



Sirachai Shin Arunrugstichai

Age: 31

Born: Bangkok

Resides: Bangkok

Education: Prince of Songkla University,
Mahidol University International College

Website: shinsphoto.com

Clients: *National Geographic* Thailand, International Union for Conservation of Nature (Asia), Save Our Seas Foundation, WildAid, Greenpeace Southeast Asia, Oxfam (Thailand), Fin Free

Exhibitions: Siam Paragon Watch Expo 2017, Bangkok; Love Wildlife Foundation at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, Bangkok; Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre

Awards: *National Geographic* Thailand Explorer; The World Press Photo Foundation's 6x6 Global Talent Program in Southeast Asia and Oceania; Save Our Seas Foundation Marine Conservation Photography Grant

Key lesson: "Apply to competitions. I am not too confident I would be taken as seriously as I am now here in my home turf without the international awards from the work that I have been doing, and local media coverage and followers that come after."



Early in his career, Sirachai Shin Arunrugstichai thought covering stories like protests, religious events and politics in Thailand would help him break into professional photography. But he was, in a sense, a fish out

of water: He was a diving instructor and a graduate student in marine biology. "One day a photojournalist whom I highly respect asked me, 'What are you doing here?'" Arunrugstichai says. "You have your own way, so why are you chasing after the same thing as everybody else around here?"

The message resonated, and Arunrugstichai began documenting marine conservation issues with hopes of inspiring change.

He scored a big break in 2013 by becoming a finalist in a photo competition held by *National Geographic* Thailand. The editors invited Arunrugstichai, then a graduate student, to send photos he was taking while studying biodiversity and shark fisheries in the Andaman Sea. His first assignment for the publication, on the plight of sharks in local waters, ran in 2016. He has pitched and shot three other conservation stories for the magazine, including a 2018 piece about Thailand's Marine Protected Areas.

Arunrugstichai's storytelling has evolved. "My work became much more narrative driven," he says. He's no longer focused on getting the great single image, he says. "Each photo has to fit like a Lego piece into the larger story. I don't go seeking out beautiful diving locations like I did in my early years anymore, but I go out seeking the stories that are going on that I want people to know." He puts in more planning, research and preparation before hunting for each photo, and his images are "more authentic and raw," he says.

National Geographic photographer Thomas Peschak has supported Arunrugstichai's growth. The two met in 2016 when Arunrugstichai won a grant from the Save Our Seas Foundation. Now Peschak advises him through the International League of Conservation Photographers mentorship program.

"In addition to highly accomplished natural history images, Shin's portfolio and narrative works also contain often surprising and sometimes even humorous images of tough or dark subject matters," Peschak says. "Hats off to Shin for his courage and perseverance."

—MINDY CHARSKI

