

## Claire Nouvian - PORTRAIT

In November 2007, in a special issue dedicated to the heirs of Cousteau, the magazine *Géo* elected Claire Nouvian "the planet's guardian angel." The article emphasized her extraordinary character - a single woman amongst male personalities - and acknowledged her total engagement to the protection of an aquatic environment that is, even though particularly misunderstood and vulnerable, absolutely essential to the planet's equilibrium: the deep sea.

A short backtrack... In 2001, during the reconnaissance trip for a film on undersea fauna at the Monterey Bay Aquarium in the United States, Claire Nouvian discovered incredible images of creatures with spectacular shapes, with astonishing colors... Unknown animals, some of which had been filmed at 4000 meters depth. Captivated and dazzled, she sought to learn more about them, realizing with perplexity that there was no synthetic document regarding the deep ocean available to the greater public and that its scientific exploration was only at its first steps.

After the shock, both aesthetic and intellectual, she passed quickly to outrage in discovering that the deep sea had already been exploited in total silence by industries for nearly 30 years, and that no treaty or law protected international waters, even though they cover two-thirds of the planet.

Because of this, each year deep coral reefs that required up to 10,000 years to form are razed in a matter of minutes by gigantic nets dragging ballasts of several tons, acting like bulldozers of the depths, massively and irreversibly destroying a biological diversity that is still largely unknown to science. In short, a handful of men and some few hundred boats, at the most, are in the process of devastating one of the world's natural patrimonies for the sake of harvesting fish with high commercial value, all in total impunity.

This unacceptable gap between these vital planetary stakes and the economic interests of a few spurred Claire Nouvian to the feeling of urgency that now engages her, body and soul, in a race against the clock. The aim: to create a collective conscience that will tip public opinion in favor of protection of the deep sea and stimulate the creation of laws regulating the exploitation. The method: to utilize all existing means of communication to familiarize us with an environment that is, by its very essence, distant, foreign, unfamiliar. Starting from the postulate that we only protect what we know and love, she seeks to create ties of affection between the public and this unknown environment, viewing emotion as the indispensable preamble to any approach to protection...

Claire Nouvian embarked assiduously on a very precise program: Between 2002 and 2005, she wrote two documentaries on the deep sea for Arte and The Science Channel<sup>1</sup>. She established Bloom Association, a non-profit organization whose purpose is the protection of the ocean, specifically but not only the deep sea, by means of dissemination of information and images.

<sup>1</sup>Aquanauts First Prize at the Pariscience festival 2005; and Expedition to the Abyss prize for Best Documentary at the Amazonas festival, Brazil 2005.



Onboard the submersible *Deep Sea* during the shoot of the TV show 'Ushuaia' presented by Nicolas Hulot. Photo © Cyril TRICOT

Since then, she has appeared frequently in public schools, and along with a network of teachers, established a program for increasing awareness about marine environments, “Génération Océans” aimed at youth in colleges and high schools<sup>2</sup>. She also took her first dive to 1000 meters in the Johnson-Sea-Link submersible during an oceanographic mission directed by Dr. Marsh Youngbluth of the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution in Florida.

In 2006, with the aid of patrons supporting Bloom's actions and its quality approach, her book *The Deep* (French title *Abysse*) was published by Editions Fayard. Translated into six languages (soon more) and reprinted four times already in the United States, it was hailed by the critics and has won numerous prizes<sup>3</sup>. The work presents first-ever images of animals of the deep and synthesizes the information collected over twenty years of oceanographic campaigns, thus it represents the first visual encyclopedia of the ocean's depths, revealing the spectacular fauna and the different ecosystems and phenomena that are grouped under the generic term of “deep sea.”

In November 2007, the exhibition *The Deep* opened at the Natural History Museum in Paris and ran until May 2008. It was a world premiere presenting to the public a large variety of deepwater animals in aquariums as well as a selection of recent -and for some hitherto unreleased- photos and videos.

In parallel, Claire Nouvian is collaborating with Dr. Myriam Sibuet in preparing an exhibition dedicated to the deep continental margins at the Oceanographic Institute in Paris.

A citizen of the world, raised on three continents, and a polyglot (she speaks 6 languages), Claire Nouvian gives talks at international conferences and symposiums on deep-sea trawling, the threats weighing on abyssal ecosystems, or the receding of biodiversity, in particular, the disappearance of deep corals and sharks: in the last 10 years, the populations of certain shark species have declined by 95% to 99%. She supports the work of NGOs, such as the Shark Alliance, who work for promulgation of laws protecting sharks, and has recently been designated “Ocean Ambassador” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

During recent years, Claire has established ties of respect and trust among scientists and oceanographic research institutes. Independent in the midst of a vast network and empowered by a broad, transversal vision of the various marine conservation issues, Claire Nouvian is in a strategic position to be the spokesperson for the deep sea, guided in her actions by a line of conduct borrowed to philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy: “Fatality is the sum of our dismissals.”

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<sup>2</sup>Second Prize for Best Scientific Communication, at the Young Scientists' Forum 'Exposcience', Poitiers, 2006.

<sup>3</sup>International prize for the **Best Underwater Book**, special mention from the jury at the 33rd World Festival of Underwater Pictures, Antibes (France) 2006; Prize for the **Most Beautiful Illustrated Book** from the French Naval Academy, Defense Ministry 2007; **Literary Prize** from the “Cercle de la Mer” 2007; **Scientific Book of the Year 2007** from the magazine Bild der Wissenschaft, Germany.