
RICHARD KEARNS
Independent artist
Singapore



Richard Kearns is an independent artist whose work encompasses photographic, printed and digital media. His conceptual approach to making work often incorporates issues of social anthropology. In this capacity Richard has worked on several projects calling on his seasoned experience as a documentary photographer recording transitional societies. In 2009 Richard moved from professional photography practice to teaching photography, enabling time for a Masters in Printmaking. In turn this opened the route back to his original vocation of a practicing artist. Richard has worked on many

varied projects and collaborations over the years which have included constructing giant Zoetropes on the River Thames (London, UK) and building traditional mud and brick furnaces and kilns for traditional Dhokra lost wax casting (Baroda, India). He has exhibited internationally, including in Egypt, India, Singapore, and UK. Richard currently lives in Singapore dividing his time between his research, art practice, and family.

The Orang Laut: A Visual Record

Documentary photography has been in evidence since the early 20th century, gaining its position with photos such as Walker Evans' and Dorathea Lang's seminal portraits of poor workers of the USA's Dust Bowl through the 30's. But at its essence, it can be argued that documentary photography is an art and not a science, revealing only what the photographer intends, or what the viewer wishes to see. In this spirit, Richard Kearns presents recent photographs taken of the Orang Laut, a disappearing seafaring community, one tribe of which has survived in nearby Bintan, Indonesia, carrying on an existence established for thousands of years. Now at risk from tourism, a charitable body is seeking ways to promote their authentic lifestyle. As part of this, Kearns was asked to record the Orang Laut at work and play, both night and during the day. This body of work raises questions about the role of documentary photography, the lives of ethnic communities, and what the viewer chooses to read from recorded images of these lives. It further questions the use of images when they are repurposed in a promotional context, deliberately presented to convey certain messages and meanings.