Baring all for charity – and maybe a world record too

By NISHA RAMCHANDANI

TWENTY celebrities plan to demonstrate that less can be more when they bare all for a coffee-table book aimed at raising $300,000 for charity. And, this being Singapore, they intend to set a world record along the way.

The celebrities from Singapore and the region – including television presenter Benedict Goh and Chinese-Australian model Jaymee Ong – will appear in the book, *Pure*. They will wear nothing, while demonstrating their charitable instincts.

The target of $300,000 is intended to be raised through an auction sale, plus income from a gala dinner, called the Pure Charity Event.

The total amount donated will go fully to the charities as costs are being offset by a host of sponsors.

Exclusive publication: *Jaymee Ong in 'Pure'. Only 30 copies of the coffee-table book will be available worldwide, 20 of them to be sold in an auction managed by eBay.*

Only 30 copies of *Pure* will be available worldwide. Twenty of them will be sold in an auction managed by *eBay.com.sg* which will start at midnight next Monday and end at 11.59 pm on Jan 17.

With bidding to start at $10,000 per book, *Pure* is an attempt to be the world's most expensive coffee-table book. Two of the books, as part of VIP packages, will have starting bid prices of $25,000 each.

The money raised will be distributed to six charities equally. They are the Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME); Singapore After Care Association (SACA); Beautiful People – Career Workshop Fund; Star Shelter – Singapore Council of Women's Organisations; Kampung Senang Charity and Education Foundation; as well as the National Heritage Board.

According to photographer and project leader Dominic Khoo, who conceived the idea, the charities were selected based on their consistent transparency to emphasise the need for such transparency and efficiency in charity management.

The Pure Charity Event will be held on Feb 27 at the Conrad Centennial Hotel, where winning bidders will be presented with their books.

SCENE&HEARD

CRY my beloved celebs

lifestyle

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Fund-raising can be fun

Heartrending to heartwarming

By the way, it's for charity

Party animal roars

life!. arts

Among the stars photographed by Dominic Khoo's (far left) are Fiona Xie (left) and Tony Leung (below). PHOTOS: DESMOND FOO, DOMINIC KHOO

Real faces of celebs

Dominic Khoo's latest show features celebrities in unguarded moments

yip wai yee

Award-winning Singaporean photographer Dominic Khoo wants to show the hidden side of celebrity.

In his upcoming photographic exhibition Access All Areas, his photo capture Cate Blanchett with wrinkles, an anxious-looking Fiona Xie holding a mobile phone and Maggie Cheung bidding farewell to a party host.

"In all other situations, these celebrities are always looking so perfect, their skin all flawless, but it's not real," says Khoo, 32. "My exhibition shows the real side."

To be held at the Sky Lounge of EFG Bank in North Bridge Road, the show will feature more than 100 rare, behind-the-scenes shots of both local and international celebrities.

Gathered over the last five years, they were taken at private parties, concert backstage and VIP functions that he had access to as a photographer of celebrities.

The former branding manager for a watch company picked up photography only five years ago when his mother bought him an SLR camera for his birthday. He took it with him to luxury watch conventions in Switzerland's Basel and Geneva in 2006, and shot more than 15,000 pictures of watches and the glitterati everything at these events.

Through word-of-mouth and subsequent photography awards, he became known in the Singapore circuit for taking unique celebrity shots.

To ensure that the upcoming show is both fun and different from typical exhibitions with blown-up, wall-mounted prints, he will have his works hung on strings in a darkened room.

"It's going to be like entering James Bond's private apartment, where strings and strings of photographs have been hung up, all taken from his shoots as an espionage agent," he says with a laugh.

Viewers will also get to see candid snapshots of retired French footballer Zinedine Zidane, American pop/rock band Boys Like Girls and Brazilian supermodel Gisele Bundchen.

Khoo adds that compared to glamour photos found in glossy magazines, his work has more staying power.

He says: "Most photos of celebrities are shot for cell high-impact shots – they are beautiful and capture your attention. But you won't want to live them and hang them in your living room. You would probably buy a picture, however, of someone tripping over backstage."

One of his favourite pieces is of Hong Kong actor Tony Leung Chiu Wai looking sideways, and "sullen menacingly" at the camera. Taken at a VIP event for luxury brand Mont Blanc in Beijing two years ago, the photo reminded him of Leung's role as an undercover cop in hit movie Infernal Affairs (2002), he says.

"It's very rare to capture an actor in a public situation looking as if he was in character," he adds.

Another one is of singer Tom Jones apologising to the audience after an illness forced him to cancel his show here in March this year. "He looked quite sad," Khoo says. "He was sweating, his voice was tougher than usual, and he was basically struggling."

My photo is a close-up shot of the moment."

He adds: "It's the stories that exist behind the photographs that really matter to me."

When asked what self-portrait would best represent himself, he says it would probably involve "plenty of shadows and a covered face".

He explains: "I am terribly shy in front of the camera actually, which makes me glad that I'm safely standing behind it."

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ACCESS ALL AREAS BY DOMINIC KHOO

Where: Sky Lounge, EFG Bank, 28 North Bridge Road
When: Saturday to Aug 7, Mondays to Fridays (9am to 6pm), Saturdays (1am to 4pm), closed on Sundays
Admission: Free

IN THE KNOW COLLECTIONS

Grin (or grimace) but just bare it

Celebrities' strip-tease book shows that lies the way to go

DAVID SHOW

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Art & Design

Famous for five minutes

As he unveils his Transformer-like adaptable gallery in Redhill, celebrity photographer Dominic Khoo shares with **Celine Asril** his art in using concepts in an instant and reaping the benefits of craziness

PATRIOTIC SHOWING

National Day need not be the only time to celebrate all things Singaporean as BT Weekend finds out from four local setups that champion homegrown talent in the arts, fashion and design. By Melissa Lwee-Ramsay

DOMINIC KHOO
Director
www.whatsthedesign.com

I've been in love with watches for four years now and my training as a watch expert comes from Antiquorum. In addition, I have written many articles, given talks and even held an auction. The one thing that I regret the most in the process of watch collecting is having sold some of my best-loved pieces. I love my Girard-Perregaux for its rare complications: a combination of chronograph and perpetual calendar. My Patek Philippe is a prized piece because it was given to me on my 21st birthday. The Gerald Genta was the first watch that I spent a great amount of time studying the movements. I truly appreciate watches for their technologies and fine handwork that you're buying into.

ADVICE TO NEW WATCH COLLECTORS: One must never approach fine mechanical watches purely from an investment perspective. I've seen many people sell their watches with a sad look in their eyes. The money they receive somehow doesn't make them as happy as when they first bought the watch. When you know you can write essays on your watches, and defend your decisions with a passion, then that's a watch that stays with you for life. ■

ME AND MY WATCH

Dominic Khoo with his Girard-Perregaux FG10B

Not only can this award-winning photographer boast a celebrity-studded collectable book that raises funds for local charities, Dominic Khoo can also call himself the first South-east Asian watch expert to be trained by Antiquorum, the world's biggest watch auction house. In fact, his entire career in photography began by shooting watches and, for him, watch-collecting remains a highly emotional pursuit.

How did you get into watches?
I think, before I had a girlfriend, the first thing I thought about when I woke up was watches. Watches are very emotional. I chose a watch for my graduation present over a car – a Glashütte Original Alfred Helwig Tourbillon. It really signalled that Glashütte Original was coming back into the world of high horology to make something extremely complicated – that very few people could do.

Tell me about your current watch.
It's an FG10B from Girard-Perregaux. It was actually named after the car that Michael Schumacher was driving in the Grand Prix in 1997. Schumacher needed a finish in the top three to win the season, and the other guys needed to place higher. On his last lap, Schumacher swerved into the guy and tried to wash him out of the race but himself finished! The other guy went on to win the championship. If you ask me, this is a watch that Girard-Perregaux probably should of have made. For the number of Grand Prixs that they won – which is engraved on the back – they didn't win the season. It's also got to be one of the most complicated watches Girard-Perregaux has ever made – it has 11 complications. A wrist watch with 11 complications is extremely, extremely rare today.

What will you buy next?
A watch made by an independent watchmaker, Urwerk. It looks like a chunk of gold. Blocks, its winding crown at six o'clock instead of the traditional three o'clock, and it's got a power reserve indication. I think it's far ahead of its time.

If someone bought you a watch, would you judge them on that?
I think watches are very personal decisions. I would like if people bought me watches, but I must have a choice in the watch. That kind of joy spoils it all, doesn't it?

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DOMINIC KHOO, AWARD-WINNING PHOTOGRAPHER AND WATCH EXPERT.

What is your latest purchase?
A vintage Rolex Explorer II "Steve McQueen" – I think it will be the next Paul Newman.

How much did it cost?
At a recent auction, those in its class (and in equal condition) fetched US$25-40,000.

What influenced your decision to make the purchase?
I think vintage Rolex watches have very interesting stories behind them – 30 years ago, people that collected watches at a high level were few and far between – someone that had the foresight (or the sheer wealth) to buy watches like this and store them in a safe was probably a very important collector – and that makes the provenance of the watch very exciting. Think about it as drinking a bottle of Chateau Y Quem that Napoleon brought into the wars with him.

What are the special features of the watch?
The iconic orange hand in the Steve McQueen was originally red – Rolex never produced watches with colours other than black, White, Green and the metals – the orange hand here was made with organic ink that faded with time.

What will be your next purchase and why? Has anything from BaselWorld or SIHH 2010 caught your attention?
So many people are doing great things in the watch industry – but I have to admit I am a little partial to independent watchmakers like Roger Smith, Philippe Dufour, Kees Engelbarts, etc. If it is a single watch, there has been a sudden resurgence in the red-and-blue dialed Paul Newman Daytona from Rolex. Maybe that is a vintage piece I would like to have.

When and why did you start collecting watches?
My first piece was a 21st birthday present. But the first piece I researched as a serious watch geek was when I was 23 – the more I researched the more I got hooked. I – seven years after daily studies and even training with Antiquorum as a watch expert, here I am.

How is Singapore a watch collector's haven?
We have the advantage of having three of the world's biggest retailers all in the Orchard Road and Marina Bay areas – that means people get to go from shop to shop to compare prices and stock very easily! And, because we do not have many smaller retailers, these three retailers have economies of scale. The watch brands give us prices that are sometimes not even available in Switzerland.

style

DOMINIC KHOO
Occupation: Entrepreneur
Age: 27
Fashion Statement: "Flowing, untucked linen"

Dominic Khoo has a passion for life, evident from his diverse business and personal interests, including avidly collecting watches. Each time he considers a purchase, he reminds every detail so only the finest quality ends up in his shopping bags. Just take a peek at his mechanical watch collection of 30 timepieces, including Glashütte Original's Alfred Helwig Tourbillon and Roger Dubuis' impressively carved Monsieur Gaio Dragon. "Complications make life simpler – so the more mechanically complicated the watch, the more I like it. Mechanical perpetual calendars, for example, are truly ingenious."

Of his choice of the Patek watch worn at the white tie-and-tails shirt, Khoo confesses: "Super LHS wool is an excellent material – I like the luxury feel of it against my skin, plus it's crease resistant." A man of many interests – golf, shopping, food, photography, tennis, movies, yoga, travelling and basses – he lives by a simple set of dressing rules. "I'm classic in style – I dress because they adapt well to casual and semi-casual occasions with a simple play of cut, materials and colours. I like crowns, cream and white Crocs from with a belt and trousers or shorts, and yoga-wear for different occasions." He has 20 pairs of shoes, including his favourite dark shoes, in shades of tan, cream and brown, but his entire collection ranges from Ludwig Reiters Chelsea boots to Ermenegildo Zegna's "Dress are very comfortable in hot, cold, outside or cold."

Khoo's only self-confessed fashion faux pas is wearing two watches simultaneously. But who can blame this keen watch enthusiast? "I have recently fallen in love with watches by independent watchmakers like Kees Engelbarts, Volker Vyskocil and Philippe Dufour, who make their watches from scratch by hand. If I wore a tan, I'd take it off to them."

JULIE LO
Occupation: Urban stylist, dynamic
Age: Looking the right side of 40
Fashion Statement: "Classic and sexy"

Julie Lo uses sartorial fashion purchases as a psychological boost. "I have to think out of the box to match old outfits with the new." Having joined the big 4-0 this year, she finds herself lately and self-critical but is glad to be "ageing gracefully." She maintains her looks by hitting the gym and scanning with music. Of models, Lo loves Audrey Hepburn's aspirational "simply elegant" approach of Prada, as with the "simple yet interesting black boat neck Prada top" she wears here.

Lo has always been game for what life has to offer. Her wilder twenty days reveal she lived the way she wanted, sporting short hair with big earrings. A Madonna, stand-ing out like a fashion maverick among the rest of the robotically dressed students. Nowadays, she switches between elegant pencil skirts and sky-high heels to girly A-line skirts. Sculpting open and tailoring left "deliberately and intentional for to glad to be