

Pro Interview

Louis Pang

TO DATE, HE HAS TRAVELED ACROSS 16 COUNTRIES AND FOUR CONTINENTS, COLLECTING A TOTAL OF EIGHT WPPI AWARDS – HIS LATEST ACHIEVEMENT BEING THE HIGHLY PRESTIGIOUS WPPI INTERNATIONAL PORTRAIT PRINT OF THE YEAR 2010.

WORDS JAYNE KENNEDY / IMAGES LOUIS PANG



“IS IT POSSIBLE TO KEEP your head in check and your feet on the ground while hundreds – no thousands – crave your photographs, let alone hunger for your every word? Can you maintain your ego and ensure that it doesn’t escape before crushing everyone around you with your immense weight?”



LOUIS PANG BIOGRAPHY

Louis Pang went down in history as the first Asia-based photographer to speak at the Wedding & Portrait Photographers International (WPPI) convention, the world’s largest wedding photography conference. To date, he has traveled across 16 countries and four continents, collecting a total of eight WPPI awards – his latest achievement being the highly prestigious WPPI International Portrait Print of the Year 2010



We were proved that one can accumulate the most prestigious awards and accolades yet still remain humble, down to earth and good-natured. After scrolling through numerous blog posts and talking to scores of people, it was clear that Louis Pang is a favourite amongst Malaysian photographers – with many praising him as Malaysia’s best photographer.

There is a misconception that photographers are the invisible beings who stand in the background and shoot events from a distance before disappearing into the past forever. Rather than blending into the wallpaper, Pang clearly brings light and love to the scene and he’s probably mistaken as the groom more often than not. For a moment, we wonder how the brides refrain from hitching up their lacey skirts and kidnapping this amiable character.

He comes across as warm and sincere, and it’s no secret why his own clients change their wedding plans to accommodate his schedule. Sought after internationally and hunted down locally, he is clearly a rare specimen that emits positivity. Pang spends most of his time capturing “timeless pieces”, with weddings and portraiture being his main area of expertise. “Timeless doesn’t mean boring. Timeless means you can look at it 10 years down the road and still enjoy the moment evoked through the picture hanging on the wall.” His sincerity is reflected in his photos; the transparent

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TOP: BLESSING

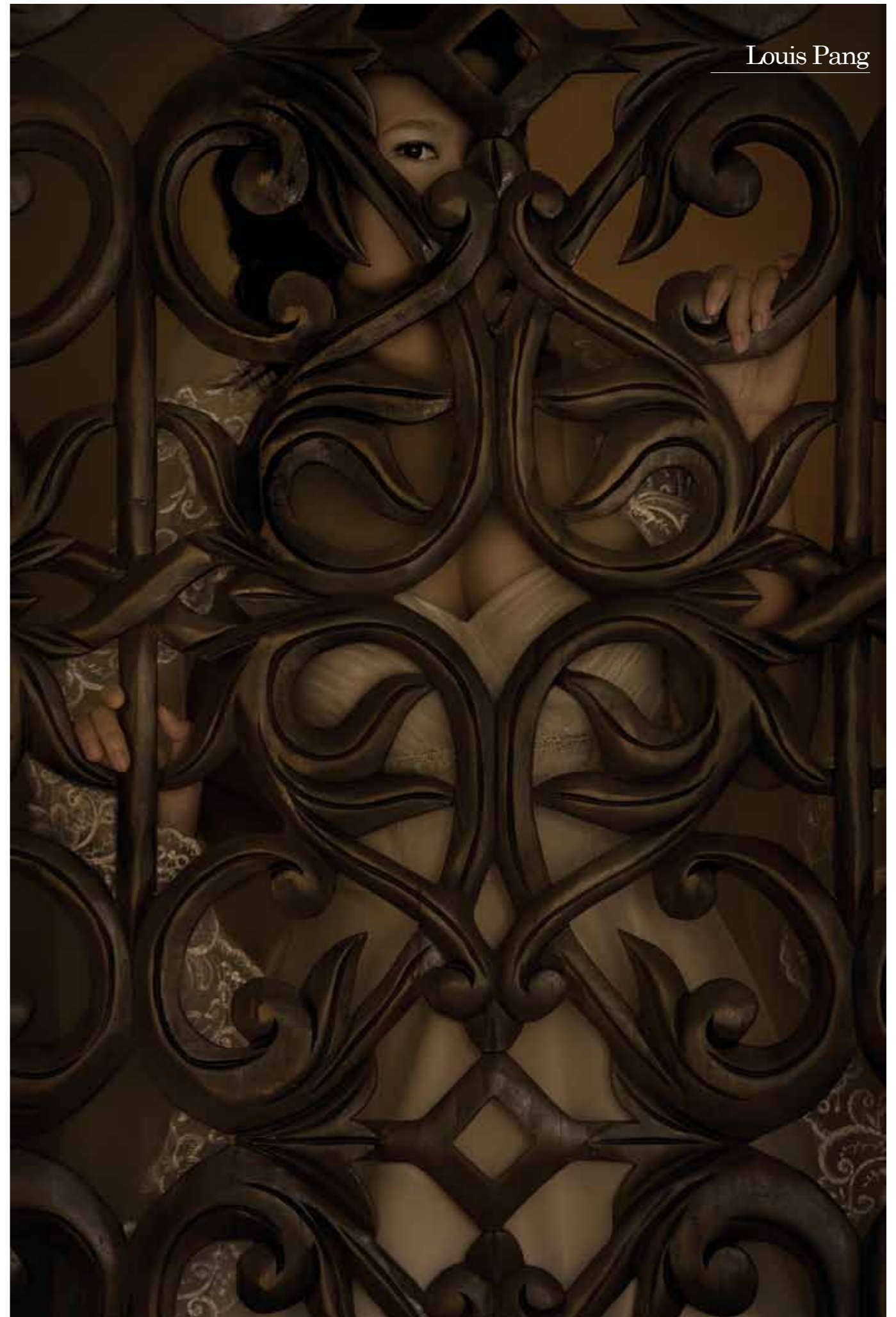
Gunjan dangles these jewelry on her female guests. It symbolizes blessings.

LEFT: OSCAR MOMENT

Louis accepts the International Portrait Print of the Year at WPPI 2010 in Las Vegas.

OPPOSITE PAGE:

Li Ee, the bride, is hidden behind a lattice to create a mysterious feel..





“...you need a strong technical foundation so that shooting becomes intuitional.”

nature and raw emotion transcend from the live moment effortlessly into a “timeless piece” – creating original images that rebel against current trendy and “modern” clichés that clog the industry.

Pang explains, “People created some really stylish ‘trash the dress’ shots but I just couldn’t do it. I’m hopelessly romantic and I just don’t have the heart to destroy a dress”

As mentioned earlier, we really have no idea how brides can resist the temptation to snap up this photographer, pun intended.

“I’m an artist, I’m a photographer, I’m a photo journalist, I’m a director and I’m also a documentarian,” explains Pang, a Jack of visual trades – and Master of pretty much all of them. “There are a lot of things involved in a wedding. Like

posing! Posing is not straight-forward at all! It has to flow, it can’t be stiff.” Being a visual person, Pang tends to use very descriptive words, prompting the listener to imagine and feel the scenario in his head. His voice flows, and our attention rises and ebbs like the tide. As much as Pang enjoys his life’s work, he acknowledges that it comes with its fair share of challenges. “The wedding events last from morning till night and we have to be aware of the changes and direction of the light, we have to consider the venue, we even have to consider the bride’s height (when she is taller than the groom) – there’s just so much to think about. Despite Amazonian brides, lengthy shoots and unpredictable light, Pang finds joy in the greatest challenge of all time: capturing love in a single moment. He sincerely is a romantic.

TOP:
“Late for Our Wedding”, shot in Bali.

“Timeless doesn’t mean boring.”

Love is difficult enough to explain in theory, let alone practice. To try and portray a complicated web of emotions from the outside in a single image is a wildly difficult action that is widely misunderstood. But Pang makes this look simple.

This strength lies in his ability to capture photographs without having to worry about the technicalities. He can do this because he knows the basics of photography like the back of his hand. “You need to know your camera really well so you can fully focus on your subjects and surroundings. You don’t need to check your exposure or settings – you need a strong technical foundation so that shooting becomes intuitional. This takes practice and time.” Pang is an avid believer of the benefits of workshops and spreading

knowledge. He frequently attends trainings overseas to improve his knowledge of photography and strives to fill his mind to the brim with new information. ‘Never stop learning’ is actually Pang’s personal life motto – and this mantra has fueled his passion for conducting his own workshops and trainings.

“The joy of teaching stemmed from several things. When I started photography, nobody wanted to teach me anything. Everyone had this thinking that photography was some sort of secret. They thought I was this new kid with a new digital and I was a threat to them. All I wanted was to know how to take pictures! So, I vowed that I would teach and share my learning with others who want to learn. When able to impart something in someone’s life, a part of you lives in that person. You’re

“In every artwork, it’s always very subjective.”

impacting someone’s life and that’s how you leave a legacy.” Philosophically, Pang has found his roots in photography, too. It is this willingness to be connected with people on a deeper level that makes Pang such an admirable and sought after individual - fresh photographers and veterans alike flock towards Pang as if he holds the key to unlocking the secrets of photography.

“People say that when we teach others, they will take away what I have. But you see, I can only teach you what I have done in the past, I do not stop creating - who knows what I’m going to do tomorrow? I can teach you technicalities but not creativity,” Pang enigmatically explains. We’re fastened to our seats, inspired, by Pang’s optimistic and transparent outlook on life. Pang had only begun dabbling in photography five years ago, and claims to be the the second photographer in Malaysia to have a blog at the time. He wrote about life, family

and photography - basically things he cared about. Through his writing, Pang was able to connect with his readers without expecting anything in return. Those that liked him carried on to hire him and introduced him to other potential contacts.

“Blogging is very important. I usually fill it up with little details. People like knowing details like the stories behind every photo taken. However, the most important thing is to be TRUE. This world is so small - if you tell one lie there will be big repercussions as the whole world will find out. My advice is; don’t fake it. If you’re a beginner, then you’re a beginner. If you’re a professional, then you are a professional. If you’ve won an award, then you’re an award winner.”

When asked about his own photographic style, Pang answers “I don’t have a specific style that I would call my own, but basically it has to come from the heart and how I see things.” Pang humbly declines to categorize his work in any

particular genre and again draws on his own authentic experiences. “A big part stems from my life experiences; how I was raised, my perception of things, people I look up to, my family, and others who shaped me will have an influence on how I shoot.” Pang draws inspiration from Australian photographers in particular, seeking out their workshops with hungry passion. “I don’t have a defined style, but people tell me I ‘shoot with sensitivity’. I once had a client who cried upon seeing my pictures on my blog, and told her husband that he MUST hire me for their wedding! I take notice of how I feel. I guess ‘sensitivity’ is one of my styles.” Pang’s images always consist of clean compositions with the least possible amount of distraction and chaos - allowing the subject to be captured with minimal disturbance. During the WPPI conference in which Pang was the first Asia-based speaker ever, many were moved to tears while experiencing his sincerely thought-

provoking and emotion-inducing seminar. After receiving applause for an entire minute, the crowd stood up to give Pang hugs and words of praise.

However, Pang is reluctant to give himself the credit that others have showered him with. When asked about his latest achievement, the International Portrait Print of the Year (2010) awarded by WPPI, he tells us, “In every artwork, it’s always very subjective. I am of course very happy to have won the award but I would have loved to know the reasons why the judges chose my picture.” His modesty is clearly apparent in the way he phrases his sentences. “Hopefully I’m not a one-shot wonder. I was totally caught by surprise and to win an award on an international platform, I certainly don’t want to discount the recognition from winning this award given the track record of past winners who have won it before.” The WPPI has been compared to the

THIS PICTURE:

This Cat Woman & Pulp Fiction-inspired photo was shot at hotel inner hallway with three flashes.



“But you see, I can only teach you what I have done in the past, I do not stop creating – who knows what I’m going to do tomorrow?”

photographer’s version of the Oscars, and Pang agrees. “It was very overwhelming and I really wanted to be up there. I’ve dreamed about what I would do and say when I receive an award on stage but when it actually happened, it was a blur. I was in complete shock! I dropped the check they gave me - and funnily enough that incident reminded me of how my clients would have felt on their wedding day. Things happen so fast in a wedding that without a good photographer, everything would be a blur for the couple.” Even when talking about himself, Pang somehow manages to turn the conversation away from his award-winning achievements and toward his love for people and photography.

“To be honest with you, if I can walk away with six pictures every year that I’m truly excited about, I’ll consider that a very successful year. I’m not any more special than the other photographers. I’m a normal guy; I eat the same food, I go to the same places. I want them to know that if one of us can make it, then all of us can too. We’re a community.”

Apart from winning awards and taking photos, Pang has been investing his time in his newest gallery situated in Desa Sri Hartamas, Kuala Lumpur. The reason he branched out to the big city was so that he could “take better care of his clients”. It serves as a place for clients to relax and brainstorm ideas for their big day.

When asked about the age-old question of ‘how do you feel about Photoshop?’ Pang answers by saying, “There’s a

lot of hard work involved whether the pictures are done in a dark room or on a computer. I won’t use the word Photoshop with my clients, I call it ‘finishing’ because if you use ‘Photoshop’, it feels like a gimmick. I feel that good finishing should be one that enhances the picture and allows others to enjoy the picture even more. The finishing process alleviates the story-telling. When people look at it, they’ll say ‘Wow, what a great picture’ and not ‘Wow, what great Photoshop skills’. Good finishing enhances the story.” To Pang, it is not the method or technique that holds importance, but it is the visual communication and story that is most significant.

For all of those who want to know how to become a better photographer, this is what he has to say:

“Imagine you had never tasted ice-cream and had never seen ice-cream – you don’t know what ice-cream is about. Would you order an ice-cream? You won’t because you don’t know anything about it! Basically, keep discovering new things, and never stop learning. Don’t be afraid to try new things – only then you’ll know what it’s about, and you’ll learn much more”. The same meaning applies to exposure; people will only ‘order’ you when they’ve had a ‘taste’ of your work. Pang ends our conversation with a simple saying that’s been heard before, but adds a little flavor of his own, as always, breathing creativity into all he says and does: “Life is a journey. It’s not a destination. It’s an *ongoing* destination.”

TOP: TITLE

Backlit the couple with a remote flash to blend it with the exposure sunset and torches..

BOTTOM LEFT:

Flash with CTB gel to light and colour the background and a flash with CTO gel and honeycomb to light Patricia with warmth.

BOTTOM RIGHT:

A fine example of Louis’ signature epic shots that combines natural vista with drama..

OPPOSITE PAGE: TITLE

“Peace” taken inside the Temple of Literature in Hanoi won the WPPI International Portrait Print of the Year.