Mick Yates, project proposal

Sarath’s story

Education after the Khmer Rouge Genocide
April 17th 1975, the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh. Within 24 hours, the city was emptied. In the Genocide that followed, 1.7-2 million people died.

This project is the story of Keo Sarath. He survived the Cambodian Genocide, as did his mother, sister and wife-to-be. But 50 of his family did not, including his father. He subsequently dedicated his life to education. This story is one of hope and not victimhood, in a country where closure on the Genocide has still not fully happened. I am excited that the project may be able to give Sarath and family an opportunity to get their story out, and to achieve some kind of closure.
Context

Whilst I covered some of this in the Oral Presentation, I believe a summary of the background is necessary to understand this proposal. We fell in love with Cambodia and its people in 1994, even though part of the country was still under Khmer Rouge control (marked red on map), 15 years after Vietnam invaded and stopped the Genocide.

In 1999 (after Pol Pot’s death) my wife and I founded a primary school building program in ex-Khmer Rouge areas. This was in partnership with Save the Children (Norway) and the Provincial Education Office of Siem Reap. It was then we met Sarath.

The documentary of the program is at yatesweb.com.

Today, as a more experienced and thoughtful photographer, I believe I can do better justice to the Cambodian people.

The story of the Genocide has been well covered by historians such as David Chandler. The Yale Genocide Studies program and DC-Cam, in Phnom Penh, have created important documentary archives.

Yet even now there is little legal closure with the leaders of the Khmer Rouge. Few have been prosecuted, despite decades of UN work. And even with best efforts of NGOs, the UN and Government, education is not where it needs to be.

In Phnom Penh I still feel that the ghosts of Khmer Rouge times hang heavily over the city and its people. I strongly believe that there is a very personal side to this story which needs to be told, and which should serve as witness to those dark days.

This project is unfinished business, for both Sarath and myself.
Project
The project will tell Sarath’s family story, both from his own recollections and from joint re-discovery of education work we did together - whilst also exploring the broader impact of the Genocide. It will include archival research, interviews and video.
Over two years, this could develop in several ways:
- a photo-biography about Sarath and his family.
- a view of the long-term impact of the Genocide.
- a view of Cambodian primary school education.
In the next 3 Blocks, all of these themes will be researched.

Objectives
Work in Block 2 will focus on Re-Photography of the school program, and exploring my archive. Block 3 will look at ‘traces’, and Block 4 new venues in Sarath’s family history.
A successful conclusion of the MA will be a book, an innovative online presentation, and an exhibition/installation in Phnom Penh.
Images from all visits to Cambodia (and archives) will be included in the FMP.
A ‘stretch goal’ would be a near-simultaneous European exhibition.
Magazine coverage/sponsorship will be sought (Leica LFI etc.)

Audience
The project aims to engage Cambodian people directly, building on Sarath’s story, to offer new, personal light on Genocide’s aftermath. Sarath and his family are a critical audience.
And I aim to find a new Global audience to re-visit this ‘old’ story.
Development of my Practice

In my view, my best pictures tell an ‘unfinished story’, with a sense of place or personality – evoking questions of who, what, where, when.

In retrospect, I feel my earlier Cambodia work is often too detached. I also see that, whilst my current work is technically competent, it is sometimes overly structured. I want to create more fluid, impactful work that helps audiences ask questions about the people in the photographs - what their life is about, and why they are depicted.

The layered storytelling of Alex Webb, and the detailed presentation of Susan Meiselas are inspirational. However, I think I need more personal imagery, asking (or answering) questions about the story. I enjoy environmental portraiture, though wish to do more with disengaged subjects, begging questions about the person’s relationship with the space. Throughout, there is a duty to respect people photographed, so I seek intimacy without exploitation.

Presentationally, Wolfgang Tillmans’ eclecticism is instructive, not so much for content but for his imaginative display of photographs and other forms of imagery to build engaging narratives for the audience.

I have had some success in street, documentary and event work, featuring in several group exhibitions and books, and have self-published three books. I have a decent online presence and a working understanding of this space. Educationally, I have a Licentiate from the Royal Photographic Society, and have completed several ‘mini programs’ (e.g. Seeing Through Photographs, MoMA, New York.)

To step-change my practice, I now want to research and experiment with new ways of engaging people - both the subjects of my work and my audience. I will also seek to strengthen the written narrative and explore how it can better support my work.

I am interested in researching semi-abstracted ‘traces’, both physical and psychological, as it applies to the impact of Genocide, to add texture and context to the audience’s understanding of Sarath’s story.
**Progress to date**

I am scanning my archive of images (35mm slides). Whilst this is not ‘new work’, they are important to the story and to re-photography.

I have been re-reading some of our library on Cambodia and the Genocide, to be sure my facts are straight.

I have been researching documentary (Rosler; 2004 and Meiselas, 1997); traces and aftermath (Ristelhueber, 2009 and Herschdorfer, 2011); contexts and presentation (Tillmans, 2011/2017); archives (Caswell: 2014); and the photography of violence (Linfield: 2010).

In Herschdorfer (Afterwards, 2011) most photographers chose a limited ‘slice’ of the story, and then picked a style to make the most of that situation. I see this as strong but limiting as it can narrow audience understanding. Meiselas’ attention to detail is astonishing but rather impersonal to the subject. The most mind-opening reading so far is Caswell (Archiving the Unspeakable, 2014). She unpacks the meaning of Tuol Sleng ‘mug shots’ - once taken, the image was a death sentence. There is something in this ‘political process’ of photography which I instinctively feel is important. Whilst I need to explore how to execute, the idea seems linked to better audience engagement.

I have visited Cambodia, to scope out the project, and to begin creating new work. So far, I have only re-visited Phnom Penh. Future trips will re-visit the countryside and the schools. I have encouraged Sarath, for the first time, to write down his stories. And the family is taking pictures with no direction from me, which I will incorporate in the FMP.

I am using video for interviews and location setting.

This project has already presented dilemmas. Whilst I want to push myself creatively, I realise that, to see this through ‘Cambodian eyes’, I need to balance the humanity of the story with appropriate coverage of the Genocide.

A strategy could be to combine image types, hence my interest in ‘traces’. By using these impersonal and ‘objective’ images, I hope to punctuate Sarath’s personal (and subjective) story to deliver a more complete and engaging view of Cambodian history.

I am eager to explore this in the next Block, Surfaces & Strategies.
Resources and skills

I have the camera, scanning and video equipment required.

I need to build better historical and present-day understanding, so that I can establish the most salient and impactful narrative:

• Understand the impact of history, visiting the archive groups (Bophana Audio-visual Centre and DC-Cam, in Phnom Penh).
  The project will challenge my research and political skills.
• Re-photograph steps taken with Sarath and others involved, in the countryside and at schools we built.
• Better understand what is going on in politics and in education today, including what Sarath is currently doing.

I will continue to study relevant contemporary photographers (including peers) to examine new approaches to story-telling.

I will continue to research exhibition/installation methods and practices, seeking exciting ways to better engage my audiences.

Given relatively infrequent travel to Cambodia, I will hone my skills with multiple mini-projects, both locally and travelling elsewhere.
Schedule

Block 1: Jan 2018 - Scoping project: Tuol Sleng, Choeung Ek.
Block 3: Sep 2018 - Traces of Genocide: Venues TBD.

Costs

Each Cambodia trip likely to cost c £3.5-£5k, including Sarath’s expenses etc. This will be self-funded.

The final book / exhibition cost are to be defined. I will need to evaluate to what extent these can be self-funded, whilst investigating crowdfunding and sponsorship.
The diary should be taught a hard lesson to all children. To see a child, a human, being tormented in prison. I am 84 years old and did not know about this camp. Never forget what I felt in this camp. It is completely devastating and my heart goes to all the people who suffered and died. I hope this can be stopped down and that those who are suffering can benefit from your kindness. I hope the world can be saved and that those who are suffering can benefit from your kindness.

Champa Pecunias,
Chester, MA
Appendix 1: Bibliography to date

Chum, Mey. 2010. Survivor. Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia.
## Appendix 2: Graphic Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positions &amp; Practice</th>
<th>Surfaces &amp; Strategies</th>
<th>Sustainable Prospects</th>
<th>Informing Contexts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan-May 18</td>
<td>May-Sep 18</td>
<td>Sep-Jan 19</td>
<td>Jan-May 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Scoping
- Phnom Penh
- Sarath’s family

### Re-Photography
- Siem Reap
- Anlong Veng
- Preah Vihear

### Traces of Genocide
- Phnom Penh
- Siem Reap
- TBD

### New Venues / Family History
- Battambang
- Banteay Meanchey

### Archives
- Scanning / History
Appendix 3: Risk Assessment

MA Photography Risk Assessment form

Please read the Risk Assessment Guidelines before completing this form which contains further resources, available from The Photography Centre.

- Please save a copy of this form to your computer
- You will need to attach a risk assessment form to your Research Project Proposal and your Final Major Project Proposal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photographer’s Name:</th>
<th>Mick Yates</th>
<th>Date(s) of Shoot:</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistants’ Names:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor / Supervisor:</td>
<td>Jesse Alexander</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
<td>Cambodia - various</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of work:</td>
<td>Sarath’s Story - Documentary in major cities and countryside, in public places, archives, historical sites and educational facilities</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Persons at Risk** Identify all those at risk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical Staff:</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contractors:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning Staff:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Staff:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Public:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitors:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estates Staff:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Staff:</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other: Keo Sarath & Family Especially at risk:

**Check list**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>Flash/tungsten</th>
<th>Stands/tripods</th>
<th>Hot-lights</th>
<th>Smoke-machine/fire-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flammable materials</td>
<td>Risk of Fire</td>
<td>Welfare of Assistant-</td>
<td>Welfare of model</td>
<td>Working-at-Heights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Transport to location</td>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>Vehicles/traffic</td>
<td>Weather conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public-</td>
<td>Confined-spaces</td>
<td>Derelict Buildings</td>
<td>Animals-</td>
<td>Children-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tides-</td>
<td>Compressed-Gasses</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Noise</td>
<td>Chemicals-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PRIMARY RISK ASSESSMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>HAZARD</th>
<th>RISK OF</th>
<th>Unexpected Illness whilst on location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTROL MEASURE</th>
<th>Usual precautions with local food, water etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insurance, travel and medical cover</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 3: Risk Assessment

| HAZARD | Equipment Stolen | RISK OF | Interruption of work  
|        |                 |         | Financial loss
| CONTROL MEASURE | Continual vigilance |           |  
|                 | Insurance         |         |  
| HAZARD | Weather, traffic, terrain | RISK OF | Personal injury
| CONTROL MEASURE | Continual vigilance |           |  
|                 | Check forecasts   |         |  
|                 | Appropriate clothing |         |  
|                 | Insurance         |         |  
| HAZARD | Politics | RISK OF | Media / press clampdown especially as controversial elections this year
| CONTROL MEASURE | In Cambodia on a tourist visa |           |  
|                 | Stay away from political events, public political comments |         |  
|                 | Carry “Medal of National reconstruction” (Royal Cambodian Govt., 2002) |         |  
|                 | Seek permission to photograph where needed (schools, Govt. offices etc.) |         |  
| HAZARD | Personal theft | RISK OF | Money, passport, cards stolen
| CONTROL MEASURE | Reputable hotels |           |  
|                 | Continual vigilance |         |  
|                 | Accompanied by local Cambodian friends and guides |         |  
|                 | American Express Emergency Services |         |  
| HAZARD |                 |         | RISK OF
| CONTROL MEASURE |                 |         |  
|
## Appendix 3: Risk Assessment

**On site risk assessment:** these are control measures that arose on your shoot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergency Information and Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phone</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Medical Expertise</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emergency Procedure</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medical Treatment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evacuation procedures</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incident/accident reporting</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessment carried out by**

- I have ensured that I have reviewed the hazards and risks associated with this project and taken necessary steps to remove hazards where possible or reduced the risks associated with the remaining hazards to a minimum.
- I have recorded the main hazards, risks and control measures in this document.
- I have ensured that those working with me have been briefed on the nature of the tasks they are to perform, and are aware of the hazards associated with the task and the measures in place to reduce the risks associated with those hazards, (if applicable)
- I will continually assess hazards and risks ‘live’ on site to ensure that nothing has been overlooked or has changed since initial assessment.

Signed: ____________________________  Date: 22nd April 2018

**Assessment reviewed by**