



In the early 1970s, Delhi photographer Pablo Bartholomew started taking pictures of his friends and his surroundings. He was influenced by and learned photography from his father Richard Bartholomew, a renowned art critic. Much of Pablo's early work was organic, as he was taking pictures for himself, without giving much thought to what he was capturing.

Then he spent nearly 20 years as a photojournalist working for the international media.

But in the mid-2000s Pablo revisited the pictures he took early in his career. He spent a lot of time observing the pictures, scanning them. He has now created a couple of shows that examine a certain kind of life in Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata in the 1970s.

Pablo, who was honored with a Padma Shri by the Indian President in 2013, has now traveled with these exhibits in India and abroad. One of the shows is *Outside In* where he captures many of his friends — from Delhi's Modern School, the city's Ruchika Theatre group, actors, writers, filmmakers and regular people he used to hang out with. Some of them are well-known names, others are people he met in the 1970s.

At 59, Pablo describes himself as documentary photographer.

A section of *Outside In* is currently being shown at the Thomas Erben Gallery in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. The show continues until June 20.

This is a small segment of the full *Outside In* show right?

Yes, the full show is about 70 images. There are two aspects to why the current show is smaller. First is the space aspect. If it had been a bigger gallery, there could have been more images.

But Thomas (Erben, gallery owner) looked at the work from his own aesthetic point of view. I let the gallery work with the material, as long as it is going in the right direction.

When did you first show these images?

It was first shown in 2007 in Arles in the South of France at Les Rencontres de la Photographie. It's the oldest photo festival.

These photographs are from the 70s. Had you visited them in the last 30 plus years?

I started in 2005. I was getting bored with the photo agency business, working for American and international media. I didn't want to do headshots of industrialists and IT people. Editorially, the rates were falling and the assignments were getting less frequent.

What I had been doing incrementally starting in 2000 — I started scanning my entire black and white archive. There were about 30,000 negatives. Then I started scanning my father's material. In total, there were at least 50,000 negatives. It took quite a while.

What was the sense you got looking at your life from the 70s? Many of the



Self Portrait, Delhi, 1975.

FROM OUTSIDE IN BY PABLO BARTHOLOMEW, NOW SHOWING AT THOMAS ERBEN GALLERY, NEW YORK

'Photography for me has been the important therapy'

As an exhibition of his images opens in Manhattan, Pablo Bartholomew discusses with **Aseem Chhabra** his life in photographs long before he became one of the world's leading photojournalists.

images are from the early 70s, and all the people were a part of your life.

Yes, and I have kept in touch with all, except people who have died such as Medha Gujral Jalota. Another friend Gautam Verma, who is also in one of the photographs at the show, died just a few days back. They live in these photographs.

Before I showed the collection I contacted most of the people to make sure they didn't have an issue. And everybody was more than delighted.

The strange thing is that I got known much more for my work in the media and I am always referred to as a photojournalist. But most people don't realize that

I had a life before that.

I became active in the world of American and international media from 1983, but these pictures are from 1972 onwards. There is a good 10-year period where I photographed for myself.

I had developed an eye and a vocabulary of a different sort, much of which had to be abandoned later. It was only later that my creative style started to emerge as a photo journalist, but I was already embedded in a certain kind of way.

Your work captures an era even when you look at the furniture, the doors at your parents' home. It is Delhi of a certain time period.

That's the retrospective aspect of the show which even for me — after having withdrawn from it for 30 years, with greater awareness that I have now, that's what it tells you. Here are snapshots of a certain period and a certain kind of a middle-class life. Within that it is a certain socially intellectual group. We were living in a socialist country in the way Mrs Gandhi (India's then prime minister Indira Gandhi) defined it.

Do you have any regrets about your life when you revisit these photographs?

No, I don't regret that life. I do regret that had I been able to continue that kind of work, I may have been able to produce a different kind of photography or grow in that genre.

But there is a great body of work that you have brought out, capturing the energy of that time period.

There are three bodies of work that I have brought to the table from the archives. There is *Outside In*. Then the largest show — *Chronicles Of A Past Life*, looking at Bombay. And there is *Calcutta Diaries*.

I also have a show, *A Critic's Eye*, which is my father's work. I brought out a book of my father's art writings. It's a 650-page book called *The Art Critic*. It is the bible for modern Indian art.

The two words '*Outside In*', what do they connote?

The full title is *Outside In: A Tale of 3 Cities: 70s and 80s in India*. It's also about my being the outsider and having inside access in many different spaces. In Delhi, when I was in school, I was a part



Medha knitting, Delhi, 1974.



Somewhere on the Bombay Poona Highway, 1974.



Pooch with poster, Bombay, 1974.

The inside view of an outsider

Photographs:
From OUTSIDE IN
by Pablo
Bartholomew,
now showing at the
Thomas Erben
Gallery, New York

My parents, Richard and Ratl at home, New Delhi 1975.



Nomme dancing at a party at Koko's, New Delhi, 1975.



'Photography for me has been the important therapy'



Pablo Bartholomew discusses his photographs with India Abroad in New York.



ASEEM CHHABRA

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of many gangs (*or groups*), which were all college people. There was the Nizamuddin gang and one from Maharani Bagh. And some of them quite different to each other, although there were crossovers.

Then there was the circle of the Ruchika Theatre Group. And friends of mine from (*Delhi's*) St Stephen's College and Hindu College. My mother had her theater circle, while my father had his art group.

These were specific groups of people that I could float through. But I was always an outsider while I was traversing all these different worlds within that 10-year period. I also had the subterranean life where I would hang out with *hijras* (*transgenders*) in the red light area and opium dens. One could cut across the economic class and be equally comfortable.

I am also of mixed origin — my father was Burmese. Try for starters, my names Pablo and Bartholomew. Most people in India will not be able to pronounce it.

There was a separation I felt in some way. It wasn't defined as such. You feel something inside and that's what drives

you. Those are the sensibilities that make you move and explore things like that.

But you were never excluded and your peers liked having you around.

No, I was too much of a hero.

The coolest guy around.

Yes, but how would you react if the school principal would call a parent-teacher meeting and tell all the class parents that they should not allow me to enter their homes.

Then your expulsion from school... do you still hold on to it?

It did affect me. And it fashioned me. I had to fight against it to a degree. I also had the last laugh. In 1985 I got the World Press Photo award, then the principal of Modern School lauded me as an example. It's seeped in irony. I developed a sense of cynicism and sarcasm. Now that I am much more tempered down, I look back at myself and wonder how I must have been.

When you look at the photographs, do you remember the time you took them?

Yes.

Do you remember having Medha pose in that iconic picture?

She was not posing. It was in between theater rehearsals at the Sri Ram Center in Delhi. There were lovely big

windows and winter light coming in. She was sitting there knitting.

So at all times people — when they were dancing or smoking or lying down — they knew what you were doing?

You have to understand that people were not that aware of the camera like they are now. Everybody now has a picture making device and everybody is taking pictures and has a sense. And they know what the camera can do and the idea of representation now sits much more formally in everybody's head.

At that time it was just an object in someone's hands. I was floating around and no one cared or bothered.

There are younger photographers now who are trying to attempt the same thing. But you can see from the body language of everybody they are photographing that they are aware of what's going on. It becomes like a participation.

In my pictures it is an observation. There is a slight separation and that can make the difference.

When you were walking with the camera in the 70s, were you also using it as a device to hide behind it?

No, it was therapeutic. Photography for me has been the most important therapy. Because the whole process of

picture making — the act of taking the picture, processing it and making the prints — all those physical processes also give you time to think. There is artistry involved, but it can be relaxing.

But holding the camera and watching people and preserving that moment...

That's a very instantaneous thing. It's not preserving. You don't think you are clicking. It's just happening. It becomes very intuitive. It's about not being aware, but using your senses to work.

You still take photographs. Do you still see this kind of honesty in your work?

No, as I said, other media work completely changed my work stylistically and it's been a tough battle to go back. That kind of spirit I may not be able to achieve again because it is the function of my own youth and the people around.

But there are the realities of your life now as well.

I don't know if I am connected with them in the same way. It's matter of the ease people feel and how much time you can spend. At that time it didn't look like one was investing time. It was just time pass.

When you are growing up time has a different sensibility and meter as opposed to how you look at time now. ■