

Long-awaited Ocean Photography Awards and Female Fifty Fathoms winners revealed

In June 2021, Blancpain announced its partnership with *Oceanographic Magazine* and its Ocean Photography Awards (OPA). To mark the occasion, the Manufacture de Haute Horlogerie created the special Female Fifty Fathoms (FFF) Award to encourage more women to share their vision of the oceans. The competition organisers and Blancpain revealed the winners at an event held at the Brand's London Boutique on Thursday 16 September. The event also marked the launch of a pop-up exhibition, which will run until 20 October at 11 Bond Street. In parallel, on 18 September, an open-air gallery will be set up along the Thames (The Queen's Walk) to present the winning photographs to the general public with the aim of raising awareness of the beauty of the oceans.

The partnership between Blancpain and the OPA competition is part of the Blancpain Ocean Commitment, which brings together all of the Brand's actions in favour of the oceans. Blancpain conducts numerous initiatives in favour of ocean exploration and preservation through this programme, which have already led to concrete results, notably by contributing to extending the surface of marine protected areas throughout the world by more than four million additional square kilometres. Blancpain is convinced that such results could not be achieved without collective engagement. It is thus indispensable to raise awareness of the ocean's beauty and vulnerability. Underwater photography is one of the best ways to achieve this goal. The Ocean Photography Awards, whose mission is to reveal the beauty of the oceans – as well as the many dangers they face –, is an ideal partner in this respect and represents a continuation of the photographic and artistic projects previously initiated by Blancpain. One of the most telling examples is the annual *Edition Fifty Fathoms* publication (2008-2020), which aimed to explore the multiple facets of the underwater world through a camera lens while offering underwater photographers a platform for expression and communication.

The 2021 edition of the OPA met with strong interest from the ocean community, resulting in over 3,000 entries to the competition. The deliberation process for the competition's six traditional categories, as well as the overall Ocean Photographer of the Year™ 2021 award, was conducted by a Jury composed of, among others, members of the SeaLegacy collective – the ocean conservation association in support of which the OPA are organised –, as well as specialist photographers and videographers.

The competition's overall prize was awarded to talented Australia-based photographer, Aimee Jan, who took a shot that is as beautiful as it is touching of a green turtle in a school of glass fish.

In addition to the usual awards, this year's edition of the OPA chose a photographer in a new category, entitled the "Female Fifty Fathoms Award" (FFF), in which competing photographers were all pre-nominated by someone for whom they are an inspiration, and were carefully evaluated by the Jury, as well as by Blancpain – whose President & CEO, Marc A. Hayek, has himself become an underwater photographer through his longstanding passion for the oceans.

Out of more than 100 nominations, 12 finalists were shortlisted and invited to submit a portfolio of ten ocean shots to showcase their work as a whole. The portfolio was the main judging element for the artists, but close attention was also paid to their achievements along with their commitment and ability to inspire others to take action on behalf of the oceans.

The FFF award was won by Renee Capozzola, an American photographer and biology teacher who takes a special interest in marine conservation. She believes that underwater photography is a powerful way to bring to light the magical world that lies beneath the water, and her work often focuses on turtles and sharks. "Sharky Sunset", one of the photos in her portfolio that particularly appealed to the Jury and Blancpain, depicts both sky and ocean dominated by a blacktip reef shark (*Carcharhinus melanopterus*) – representing a species whose abundance is a sign of a healthy marine ecosystem.

As a reward, Renee Capozzola was presented with the first example of a new model from Blancpain's Fifty Fathoms collection. The blue watch bears the serial number 1 and its case is engraved with the words "FFF Award 2021".

Introduced by Blancpain in 1953, the Fifty Fathoms is the world's first modern diver's watch. It was created by Jean-Jacques Fiechter, then co-CEO of the company and an avid diver. With a particular admiration for women divers because of their ability to outperform men in terms of immersion time, Fiechter was aware of the need for a reliable timekeeping instrument for exploring the underwater world.

Links and information:

- www.oceanphotographyawards.com, to view all the winning and finalist photos, as well as the names of the competition winners and the members of the Jury.
- www.blancpain-ocean-commitment.com, to find out more about the Blancpain Ocean Commitment.
- www.blancpain.com/fr/collection-fifty-fathoms, to explore the Fifty Fathoms collection.