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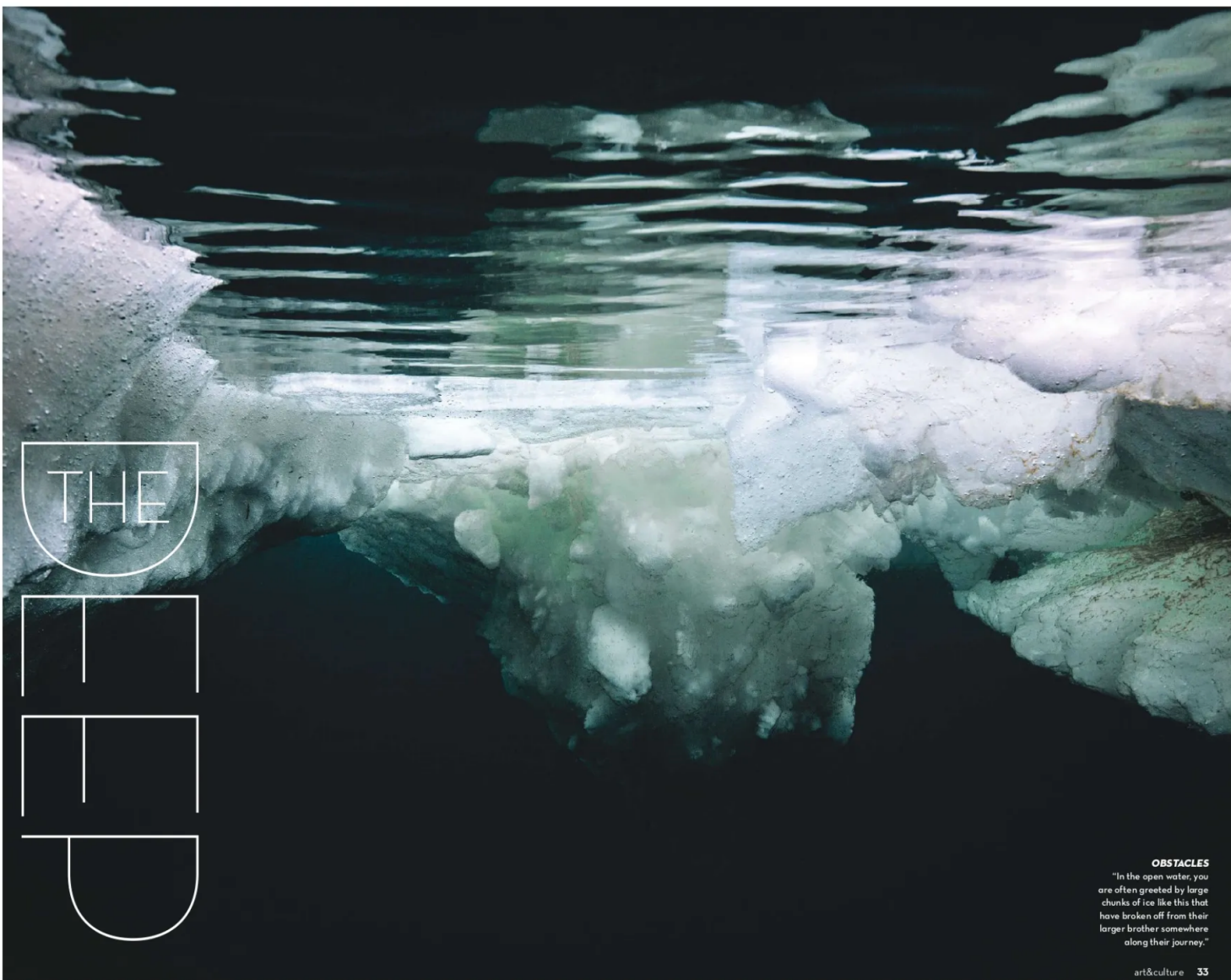
There's beauty in the unpredictable,
and even in the dangerous.

Photographer Chris Leidy found it.

BY MICHELLE LEE RIBEIRO

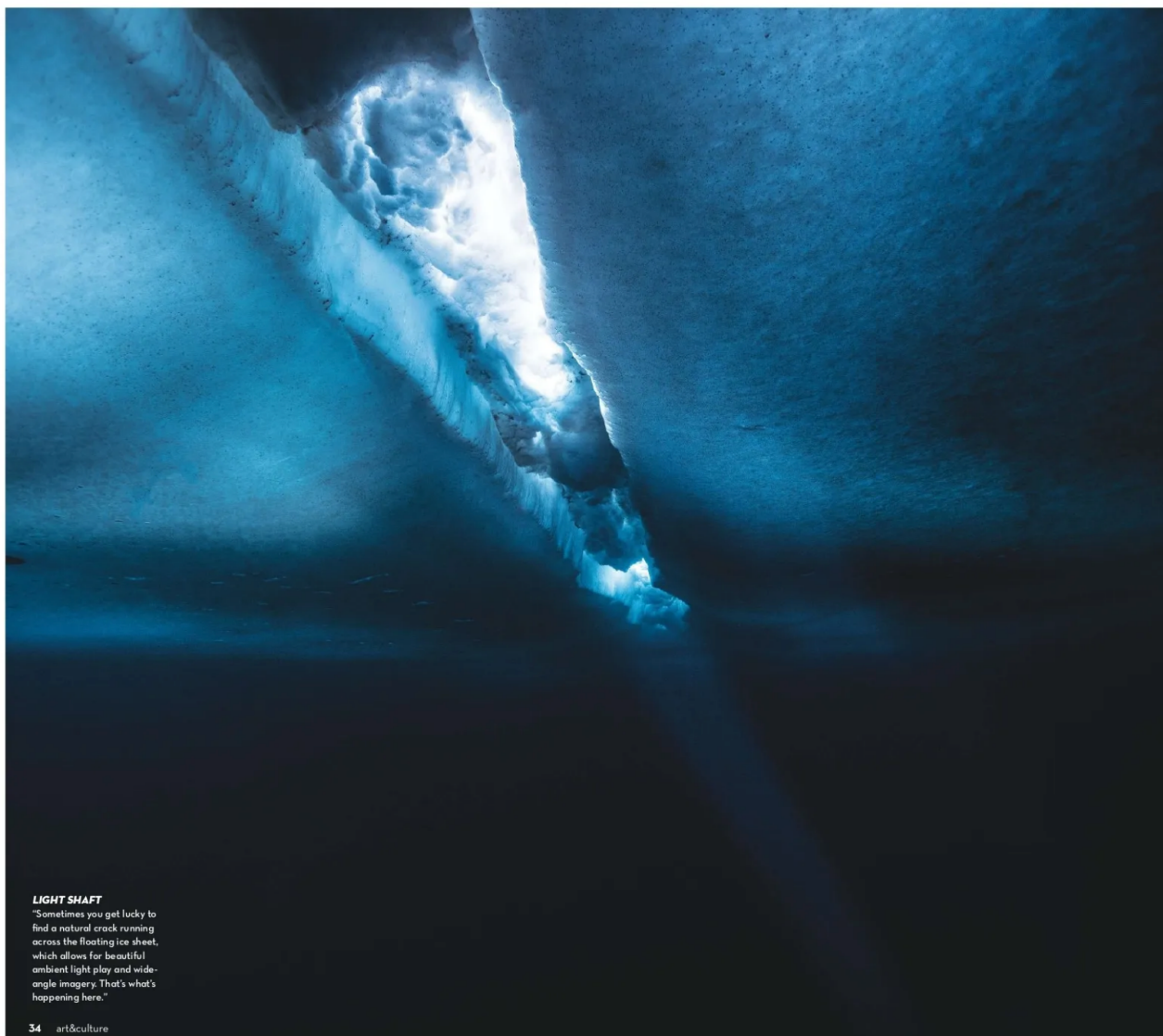
"I'm so claustrophobic, you don't understand." This coming from a man who spent three weeks last summer diving through holes in the Arctic ice wearing a 50-pound lead vest, sinking into the deep blue sea under a frozen 8-foot-thick ceiling.

For Chris Leidy, facing that fear was necessary to capture the images milling around in his mind's eye. And really, it wasn't hard for him to overcome. "Down there, you're in the zone, so you lose any kind of fear or thoughts of being trapped," he says. "It's so spiritual—everywhere you look, you've never seen anything like it before. The air bubbles start to look like mercury; it's trippy. I was like a sponge soaking it all up."



OBSTACLES

"In the open water, you are often greeted by large chunks of ice like this that have broken off from their larger brother somewhere along their journey."



LIGHT SHIFT

"Sometimes you get lucky to find a natural crack running across the floating ice sheet, which allows for beautiful ambient light play and wide-angle imagery. That's what's happening here."

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ICE VEIN

"This is a shot taken topside of a weather-made crack in a 35,000-year-old iceberg."



For the past 10 years, Leidy's wanderlust has taken him to exotic locales like French Polynesia, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea, where he captures underwater images so beautiful in their abstraction you sometimes forget how very real it all is. This isn't a bunch of post-production magic. Leidy, as he describes his process, edits in camera: "I see something I want to shoot and visualize how I want it to appear, setting my camera—white balance, exposure—so the end result looks like what I'm seeing. There's expression in all types of art, but my thought is, what I see when I take the shot... That should be the image."

Shooting in 20-degree water was a major departure for the Palm Beach native, who is represented by New York's esteemed Marlborough Gallery. He traded his wet suit for a uniform that consisted of two pairs of long johns, two pairs of wool socks, a long-sleeved tee, a down onesie,

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ARCTIC LANDSCAPE

"My view every morning, day, and night. I was surrounded by towering monuments of ice 24/7. It's a humbling country and extremely unforgiving."

down boots, and a dry suit. Every morning, he and his Inuit guides would head out of their yurt, hop on a dog sled or snow mobile, and zoom out to an ice-locked berg. They'd drill a hole, and Leidy would shimmy down and let nature dictate the outcome.

"There's a current pulling you, it's dark, and the elements are so intense," he says. "Some guy you just met is holding this rope attached to you. He's your lifeline. You hear cracking and the ice moaning. It's wild, man.... But I just went out there. I had a vision of my photos and was going to take whatever came at me, as it came." marlboroughgallery.com *

More with Leidy at palmbeachculture.com/magazine



BLUE BERG

"I love composing an image with just a section of what is standing in front of me. It messes up the brain of the viewers. This was a towering iceberg that was locked in by the floe ice and stood about 75 to 100 feet high. We would bust off large chunks of the iceberg and melt it down for drinking water."



PROFILE

"This is a profile image of where the iceberg meets just above and below the surface. So abstract."



ICE CRACK

"This is from the perspective of me looking up at a crack in the underside of the ice sheet. If you took this image and hung it on the ceiling, that's what it looked like when I snapped the photo. The yellows are a cluster of krill and algae that have been lit by the sun."