



PICTURING SURVIVAL

For four decades, **Ricky Maynard** has questioned the photographer's role, the influence of the image in society and its persuasive power.

WORDS | KEITH MUNRO

When it comes to picture-making, documentary photographer **Ricky Maynard** has a belief that rings true. It is something that continues to guide this process. "A really good portrait is the result of an intimate conversation between two people," says Maynard. What has also become an important element in his photographs is, "recognising the existence of struggle beneath the image surface."

Through his considered professional practice, Maynard thinks deeply about photography. He is a lifelong student of the photographic medium and a master storyteller who is driven by the importance of the subject matter and the need to share the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia with others.

It is important to him that Aboriginal

people see themselves in his photographs. Maynard is passionate about the materiality of the artform; he is process driven, collaborative and engaging.

He is influenced by the work of leading figures in the photographic medium who changed and challenged the way we appreciate this art form. Pioneers such as **Alfred Stieglitz** (1864–1946), **Lewis Hine** (1874–1940), **Paul Strand** (1890–1976), **Dorothea Lange** (1895–1965), Group f/64 members including **Ansel Adams** (1902–1984), **Edward Weston** (1886 – 1958), **Walker Evans** (1903–1975) as well as **Mary Ellen Mark** (1940–2015) who was a lecturer of Maynard's during his time at the International Centre of Photography in New York in 1990. He is also a founding member of M.33 Photoagency, Melbourne.



His work is held in numerous national and state gallery collections, and he has exhibited nationally and internationally. Maynard has also been the recipient of various awards throughout his professional practice including the Mother Jones International Documentary Award, 1994, an Australian Human Rights Award for Photography, 1997 and the Kate Challis RAKA Award, 2003.

Since the mid-1980s, Maynard has documented various cultural practices, stories and histories that remain vitally important to Aboriginal identity. He has also examined sites of occupation and contact, and issues

relating to social justice and native title. His images often bring the human story of these issues to the viewer's attention. This humanness has been a fundamental aspect of his work and has provided his audiences with a deeper engagement with various Aboriginal communities throughout Australia.

Maynard undertakes his photographic work with a profound sense of responsibility towards cultural integrity, honesty and truth in picture-making by actively engaging with the people and communities he documents. He inherited this during his time as a trainee photographer at the Australian Institute of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra. Working with historical images of Aboriginal people in the institute's digital collection, he began to question the role of photography and the powerful way it frames not just a culture but also a people. Maynard has continued to work and develop his practice within this ethical framework.

Maynard's photographs take viewers on a journey of understanding the unique relationships Australia has with this country's First Peoples and to question how the photographic lens has historically framed those relationships. This includes the colonial gaze



that dominated much of the studio portraiture of Aboriginal people throughout the colonial period up until the 1950s and the inherent power imbalance at play.

Maynard was born in 1953 in Launceston, Tasmania, and is a member of the Ben Lomond and Cape Portland peoples. While he places himself firmly within the tradition of documentary photographer as social activist, his subjects are always strongly connected to his own life and upbringing as an Aboriginal person. The series that established him as a photographer, *The Moonbird People*, 1985-88, documents the annual tradition of mutton

birding on the windswept islands of the Bass Strait, situated between the southeast Australian mainland and Tasmania. The Maynard family were one of 13 Aboriginal families living on the islands, and practising mutton birding, in 1847. The harvesting of moonbirds for their oil, meat and feathers is an annual cultural tradition that continues today. It is clear from the easy way his subjects carry themselves that they are comfortable in front of Maynard's camera as they go about their business. "They knew they were involved in the process, and they trusted me," he says of this series.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Ricky Maynard, 2000s, photographing on Big Dog Island, Bass Strait, Tasmania. PHOTO: MICK CUMMINS.

OPPOSITE: Ricky Maynard, *Untitled, No More Than What You See*, 1993/2023. Silver gelatin print on paper, 32.3 x 48.2cm.

ABOVE: Ricky Maynard, *Untitled, No More Than What You See*, 1993/2023. Silver gelatin print, 32.3 x 48.2cm

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND BETT GALLERY, HOBART.



In his series *Urban Diary*, 1997, he captured the profoundly personal journey of adults undertaking rehabilitation for drug and alcohol addiction. He addressed the landmark High Court of Australia ruling on Native Title in the series *Returning To Places That Name Us*, 2000, while his series *Portrait of a Distant Land*, 2005–07 and *Saddened were the hearts of many men*, 2015 were completed closer to home in Tasmania, with narratives linked to history and place. They are the faces, places and landscapes that have informed, in intimate detail, the co-authorship of image-making that Maynard has developed over 30 years.

While he photographed the earlier *The Moonbird People* series with a 35mm camera, the majority of his professional practice saw him prefer the use of various medium format cameras.

This year represents the 30th anniversary of Maynard's seminal series *No More Than What You See*, 1993 which will be celebrated in an upcoming exhibition presented at Bett Gallery in Hobart come August. The series came about following discussions with the South Australian Department of Correctional Services who granted Maynard permission to document Aboriginal people in four prisons

over a three-month period in response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody which was handed down in 1991.

Exhibited for the very first time will be the entire 31 works that make up the suite. The images will be printed in a limited edition of ten, and will be larger in scale to the format in which they were originally produced.

If the images that Maynard captures are to record an archive of our time, what does this series invoke 30 years later as we revisit this particular subject matter? They are a powerful reminder of why this body of work is important.



OPPOSITE: Ricky Maynard, *Untitled, No More Than What You See*, 1993/2023. Silver gelatin print, 32.3 x 48.2cm.

ABOVE: Ricky Maynard, *Sean, Saddened Were the Hearts of Many Men*, 2015. Silver gelatin print, 45 x 45cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND BETT GALLERY, HOBART.



I am conscious that many parts of the world have experienced Black Lives Matter, the anger, the protests, the outrage and action. These images open up space for the conversation in a proactive and dignified way. It gives voice to the voiceless. It also sheds light on the people that make up the disproportionately high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that are incarcerated in this country. It recognises the humanity in this problem, and that they are not just numbers we read about when another death in custody is reported in the news. All too often there is a detachment and an inability to connect the figures we read and hear about in the latest news cycle with real people. I am reminded of that when I revisit this series, and look at the sterile environments and into the eyes of kids, expectant mothers, adults, parents and the elderly that have collaborated in the development of Maynard's series.

This body of work challenges, informs and empowers audiences with its subject matter. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people per capita are the most incarcerated people on the planet, and in many ways, it becomes less about what you see and more about what you do.

Maynard captures the resilience, dignified humility and stoic nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Long may this continue.

Ricky Maynard will show his 1990s series *No More Than What You See* at Bett Gallery, Hobart from 4 to 26 August 2023.

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EMMA BETT

Director, Bett Gallery, Hobart

"Bett Gallery has represented **Ricky Maynard** for well over 20 years. I was originally drawn to Ricky's work through its palpable sense of connection between people and place. Ricky takes time to develop personal relationships with his subject, be that person or site, and this sees him stand apart from and go beyond other documentary photographers. There is an intimacy to his photographs and a truth and authenticity to the work. You know that you are looking at something very important, even if you can't register why.

"This upcoming exhibition of Ricky's will

mark 30 years since this series of photographs were first exhibited. Maynard began *No More than What You See* after returning from New York where he had studied at the International Center for Photography. The series was made in response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1987–1991. Today, 30 years later, Indigenous Australians are the most incarcerated people on the planet and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners account for 32% of all prisoners. These are incredibly significant and evocative images by Ricky, who was given special

access to prisons with the support of the South Australian Department of Correctional Facilities.

"Ricky's work continues to be highly sought after by institutions and private collectors, acknowledging his importance as the creator of some of the most compelling images of contemporary Aboriginal Australia over the last two decades. Never have these images been so important. Ricky upholds the continued presence of his people and his connection to their place, encouraging viewers to take the time to listen to these important stories."



DR. SHAUNE LAKIN

Senior Curator of Photography at the National Gallery of Australia

"I first came to know Ricky's work through his Muttonbird series. When I first saw these photographs, maybe because I was young, I didn't fully understand their power.

"Everything that Ricky does is about picturing survival, using photography and the documentary form to demonstrate the resilience of his family and of First Nations people and culture on this continent. So he uses this actually quite complicated set of practices – documentary photography – that, certainly by the mid-1980s, had become implicated in the facilitation of ideological and political

projects (including colonisation and genocide) and that had historically been used to furnish "proof" of people and culture having passed or in demise.

"But he never uses the documentary mode in a didactic way. His photographs are always open and straightforward, both as pictures and also as assertions of sovereignty and survival. I began by stating that, when I first saw it, I didn't fully understand the implications and the power of Ricky's work, perhaps because I was too young. But maybe the work itself has helped me shift."

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COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND BETT GALLERY, HOBART.



1950s

1953
born, Launceston, Tasmania



1980s

1983-86
worked as photographic assistant, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra

1987
held position of Aboriginal Arts Development Officer, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, Hobart, Tasmania

1990s

1990
awarded Aboriginal Overseas Study Award and travels to International Centre of Photography, New York, USA

1992
holds solo show *The Moon-Bird People* at National Aboriginal Culture Institute, Adelaide, South Australia

1994
holds solo show *No More Than What You See, the Prison series* at Stills Gallery, Sydney. | recipient of the Mother Jones International Documentary Award, San Francisco, U.S.A.



1995
solo show *No More Than What You See, the Prison series* tours to Adelaide and regional South Australia | holds solo shows *World Retrospective on Documentary Photography*, Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City; *The Moon-Bird People*, Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney; and *Dear Mother*, M.33 Photoagency collective exhibition, Fitzroy Town Hall, Melbourne | undertakes Artist-in-residence, University of New South Wales

1997
holds solo show *Urban Diary*, Manly Art Gallery and Museum, Sydney. | awarded Australian Human Rights Award for Photography

1999
holds solo show *The Survey*, Melbourne Arts Festival, Linden Gallery, Melbourne

2000s

2000
founding director of The Moonbird Heritage Trust, Indigenous archive, and community history programs | holds solo show *The Elders Album*, Tasmania Elders Council, Tasmania

2001
holds solo show *Returning to Places that Name Us Aurukun, Wik Portraits*, Stills Gallery, Sydney

2003
holds solo show *Wik Portraits*, RAKA award exhibition, Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne | national winner of the prestigious Kate Challis Indigenous RAKA Art Award

2005
awarded Australia Council for the Arts, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board Fellowship Award

2007
holds solo show *In Response to Place*, Melbourne Town Hall, commission, and exhibition; included in Paris Photo Quai Biennale, Australian Embassy, France and Busan Biennale, South Korea

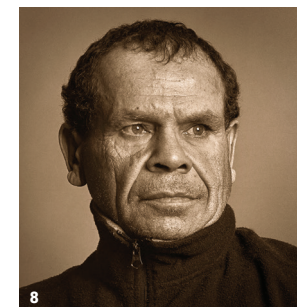
2008
holds solo show *Portrait of a Distant Land*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Tasmania

2009
holds solo show *Culture Warriors*, National Collective at Katzen Gallery, American University Museum Washington DC, USA | *Portrait of a Distant Land* titled for the Survey Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney with national and international tours. Entire collection acquisition by the Museum of Contemporary Art

2010s

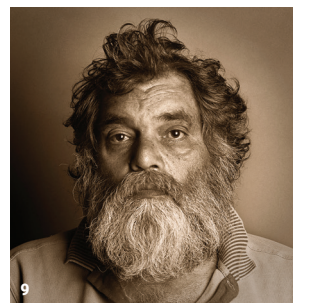
2010
portrait of Mick Dodson, First Nation scholar and leader, commissioned by National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, now in its permanent collection. | holds solo show *Portrait of a Distant Land*, Bett Gallery, Hobart

2011
holds solo show *Portrait of a Distant Land*, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, Virginia, USA



2012
Portrait of a Distant Land, touring exhibit shows at Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute South Australia

2016
holds solo show *Saddened Were the Hearts of Many Men*, Stills Gallery, Sydney



2020s

2023
upcoming solo show *No More Than What You See* at Bett Gallery, Hobart

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND BETT GALLERY, HOBART.

1 | 1985
Ricky Maynard, *Elliott (Bucky), The Moonbird People*, 1985. Silver gelatin print, 28 x 36cm.

2 | 1985
Ricky Maynard, *Athol Burgess, The Moonbird People (detail)*, 1985. Silver gelatin print, 28 x 36cm.

3 | 1990s
Ricky Maynard, self portrait with work *Urban Diary*, 1990s.

4 | 1993
Ricky Maynard, *Untitled, No More Than What You See*, 1993/2023. Silver gelatin print, 32.3 x 48.2cm.

5 | 1993
Ricky Maynard, *Untitled, No More Than What You See*, 1993/2023. Silver gelatin print, 32.3 x 48.2cm.

6 | 2005/08
Ricky Maynard, *The Spit, Portrait of a Distant Land*, 2005/08. Silver gelatin print on paper, 37 x 54cm.

7 | 2007
Ricky Maynard in the darkroom.

8 | 2015
Ricky Maynard, *Kerry, Saddened Were the Hearts of Many Men*, 2015. Silver gelatin print on paper, 45 x 45cm.

9 | 2015
Ricky Maynard, *Leigh, Saddened Were the Hearts of Many Men*, 2015. Silver gelatin print, 45 x 45cm.