

# THE EYE THAT BEHOLDS

*Pablo Bartholomew's journey as a photographer captured a young nation in its stride. Sakshi Gallery this January will showcase some of his more candid photographs.*

Pablo Bartholomew remembers 1984 to be an extremely hectic year. In June, Operation Blue Star took place with the army entering the Golden Temple, Indira Gandhi being assassinated in October and Rajiv Gandhi was leading the congress party. The elections process had started on 1 December, 1986 when the Bhopal gas tragedy happened. "Bhopal was one of the worst horrors that I have witnessed and I hope that nothing like this happens again," says Bartholomew.

In many ways we remember him for his shocking photograph of the half buried baby in Bhopal. Yet when Sakshi Art Gallery opens PB's 60@60 on 22 January 2016, it will comprise a body of works of 60 images of artists, actors, poets from the 70s and 80s, in a way showing



Bartholomew's lighter side.

These images include personalities like Saeed Jaffrey, Adil Jussawala, Anupam Kher, Maneka Gandhi, Shabana Azmi and Smita Patil. "This body of work, 60@60 are 60 images which will possibly be the last resurrection, a visual testimony to friends and people in the arts that I encountered as I traversed and muddled through life in my early years as I was establishing myself in the '70s and '80s," says the artist.

Bartholomew, remains one of India's leading photographers. He was the first from South Asia to win the World Press Photo (WPP)

Award in 1975, when he was just 19. His work has already been shown at Musée de l'Homme in Paris, Asian Arts Museum in San Francisco, Queens

Museum of Art in New York and at Visa pour l'image - the International Photojournalism Festival at Perpignan. Moreover, his client list -includes Time, Newsweek, National Geographic, LIFE, GEO, Stern, Le Figaro and The New York Times Magazine - envy for any photojournalist.

Through his lenses, Pablo has for over 40 years captured images of a growing nation. In his own words, "From the age of 17 years to now at 60 it's been a journey where

I have photographed this country and its people so one could say that it's a mini personal history of a nation."

Here is a bit of Q&A we had with Pablo Bartholomew.

**CB : What is this time's exhibition all about?**

**PB :** This is a fun show from my archive of images. And the fourth and possibly the last of the extraction from it. Portraits of artists, poets, writers, actors, film makers, politicians and more.... All when we were much younger.

**CB : You have taken some iconic portraits, anyone that still strings out as special?**

**PB :** They are all special. That's why they are in the show.

**CB : Your father was a Burmese refugee, while your mother was a partisan refugee, how was your childhood like?**

**PB :** I am a post-independence child of the 50s so for all practical purposes we were a middle class family in a young nation that was struggling to find its way and so were we. Being of refugee origin, things were sparse and simple. There was no land or property but there was a lot of cultural collateral in those formative times.

**CB : How much of them is instilled in your photography?**

**PB :** My father was multi-faceted and with his writing, painting, curating, he also photographed. So the tools were at home. The camera's, film and darkroom were all at home. That's where I learnt the craft of photography when it was much more technical, and a lot more thinking was involved in the picture making.

**CB : What did you pick up as a photographer on Satyajit Ray's, Richard Attenborough's and Merchant Ivory film sets?**

**PB :** At that time, I was working as a stills photographer. And it was also a time when



I was looking to see if I wanted to become a cinematographer or work in the film industry. But chose not to go that route. For me working in a compact manner and remaining to be a photographer was a qualitative choice. Working with a group of people or a crew wasn't what I wanted to get into. Yet there were other things I picked up. Lighting was one of them. It was a great learning curve to see how different cameramen lit situations and how they handled the camera.

**CB : How do you see the Indian art scene?**

**PB :** The art scene is very lively. There is a lot of young energy and lots of new work and experimentation is taking place with the artists. However, there needs to be a more mature collector base that needs to support the work. The galleries can only put the work forward.

**CB : What are your views on Instagram photographers?**

**PB :** I haven't really gotten into Instagram. But there is a space for everyone and everybody. Not sure if all of them can support themselves monetarily. It's more of a vanity thing.

**CB : In a few words, why do you love doing what you do?**

**PB :** Ironically, this is the only thing that I know how to do. Hence in one sense I am stuck to it. Trapped, if you like to use a stronger word. But some trappings are good. And I work and enjoy myself and have been fortunate to communicate through it whether in the media or in the gallery & museum worlds.