

MY BUDDY THE 3D VIDEOGRAPHER

FEATURE **PATRICK VAN HOESERLANDE**

Diving is a hobby with various possibilities. There are plenty of good incentives to take your gear and get underwater. In this new series titled 'My buddy', I'm in search of diving enthusiasts who spend their limited time underwater for a special and specific reason.





Photo by Filip Staes – The Buddies



Photo by Filip Staes

“My buddy” for today, Ben van Asselt, combines underwater filming with his passion for wreck diving. One would expect that we would meet somewhere near a slipway. I thought perhaps a rendezvous in a small harbour with a sea view, but instead we met on the almost empty parking lot of the Put van Ekeren (see June’s issue for the first ‘My Buddy’ article of the series with more information about this lake). Together we were to look for the underwater statue, ‘The Buddies’ to make a short 3D film of it. So, what is the connection between our dive in fresh water and Ben’s dives in the North Sea?

I’m the first one to arrive at our meeting point. This was not a lucky shot because I had planned to arrive early to get the chance to prepare my material before Ben showed up. It is much easier to interview someone and take photos when you don’t have to prepare your diving equipment. After he arrived, I took advantage of my extra time to take a closer look into his dive box. In this neatly arranged box I discovered a big camera, a heavy video light and all sorts of items that come in handy for wreck diving in the rough North Sea. The size of his fins indicated a slow diver, which for me is great!!

Why are we going to film ‘The Buddies’ in 3D? I have to admit that the name of the artwork fits perfectly with the title of this series of articles, but that is not the reason. Modelling objects by creating a three-dimensional video makes

research without being underwater possible. By means of 3D video, maritime archaeologists can investigate wrecks without worrying about air consumption and decompression stops. They don’t even have to know how to dive. For diver-scientists this approach is nothing to get excited about, but for the less water loving people, it’s a welcome alternative. An additional advantage is that the wreck itself will be not touched, nor damaged.

Such a model can be viewed from all sides and everything can be neatly measured in the dry and safe environment of an office. The better the cameraman masters the technique of 3D filming, the more efficient a video team can work at depth. My buddy Ben, has had the idea to make cinematographic 3D models of all the statues in the lake. Filming the statues serves as practice for the bigger task to later model wrecks in the sea.

This kind of underwater filming differs a bit from normal procedures. Of course you have to film the object from all sides, but unlike other video work, you have to expose the object to light abundantly. After all, the aim is not to record the perfect shot but make sharp images of all the details.

The real work obviously follows after the underwater session. Even more so than when producing a film, the biggest part of the work is done behind a computer screen in a dry environment. Specialised software takes

many frames from the raw film footage and combines these with pure calculating power to an initial coarse 3D model. The videographer manually corrects the virtual representation, after which the computer refines the model in a second calculation session. Again, manual correction and automated refining. This cycle continues until the levels of detail are sufficient for the purpose of the model.

I’m not interested in the dry stuff however, because we were dressed up for the wet part of the job. While Ben handled the camera, I was to take care of illuminating the statue for him. After a quick buddy check, we started our slow but progressive search for the statue while checking our video equipment was properly sealed.

We collided with the three-headed statue on our first attempt – the statue is a group of three heads looking up symbolising a disabled diver with two buddies.

The visibility was ideal. Carefully circling around the artwork, we stripped the pedestal of moss and other vegetation. This flora, unlike the life fixed on the statue, was a figurant that would only get in the way. We kept our movements short and slow as to not stir up any silt. The bright video light would light up dust particles like snowflakes in head lights. Silt would add a long break to our dive and we needed to avoid that.

After the cleaning job, we swam away from the statue to manoeuvre ourselves in our starting position. From there we carefully approached the statue side by side. The camera rolled while Ben circled the heads in a very controlled manner, and I mirrored his movements from 20 centimetres at his side. I know from my previous dives that my feet are slightly positively buoyant and so it turned out to be a very concentrated 6 minute session of underwater ballet, constantly fighting against my fins.

After the first take, we went back to our starting point for the second round of the statue. This time I had to illuminate from the top so that the shadows would become smaller and the details more visible. It was a ‘quicker tour’ of just 3 minutes.

Having successfully completed our assignment, we got to spend the rest of our air on enjoying the underwater life around us. The dive was just as I like them: at ease. A little more than an hour after our initial immersion, we surfaced.

While we put our equipment away, we debriefed and talked about old and new projects. Ben informed me of a new project in the pipeline, but of which he could not yet disclose anything. There are definitely some exciting times ahead.

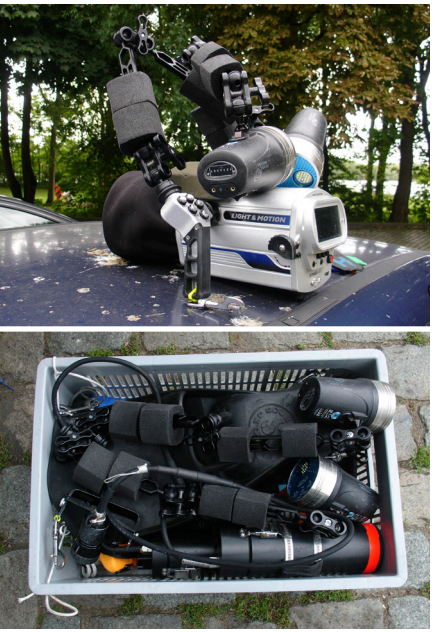
Thank you Ben for getting me acquainted with three-dimensional underwater filming. This

was just one of the many facets of our hobby that I had planned to discover.

To see the 3D result from our dive, go to: <https://sketchfab.com/benvanasselt>

Do you know anyone who has a unique dive mission and wants to be my buddy on one of these dives? Or are you such a diver?

Then please get in touch with me by email: patrick.vanhoeserlande@nelos.be.



Diver: Ben van Asselt
First Dive: 2008
Total Dives: 760
Club: Amphora
Certification: 3 Star Diver
Specialties:

- GUE Tech I
- GUE DPV
- GUE 3D

Equipment: Light and Motion Stingray camera housing and video lights.
Favourite Dive Site Local Waters: ‘Westhinder’ wreck in the North Sea.
Favourite Dive Site Abroad: Rosarol, Croatia
Most Spectacular Dive: A dive on a wreck with lots of fish in Croatia. We recuperated all kinds of diving equipment (stages/regulators) and re-oriented the entire wreck. A German diver had tried it a year ago, but had not succeed.