

Kanchi — Underwater

by Ryuijie



Published in *LensWork Extended* #76



Commentary

Tradition dictates that photographs are rectangles — with the few exceptions being the occasional square. Quadrilaterals rule the photographic world. I've always found this odd, especially because a lens casts a round image. Why isn't the native format for photographs a round shape? I can only speculate, but I suspect it is because it is so difficult to cut a piece of paper perfectly round — and so easy to trim in straight lines. Quadrilaterals rule.

That doesn't make the quadrilateral the best choice, only the *easy* one.

Ryuijie pushes the boundaries even further. He doesn't stop at round, nor oval, but pushes all the way to *irregular* edges. And why not? The world is not square. In fact, there are no straight lines to be found in nature at all! We live in a wiggly world and nowhere is that more true than in water. And with no creature is that more true than with fish! Doesn't it make perfect sense that a portfolio of fish and underwater photographs would be wiggly, too?

But it's not just the edges of this portfolio that defy convention. I'm not sure if it is the irregular shape or an irregular lens, but this image seems bubbly to me. Perhaps it was made with a so-called "fisheye" lens — how appropriate! Perhaps it is just an optical illusion. Either way, it visually appears that we are looking into (or out of) a bubble, surrounded by bubbles, immersed in bubbles, in a bubbly world. How perfect for this content!

Ryuijie makes platinum/palladium prints. I suspect that this irregular shape was created in the paper coating process, somehow. By applying sensitive emulsion to his paper so that only this area was sensitized, his print assumes this irregular shape. I've done a similar thing with digital techniques and image masks. In essence, I'm proposing that a non-quadrilateral image shape is not at all the complicated affair that it was in the earlier days of photographic technology. The only limitation to producing such work is the mental one that restricts you to the habits of thinking that prevent you from breaking (forgive me for the obvious metaphor) out of the box.

Here in the early years of the 21st century, we can produce almost anything we can imagine. Techniques are not the limitation; *thinking* is. For many, the greatest challenge in the creative art life are not the questions about logistics, but rather the issues of letting go of our photographic inheritance. I often talk about taking photographs out of the frame and off the wall. I meet with resistance and excuses why this should not be done. Mental barriers. When photography is used as an art medium, isn't it perfectly appropriate to bend it like an art medium and push it into whatever form and format we need and that we can? Even irregular shaped bubbles!