

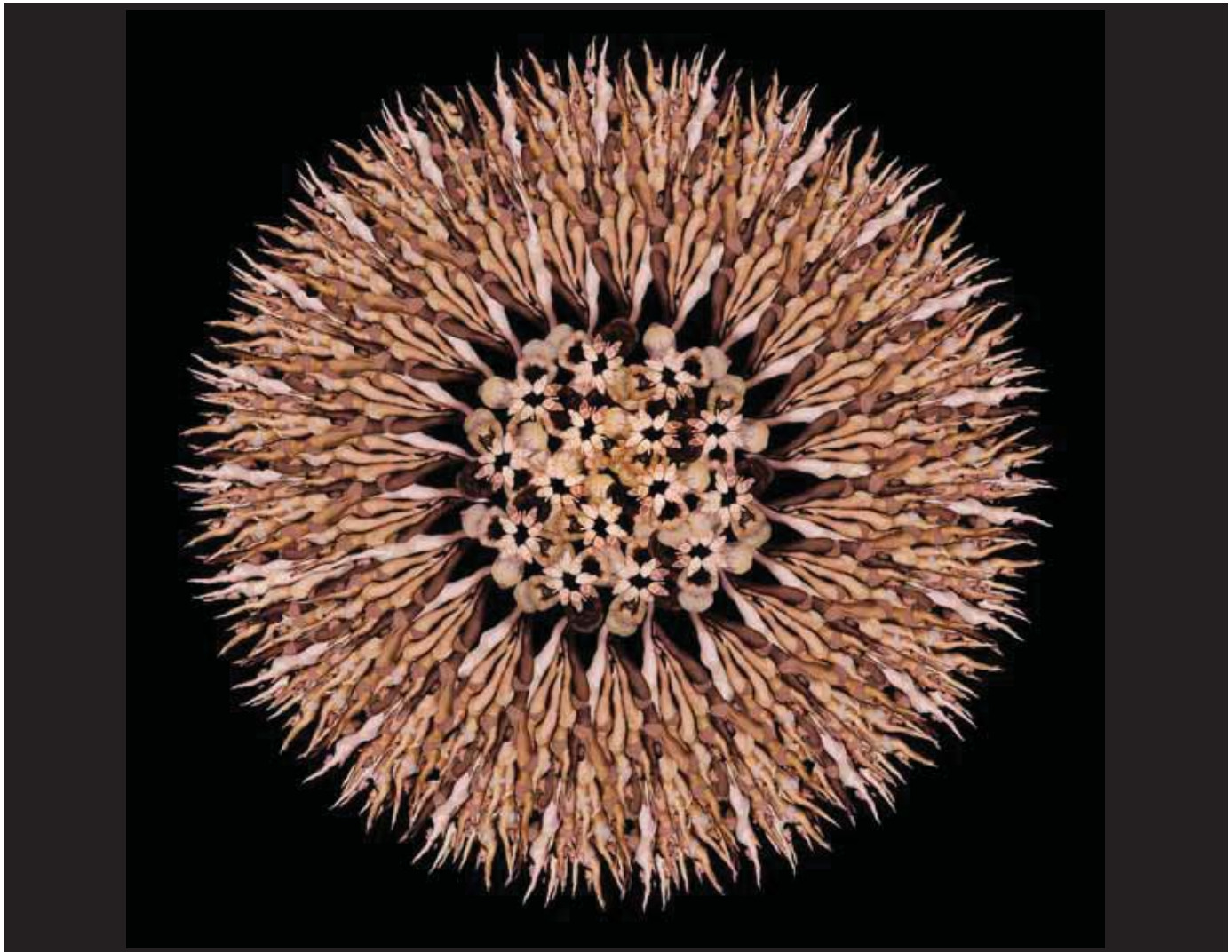
RETINA TIMES

The Official Publication of the American Society of **Retina Specialists**



Winter 2014
Issue 57

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Flower Study (Sunflower) With Dancers. Photo by ASRS member Howard Schatz, MD. See story on page 20.

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Corps de Ballet, Underwater, from the Howard Schatz book *H2O*.

WHAT'S NEWS >>



Howard Schatz, MD



Dilsher S. Dhoot, MD
Section Co-Editor

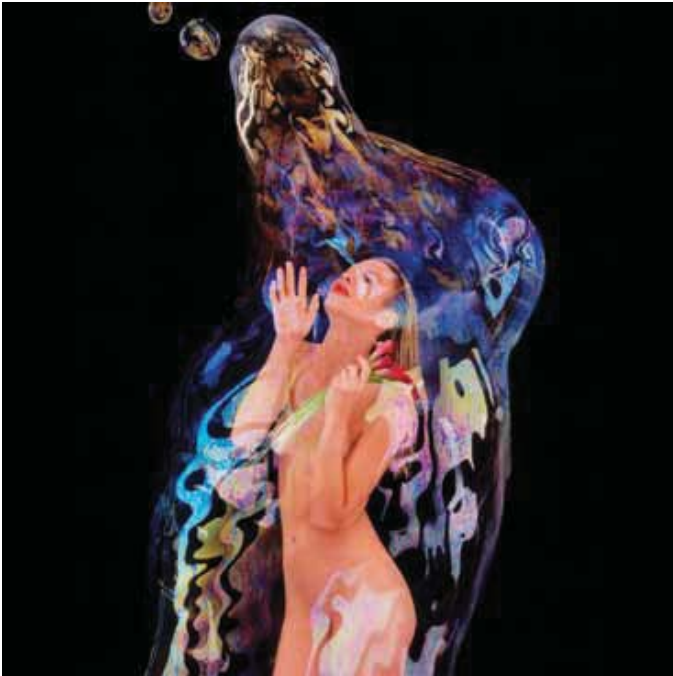


Dante J. Pieramici, MD
Section Editor

What's News Chats with **Howard Schatz**

Leading retina specialist turns passion for photography into a second illustrious career

In 1995, ASRS member Howard Schatz, MD, at the age of 54, decided to pursue photography for one year as a sabbatical. At the time, Schatz was at the peak of his retina career, an internationally respected clinician, scientist, and teacher. Few people are able to distinguish themselves in one field and proceed to become a master of another, altogether unrelated field. This is precisely what Howard Schatz has achieved.



Clockwise from top left: Dancer, Underwater, FLOW, Fashion Study, Underwater, Fashion Study, Colors From Indonesia, Beauty Study, IN A BUBBLE.

**‘There is a connection between
retina and photography,
and that is visual memory.’**

Now, almost 20 years later, his photographic imagery can be seen in publications including *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *GQ*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Time* magazine, to name just a few. And he has had 20 books published covering a wide range of subjects. We recently caught up with Howard Schatz to learn more about his past, present, and future.

Tell us about your decision to pursue photography full-time.

Howard Schatz: All physicians have hobbies, and I've had a camera since I was in medical school; I made pictures all the time. In 1987, after working 14 years full-time as a retina specialist, I decided to devote one day a week, Saturday, to photography. I went about it in a very focused and determined manner. I converted the dining room in our San Francisco house into a studio. I purchased used, high-end, medium-format cameras, strobes, and other lighting accessories. I studied very hard, beginning a collection of photography books (now a library of more than 2500), and studied photography in multiple sources and venues.

Over the next 8 years from 1987 to 1995, doing photography one day each week, I began to receive a great deal of attention for my work. Five books were published and there were numerous gallery and museum shows. We began to get phone calls for commissions from magazines as well as from advertising agencies to do commercial advertising work. Obviously, that was not possible. My wife, Beverly Ornstein, suggested,

"Why don't we take a one-year sabbatical, go to New York, and do photography full-time; see how it goes?"

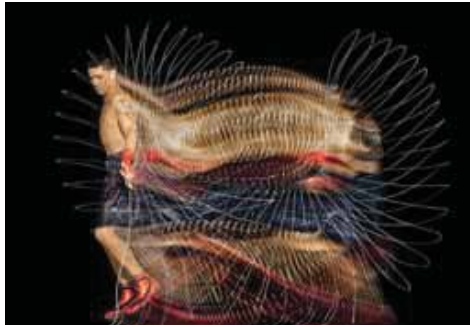
We rented a 5000 sq-ft studio in SoHo, in New York City. I immediately started a project photographing dancers, which became a book called *Passion and Line*. I was shooting almost every day; it was creatively challenging and thrilling. We went to bed each night giggling over the adventure. We had a great, fun, rich year.

As the year was coming to an end, I asked my associates about taking a second one-year sabbatical. Each year thereafter, I re-upped the sabbatical. After a time, it was clear that I was not going to return to medicine. I didn't just say one day, "I'm a doctor," and the next, "I'm a photographer." I did it at a very, very gradual pace in which I had a certain level of confidence of success. We were making

a living and we were having a wonderful experience.

Was there something about photography and retina that overlapped—something unifying about them?

Howard Schatz: I have 2 answers. First, photography and retina have nothing to do with each other. As a physician, the important thing is to get it right. When you do surgery, a mistake—even microscopic—can result in a blind eye. In medicine, in the care of patients, it's about getting it absolutely and exactly right.



Movement Study, Jump Rope, Sergio Martinez, Middleweight Champion.





Movement Study, Backswing

In art, it's imaginative creativity and taking wild chances. When making original visual art, making photographs, in my case, it's about trying anything and welcoming mistakes—mistakes can make magic. The worst thing that can happen is that the photograph isn't good. The care of patients and the making of creative art utilize 2 different parts of the brain. They are entirely different endeavors.

Second, there *is* a connection between retina and photography, and that is visual memory. I have an aptitude, as probably most retina specialists do, for remembering images. I urge young photographers to develop a vast visual databank. As one looks through one's camera, one ought to know whether it has been done before, and if so, find another way of seeing it. There is then the possibility of finding something original (vs banal) and, hopefully, something important. In retina, pattern recognition is essential.

If you could do it all over, would you have skipped ophthalmology and become a photographer from the start?

Howard Schatz: No. I was so fortunate to be educated, to go to medical school, and then take a residency in such an interesting field. I thought that as a physician I was doing something meaningful, worthwhile, and useful in this world. I loved medicine, my patients, learning, teaching, being at the forefront of knowledge. And I made many wonderful friendships that have lasted to this day. I miss medicine very much.

My initial thinking was that medicine was “important” and photography “frivolous.” Then I met Rick Rubin, a world-renowned record producer

whom I spent a day photographing for a magazine editorial. We talked about our lives. I told him that when I was a physician, I felt I was doing something really meaningful, and that photography was not meaningful, not as serious, that it doesn't touch the world in the way that being a physician can.



Portrait, Rick Rubin.

Rubin said, “You are wrong.” He explained, “Your art brings pleasure, insight, knowledge, and information to thousands or maybe millions of people. It is very meaningful.” Maybe so.

What do you miss most about your retina practice?

Howard Schatz: I miss everything. I loved my patients, my employees, my colleagues. I miss teaching and doing clinical research. I miss the discussion of challenging cases and learning with colleagues.

I am very interested in learning: in photography, I want to be scared. I want to be in a place where I don't know what is going to happen; that excites me. It is one thing to see a patient with a condition you see all the time and know exactly how to treat it.

However, it's a great moment when you look in an eye and don't know what the condition is. I am interested in being on the edge. On the other hand, making original imagery, working to create photographs that surprise, astonish, and delight me, is a marvelous journey.

Who were your mentors in ophthalmology?

Howard Schatz: When I was in my residency, Martin Urist, MD, a motility expert, was a great inspiration for me; he taught about seeking



the truth and learning. He continued teaching ophthalmology into his 70s. I always imagined that one day I would be like Urist.

In a way, I haven't fulfilled my initial dream of becoming a wise old man in the field of retina. Arnall Patz, MD, gave me my first opportunity in retina at Wilmer Eye Institute and was always generous and inspiring.

Tell us about your most recent project, *SCHATZ Images: 25 Years*.

Howard Schatz: An important photography book publisher, Glitterati Incorporated, came to me and asked if I would edit my archives and gather a series of images for a retrospective of my work. I thought about it a great deal; why would I want to look back? Do I want to go through all these images again? The more I thought about it, the more I felt maybe I could learn something.

We hired a world-renowned photo editor, Steve Fine, and he went through my entire archive of more than 40 projects and 4 million images. Beverly, who is a great editor, and I, also edited all the images. We searched for any gems that we missed initially and we agreed to include only images we all felt were great and belonged.

Every image in this book had no vetoes. We included the

work from 32 separate projects. We spent 8 months editing. I then spent the next 4 months working with a great designer, Alex Spacher, who is the creative director and designer for *Departures*, the American Express magazine. Together, we designed a luxurious 2-book boxed set. Each book has 415 pages and the 2 volumes total 1083 photographs, 830 pages.

What's next for Howard Schatz?

Howard Schatz: I am hesitant to answer such a question and will tell you why. Many, many more—thousands of books and papers—are planned, and many more projects are thought of than ever reach completion. It's not a good idea to talk about what you're "going to do" and receive false credit for a project you are planning, one that you haven't completed. So, I generally advise people if asked that question, keep your mouth shut, keep it inside, do the project, then brag about it when it is done.

I've had a happy, productive life, full of surprises, challenges, and much satisfaction. Actually, 2 lives, because living the life of a physician is very different from living the life of a creative artist. I used to think all the smart people became physicians or engineers, but it is not true. There are many, many brilliant people in the creative arts. It has been a real blessing having been able to pursue so many dreams in 2 distinct fields. 🌐

**SCHATZ Images:
25 Years**



Howard Schatz's new 2-volume retrospective can be found at SchatzImages25Years-Glitterati.com. The publisher, Glitterati Incorporated, New York, NY, is offering a 30% discount for pre-orders until December 31, 2014.

Financial Disclosures

Dr. Dhoot - REGENERON PHARMACEUTICALS, INC: Consultant, Honoraria.

Dr. Pieramici - ALLERGAN, INC: Investigator, Grants; BAUSCH+LOMB: Advisory Board, Honoraria; GENENTECH, INC: Advisory Board, Consultant, Investigator, Grants, Honoraria; QLT OPHTHALMICS, INC: Investigator, Grants; REGENERON PHARMACEUTICALS, INC: Investigator, Grants; SANTEN PHARMACEUTICAL CO, LTD: Consultant, Honoraria; THROMBOGENICS, INC: Advisory Board, Investigator, Grants, Honoraria.

Dr. Schatz - None



**‘The care of patients and the making of creative art
utilize 2 different parts of the brain.’**
