvie Laurent

MONACŒCOART®: *Jacques Yves Cousteau, said: «The sea, once it has cast its spell on you, holds you in its net of wonder forever». Do you share this idea? If so, what indelible message has the ocean left in you? How do you feel when you dive into a biodiversity-rich seabed? 🏠*

🏠 **Olivier Jude:** I fully agree with *Commander Cousteau* who influenced me from an early age for his willingness to discover the underwater world. When I was very young, my parents often took me to the *Oceanographic Museum of Monaco*. I consider it as the Temple of the Sea. Sylvie, my partner, and I are fond of cult documentary films like: «*L'Odyssée de la Calypso du Commandant Cousteau*». I followed the whole storytelling of Calypso, so I was very sad when I knew that that mythical ship could not come back to Monaco. Every time I fly from Nice to the North, I immediately miss the Mediterranean that represents the main source of wellbeing and artistic creativity. We love the Sea, we often go on a boat and diving to enjoy the splendours of our underwater explorations.



Photo >> August 2022: Artificial Reef immersed in the Marine Protected Area of Monaco, Larvotto Reserve, depth 30 metres - the Monegasque reefs began to be colonised by «sea roses» - the protection of our environment begins with the preservation of the flora and animal concretions that «decorate» the shelters of the local fauna showing its most colourful livery - © Olivier Jude et Sylvie Laurent

MONACŒCOART®: *What kind of physical training and equipment are necessary to face the diving like the ones you realise? [▲](#)*

🗣️ **Olivier Jude:** I said in the introduction of this interview, what we care first is safety besides the underwater photography. Sylvie and I have been diving for fourteen years and we work, travel together to discover the underwater funds. Nowadays, we do not need to talk before the diving thanks to a series of signs like proper codes which facilitate our communication under water.

Our excellent results come from healthy life (no alcohol, no excesses). As professional divers, every six months, we are tested by a hyperbaric doctor. At present, diving is considered as both a sports activity and an extreme sport. People who think that diving in the Mediterranean Sea is cooler are wrong. The Mediterranean divers (certainly the best ones) are trained according to the rules of *Confédération Mondiale des Activités Subaquatiques*, CMAS, created by *Commander Cousteau* in 1960 in Monaco, following his idea to gather all the world divers.

Sylvie and I are both certified Nitrox divers, after passing examination and training, and we use Nitrox (i.e.: with enriched air beyond 20% of classic oxygen) for our decompression. Thanks to a considerable scientific progress, our diving is deeper, longer, safer and in the beginning less tiring. In scuba diving training, as all the other sports, is very important to maintain a healthy condition.

As far as the equipment is concerned, our diving material is very classic (everybody can buy it in any specific shop) apart from the pressure regulators and the Nitrox blocks. Because of the cold water, we need different diving suits depending on the sea and the ocean we are going to explore.

The photographic material has changed after twenty years of practice and the actual professional equipment is very different and need a lot of training. Nevertheless, our passion and adrenaline help us to conquer the best underwater pictures.



Photo >> August 2020: Sage bank, at a depth of 20 metres, swimming over Posidonia meadows in Ustica, Sicily - this Marine Protected Area was nicknamed «The Black Pearl» by Commander Cousteau during one of his expeditions - it represents a perfect coexistence of fauna and flora encouraging the survival of Mediterranean endemic species
© Olivier Jude et Sylvie Laurent

MONACŒCOART®: *What kind of attitude should a human being adopt in order to get close to the marine creatures and the coral bottoms?* ▲

👤 **Olivier Jude:** One word only : RESPECT. In my opinion we must feel humble in front of the underwater and coral richness. I am not a scientist but my friends and biologists from the *Centre Scientifique de Monaco* state that the coral grows less than one centimetre each year. When we are in the Red Sea, South Egypt, near *Zabargad*, we can see coral walls 20 metres high and then you realize that it took thousands of years for the corals to build it. For the exhibition "*Planète Mer*" Sylvie is near the wall to make people understand the huge size. It is amazing to see such a marine life and what the nature offers us, a privilege that we must respect and defend.

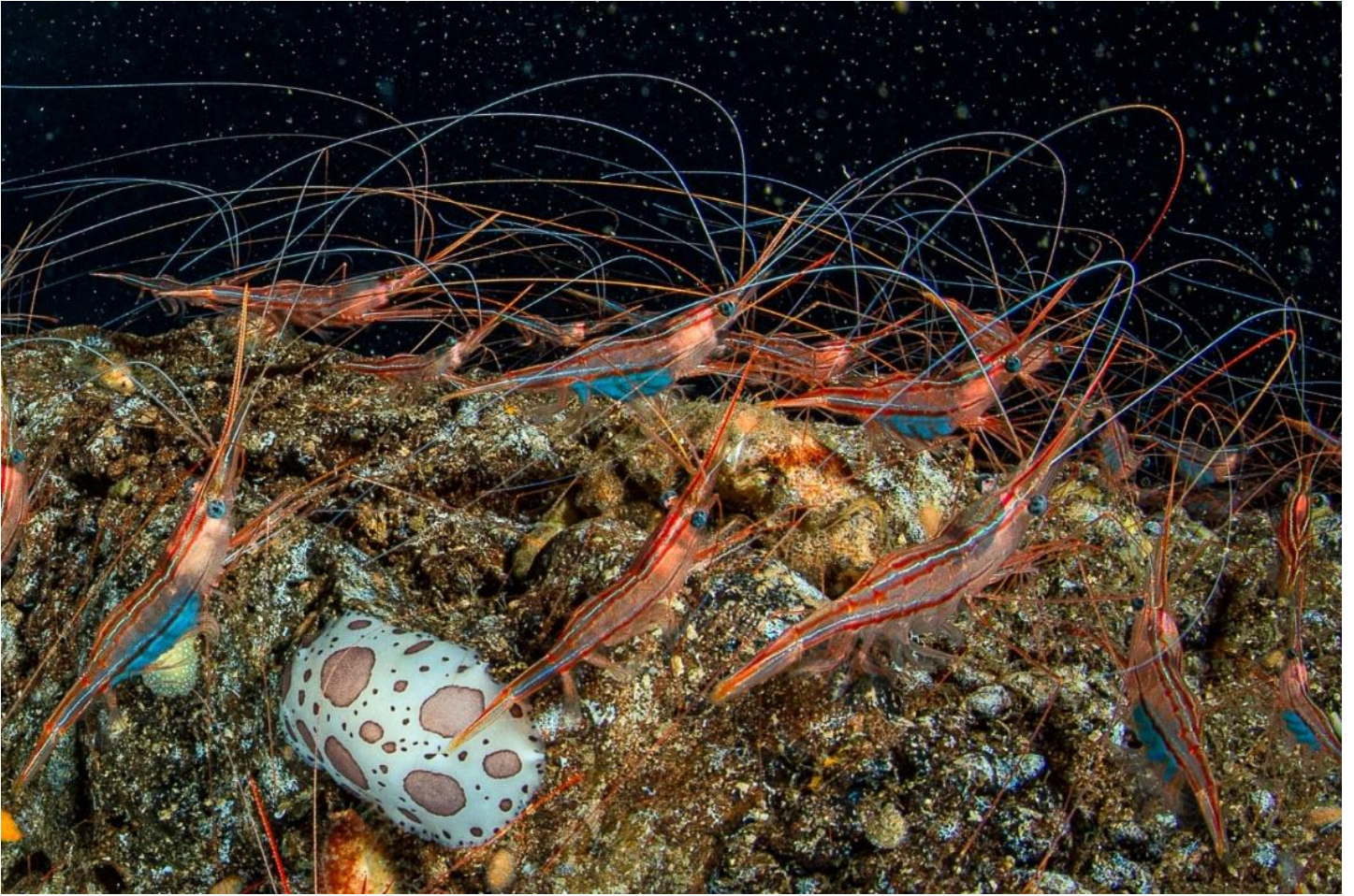


Photo >> August 2020: Cave shrimps in the Mediterranean, photo taken in complete darkness inside an underwater cave in Ustica, an island classified as Marine Protected Area - the underwater scenery is volcanic, consisting of black lava that still shows significant seismic activity -, the light of the diving lamp allows to seize the moment in a split second before the creatures hide - the photo was awarded the Prix Macro at the Festival d'Orléans in November 2021 and it was presented at the International Diving Show, held in April 2022 in Bologna - © Olivier Jude et Sylvie Laurent

MONACŒCOART®: *First Exposition at the Salle the Princes within the Oceanographic Museum in 2012. Then many other locations around the world, like Naples in 2015 and Moscow in 2019. In 2020, you exhibited at the Maison de France in Monaco with the exhibition “Profondeurs” under the High Patronage of the Sovereign Prince. What feelings have been appreciated by H.S.H Prince Albert II de Monaco? [👑](#)*

👑 **Olivier Jude:** We hope to be “appreciated” by H.S.H. Prince Albert II de Monaco, but we are aware that without His support, His help and encouragement to defend the underwater environment, which we are very happy to promote, we will not be here today. We will be happy to hear that our work can help promoting the protection of our underwater heritage.



Photo >> Avril 2021 : April 2021: Soft corals (alcyonic types) flourishing on the wreck of the Carnatic in the Red Sea - the remains of this ship have lie on the seabed at a depth of 30 metres for almost a century offering shelter for thousand of species - © Olivier Jude et Sylvie Laurent

MONACŒCOART®: *Where does the latest exhibition come from?* [🏠](#)

👤 **Olivier Jude:** The *Direction de l'Environnement* of the Principality gave us the idea for our exhibition at the *Galerie des Pêcheurs* and we have been very happy and proud of this choice. The Principality of Monaco, where I was born, is a small State but surely nowadays it represents a large commitment for the safeguard of the Seas and Oceans. We have just followed the high underwater environment values of our State. *Yacht Club de Monaco* and other numerous partners have been following our journey for many years and these goodwill synergies have helped us with our work of underwater photography.



Photo >> August 2022: Komodo National Park, depth 15 metres - Fire Coral looking like a wheat field, home to a diverse and varied fauna, endemic to the Indian Ocean - © Olivier Jude et Sylvie Laurent

MONACŒCOART®: *What are the future projects?* [▲](#)

🗨️ **Olivier Jude:** Well...we have just come back from the Egades Islands, a protected area in Sicily, Italy. Simply marvellous, captivating, both on and under water surface: a small terrestrial paradise. Before we had been in *Raja Ampat* Arcipelagus in India after fourteen days of navigation. Next November we are going to leave for the Red Sea for new underwater pictures. So, we will have new collections of images to enrich our data base already very beautiful. What we are very fond of is this constant search for an artistic dimension at the service of environment. Then we will be looking for a new local or international location to exhibit. Once it will be fixed, we will announce it without reserve.

To know more about Olivier Jude and Sylvie Laurant please visit: [Phoctopus](#)