



One diver's salvation through art and the sea: you might know her better as a regular contributor and DIVER cover girl, but **JADE HOKSBERGEN's** abiding passion is for mixing her love of the ocean with painting



**EXPRESSION THROUGH ART** has always played a vital role in my life and my wellbeing. I started painting from the age of 14 after being given a diagnosis that would change my life forever.

My affair with painting quickly blossomed when my artistic ambitions were recognised and encouraged by my father. Painting soon became something I engaged in on a daily basis, often several times a day. It was as important to me as breathing and, in strange ways, it has kept me alive and going.

I slowly learnt that by putting paint-brush to canvas, I could feel temporary relief from the internal demons I faced. Painting felt to me like a necessity, rather than a hobby, and I painted so prolifically that it felt as though it defined my very existence for a while.

It has allowed, and still allows me to process emotions I struggle to articulate in words. I guess you could say that I write my biography best with a brush.

**MY BODY OF WORK** can be broken down into two series: the ANOX (2009-2012) series, and OCEAN series (2013-2020).

The ANOX series is the product of an enormous creative urge that began after the diagnosis made it clear that I was treading on a thin line separating life and death. Each ANOX painting is a composition comprising these lines.

Paintings in this series are not only characterised by the use of clean bold lines but also bold colours and rigid geometrical shapes.

They reflect a past version of myself that was not only chasing an ungraspable sense of control in life but operating in a deadly-narrow comfort zone.

Growing up in the Philippines allowed for weekly visits to the sea, and I was introduced to scuba-diving at the age of 9.

This exposure to the underwater world would start directly influencing my art from 2013 on, as I began a new series of work: OCEAN.

This saw clean, bold lines replaced by messy ones, mirroring an evolving self that was more relaxed, one no longer confined inside a rigid mind-prison.

This series is the product of an evolving self, one more accepting that much of life is beyond our control.

Rather than the use of exclusively bold colours, the OCEAN series uses a more nuanced palette, symbolising life's uncertainty and the idea that, rather than being absolute, many things in life fall under a spectrum.

The OCEAN series reveals an appreciation for lifeforms under water, and exhibits the spontaneity and freedom that comes with embracing this uncertainty.

It draws influence from life in the ocean, where I've often felt most free. Diving transports me to the same place painting does, a place of tremendous healing and relief. It's a place where destructive tendencies are hushed.

By processing my emotions through art, abstruse creatures are born, and destructive thoughts are purged. I keep my head above the water by painting what might lurk below.

I've been told that the subjects of my paintings resemble the kind of fish found in the deepest reaches of the oceans, with their jagged teeth, filamented features, elongated spines and light-producing lures.

I'm not sure how that came to be, because I usually photograph life firmly within recreational-diving limits, with the occasional frogfish being the most fearsome-looking creature encountered.

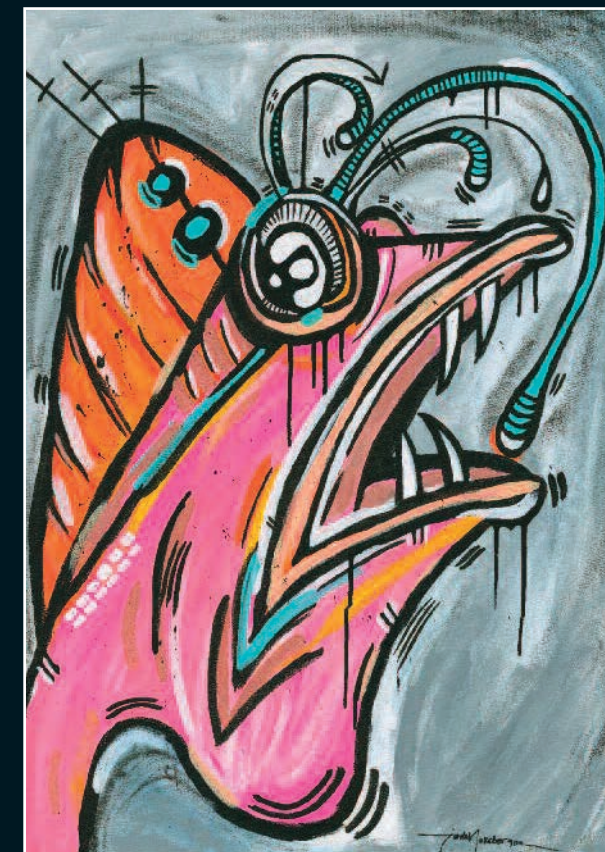
However, in 2018, when I started blackwater diving, I encountered fish that looked just like those in my paintings.

Through encountering these larval, pelagic animals, I realised how much of a parallel there was between my work and that of Mother Nature. In a strange way, I felt as if I was diving in my imagination.

For instance, the larval lionfish I encountered looked like a close cousin to the portraiture I had painted on canvas. I've always known it, but now there was no debate, Mother Nature is truly an artist that can't be outshone.

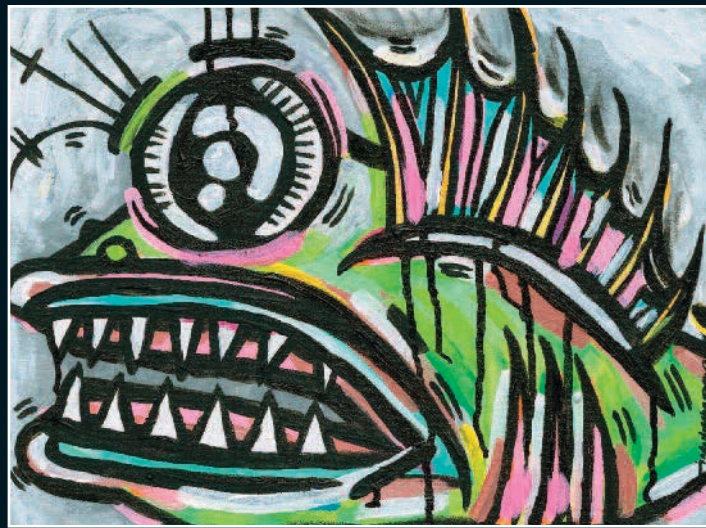
**AS I EMBARKED** on the OCEAN series, my ties to the sea were strengthening. On a trip to Malapascua in 2013, a place world-famous for thresher sharks, I met Henley Spiers. He would later become my husband and father to our two children.

Together we pursued a life guided



# STAYING AFLOAT





by undersea encounters, working together as dive pros in St Lucia, before transitioning to a new career as underwater photographers. I hope you will have seen some of our features in the pages of **DIVER**.

The camera is a valuable creative outlet, fulfilling my passion for sharing the story of the ocean's smaller, and often overlooked inhabitants.

At heart, however, my creative mother-tongue is painting.

I'm less interested in painting what I can see as what I feel. My art will always be very personal, and for a long time I fought shy of sharing it, for fear of being criticised and judged.



**Pictured:** Lionfish on a blackwater dive.

Most of my work includes "symbols" – abstractions of certain objects/ features/ elements that I feel are important in the telling of my story.

Some of these symbols include sharp teeth, drool drops, belching tongues, crosses, and the three ribs (often disguised as fish gills), and they highlight a particular trauma in my past of which I bear the scars today.

In many ways, the "portraits" I paint are extensions of myself, carrying the burden of my emotions so that I don't have to.

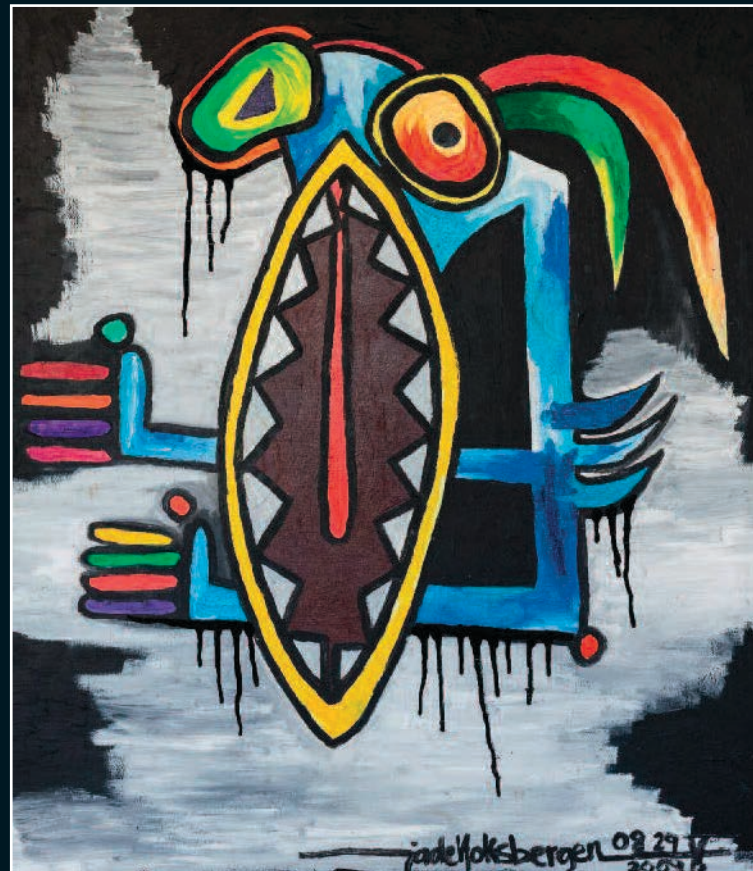
Therefore, by the same train of thought, any criticism of them feels like a criticism directed at my own existence.

However, I've since learned that for the viewer they are nothing more than works of art, and there is nothing more

subjective and varied in this world than our taste. So, I have decided, as a personal challenge, to keep creating but also to share and let them go.

To let go of the fear that comes along with exposing these extensions of myself, but also to physically let them go. I truly believe this is the next step I need to take for my personal growth and, truth be told, I only have so many walls!

My paintings document not just my metamorphosis as a painter, but as a survivor – one who has found great solace in the ocean and art.



You can see more of Jade's work and keep up with the weekly release of new artworks on her website [jadehoksbergen.com](http://jadehoksbergen.com), or by following her on Instagram: [@myjaded.artstyle](https://www.instagram.com/myjaded.artstyle) or Facebook: [@jadehoksbergen](https://www.facebook.com/jadehoksbergen)



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