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Making headlines with Glenn Guan

“His work transcends mere visual aesthetics, refined techniques and glamorous lighting - he goes beyond such superficiality as his work reflects not only the nation’s most prominent stories, but also chronicles tales and movements from around the world.”

*Text by Jayne L. Kennedy
Images by Glenn Guan*



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His determination and love for sports photography has earned him a Silver in the "Best in Photojournalism" sports category in the prestigious 10th Asia Media Awards 2011...



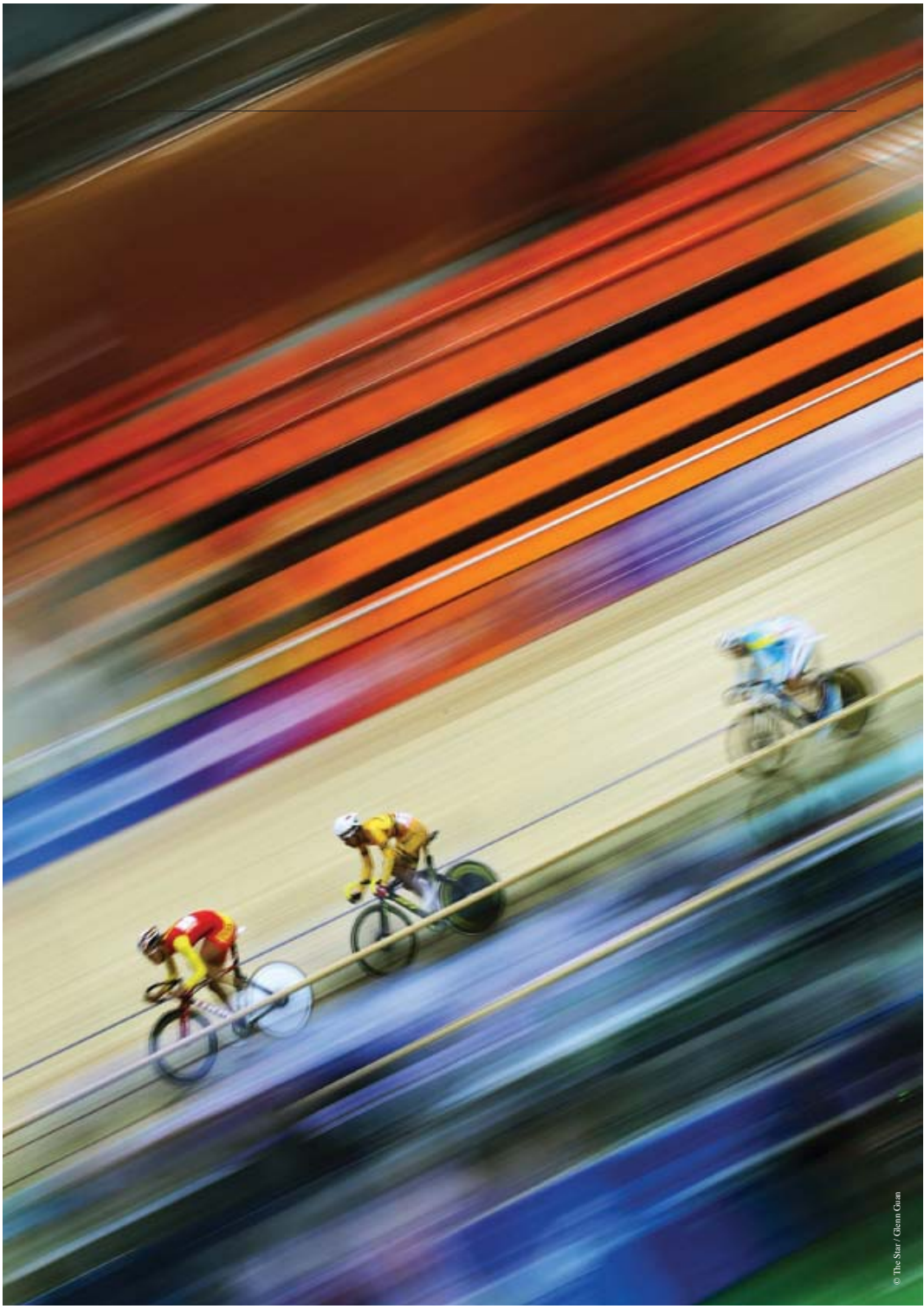
Glenn Guan

As a prominent member of The Star's photo department, Glenn Guan's work has probably fluttered across the headlines hundreds of times, and has most likely kept you captivated with some of the country's top stories too. His work transcends mere

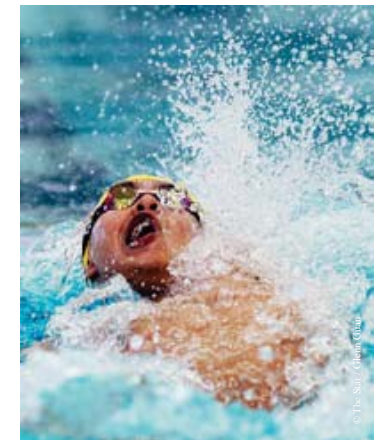
visual aesthetics, refined techniques and glamorous lighting - he goes beyond such superficiality as his work reflects not only the nation's most prominent stories, but also chronicles tales and movements from around the world.

His determination and love for sports photography has earned him a Silver in the

"Best in Photojournalism" sports category in the prestigious 10th Asia Media Awards 2011, where he captured Malaysian athlete Melinder Kaur creating a massive splash by lying flat in a puddle of water, anticipating her next move and predicting where he should focus by guessing where her feet would land. This patience and tinge



© The Star / Glenn Guan



of risk-taking has landed him many incredible shots, and this endless quest for the best picture is what makes Glenn so unique. He has also won Grand Award in the Picture KL 2008, the Outstanding Award in the MCPA Asian Cup 2007 and held an exhibition at the Kuala Lumpur Photography Festival 2007.

"I've been shooting since college, where I studied IT and did web design on the side to fill up my spare time and was lucky enough to land a massive opportunity with Tourism Pahang where I spent an entire month on Tioman island," shared Glenn.

"Soon after, I worked with a company who took stock images, which was pleasant but incredibly boring. Switching to The Star brought a lot of chances to experiment with different subject matter, circumstances and categories of photography.

After experimenting in the various fields of photography available to press photographers, Glenn decided to step into the Sports Arena and make this his area of expertise.

"I've had the chance to shoot fashion in Australia amongst the freezing sand dunes, where models wore less than three layers

of clothes in summer gear but that's nothing compared to the excitement of sports! I love the game. You have to love the game if you shoot sports or else you won't know where to look next, how to anticipate the opponent's move or how to even follow what's going on right in front of you," he explained. "You either get the picture or you don't - you can't redo that moment and you definitely can't ask them to do it again - the game doesn't wait for you. You can only capture that intense moment of sorrow or joy once - and that moment will make or break your entire day's work."

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© Glenn Guan

Switching to The Star brought a lot of chances to experiment with different subject matter, circumstances and categories of photography.



© The Star / Glenn Guan

It's been four years since Glenn made his choice to focus on sports, and he's never looked back since. His busy schedule in the news industry makes personal projects difficult to execute, leaving him with little time for himself. Being on standby almost every day makes it nearly impossible to plan, as when natural disasters strike, his team will most likely be the first to be called to duty due to their expertise and skill. "It's definitely not easy to work with the news; stress levels are high, you're expected to capture tonnes of

information in one shot and when you're needed, you're expected to drop everything and come in. But it's worth it," shared Glenn. His typical busy day can start from the wee hours of the morning with three to four assignments due that day. He normally rushes from location to location, travelling back and forth depending on the nature and urgency of the day's work. He quips, "When I was in Guangzhou catching the Asian Games, travelling from venue to venue took us hours. The furthest I can remember was a 3-hour one way journey to

the equestrian centre to cover the Malaysian team who won a gold medal. Due to the long distance, I had to edit all my pictures in the bus so that I can transmit them back to my office once I was back to the press centre, then rushed off to cover another event".

As a sports photojournalist, Glenn is always seen lugging around almost his body weight in equipment, rushing to make it in time for the next big event! Glenn himself usually brings the Canon EOS 1D Mark IV, 5D Mark II, 7D, Canon EF 300mm

f2.8L IS, EF 70-200mm f2.8L IS II, EF16-35mm F2.8L II and a handful more. He clearly favours Canon, which still seems to be dominating the market when it comes to sports photography. It may seem like a lot of equipment but consider attending a major sporting event. All around the edges of the court, field, pool etc you'll find photographers with massive lenses on the side-lines, 300mm or longer. To save themselves from sore shoulders, monopods are a must-have as well. Altogether this can weigh over 18kg for a

single event.

"Equipment is definitely one of the most important things you need when shooting, but everyone has the same equipment, how are you going to make your images look different?", he shared further. "Look for areas no one else will imagine shooting from. I once climbed upon the roof during an on-going game and sat upon the scaffolding to take pictures - it wasn't official access but I found a way to make it work. And it definitely was worth it! Sometimes you can leave your equipment

in hard to reach areas and operate by remote - but the key is to find angles no one else will have. It's not about taking static images or freezing the moments, you need to convey the emotions felt during the game, the electricity of the crowd. My own style showcases clean backgrounds, expressive gestures and dynamic movement. But for those looking to get into this category, you must practise with small events and work your way up to the bigger ones because you'll need accreditation anyway."

Pro Interview

Glenn and his team were fed with empty promises daily, and were herded from one place to another like cattle, moving them as far away as possible from covering the story

Although sports are his preference, Glenn is sometimes called upon to cover larger stories, some with a more terrifying twist. This year, he was sent to cover the turmoil that bubbled over in Libya, an experience no one can forget. Glenn and his team spent a month in Yemen and Tunisia, attempting to enter and cover the political crisis in Libya. They were fed with empty promises daily, and were herded from one place to another like cattle, moving them as far away as possible from covering the story. "I actually received a call 24 hours before the flight informing me that we had an urgent story to cover and were expected to be ready by 2am for the trip. Upon landing we had to sneak from location to location so we wouldn't get deported. It was really intense." This was his first experience being in a warzone with the team, and it was everything he imagined it would be. He had heard that four journalists and their team had been kidnapped and deported to another country, and those who had managed to enter Libya were taken to areas unaffected by the revolt thus leaving nothing to cover for the news. But Glenn had enough chaos to last a lifetime. "There was one incident where there was a massive shoot out, ending in a massacre of men, women and children. People were getting shot left right and centre. This occurred not far from our hotel, so we rushed to the scene on foot and ran into the thick of it. People were running away from the scene while we were counter-intuitively running into it. Men turned to me with pieces of their friends' bodies in hand, begging me to take pictures of the injustice they had faced. Snipers opened fire at anti-government protesters after Friday prayers on the street of Sana'a, Yemen. In Tunisia, we witnessed tens of thousands of refugees rushing out from Libya daily, but couldn't get the permission to cross the borders. Some of them had not eaten for days and had to reach out for food in between barbed wires.

It was also an unforgettable experience in Yemen where Glenn was granted entry into the country as a tourist. In order not to draw any unnecessary attention from the authorities, Glenn had to put aside all his



professional equipment and work with only a compact digital camera.

Being a photojournalist has its perks and its burdens, but most of all, it certainly opens one's eyes to a world beyond our own. Knowing the difficulty Glenn faced in this time of intense pressure gave me a whole new respect for this soft-spoken, humble yet accomplished photographer and will definitely propel me to keep an eye on his future stories. Whether snapping away at Wimbledon, the Japan Super GT International or revolutions in the Middle East and elsewhere, Glenn Guan will definitely be making headlines around the world for a long time to come. Game on.

For more of Glenn's recent works, check out glennguan.com or tweet him at twitter.com/glennguan.



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