

THE ART CRITIC

Pablo Bartholomew traces back the path that Richard Bartholomew traced as an artist and an art critic, in a new book that compiles the latter's writings, *The Art Critic*

H E DIED IN TRAGIC CIRCUMSTANCES IN '85. Fifty-eight he was then, too young! A stroke took him, at an official meeting at the home of the head of the arts' organisation he served then. Those around him thought it better to let him lie and rest and not take him to the hospital. So he lay there unconscious without medical attention and was brought home hours later in that unexplained state... A shattered family that was already dysfunctional. Some magazine assignment I was away on. My mother was living apart from him by then. My brother was the only one to receive him in his unconscious state. But it was too late to bring him back. In a coma for ten days in the hospital he was before life left his body.

A year after his death, an exhibition of his photographs I did. Shown in Delhi and Bombay, it was my way to deal with him, seemingly adequate at the time, showing only his Indian and American street photography, the most familiar of that body of work I could then deal with.

Three years on, I tried making peace with myself, tried to fill in the blanks... childhood stories of the tribes who helped him on his journey. Bedtime stories they were; tales of a safe passage, the exodus from Burma, a young boy and a victim of the Second World War, walking into India to escape the Japanese. The Northeast region that I explored and its people that I met in my obsessive search; a ten-year project it became which only temporarily filled up some emotional voids but never really answered enough. Dawned by now a new millennium, 19 years had passed since his death, and then a stroke hit my mother leaving her speech and body half paralyzed. Unlike with my father, it did not take her life away. Once out of hospital, in some sort of recuperative state, we thrust her into new medical frontiers of stem-cell therapy in the hope that there may be some recovery from her paralysis. But only marginally it helped. The book, for now, remained a lingering mirage.

Besides, I was tiring of working non-stop in the media, and new yearnings emerged. My early work that I had long since buried started to call out. In my late twenties, when I jumped into the world of the media, the immediacy and rush of being in the midst of the Subcontinent's chaos and blues was so alluring that it dulled and faded what had been a more

personal and quieter way of seeing and looking. What was shot in my teens till my mid-twenties was shut out and put away. And as the keeper of my father's photographic work, after his death, the excavation of my archive only amplified the desire to revisit his too. Older now, I looked at his photography in a more complete way. A strange experience it was, to look at his work and mine, and mine and his, and to see the threads common to us in our photographs of friends and family, of the streets we photographed. Extracting my first

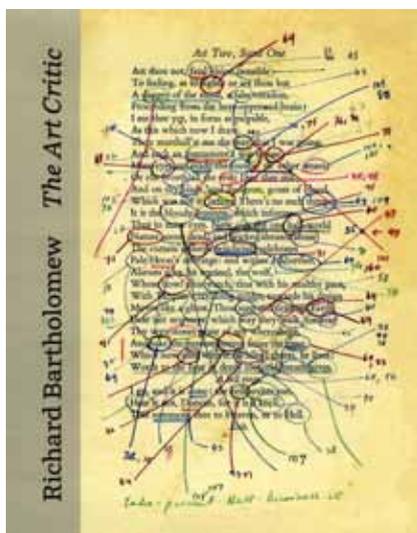
body of work from my own archive, I then started on his. As with mine, I did the same with his, a stream of exhibitions, a book of his photography to go along. This was the first resurrection, yet, a sense of incompleteness disturbed me, a feeling of emptiness remained.

Five years passed. A closure had to be made, as if a ghost had to be exorcised, some peace negotiated. So here we are, finally, 27 years later, putting our money where our mouths are with this final move to self publish.

So maybe the refugee child can now smile; he who came to this land, lived on the margins in economic strife, pursued his dreams, married, had children, was mostly well regarded by all as this gentle soul and maybe for that he was easily used and abused; left unrecog-

nised by the State for who he was and what he had achieved for them in those early years when this nation floundered in the dark.

So this book needs to be out. To reshape some histories, to bring back the forgotten others, to reassess and alter the already hazily known, to redefine some standards of writing and our understanding, thoughts and feelings of an era now lost. More importantly, to allow this man to breathe his words... ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY OLIVIA BONNAL SANSONI

Pablo Bartholomew is an acclaimed photographer; awarded for his photo-journalistic work with morphine addicts and Bhopal Gas Tragedy victims. His work has featured in *The New York Times*, *Time*, and *National Geographic*, among others, and in the city, is most noted and talked about, for his black and whites of a swinging 70s Delhi. He lives in New Delhi.

Featured article is an excerpt of the Afterword, from the book, *The Art Critic*, priced at ₹3,000 available at bookstores, on flipkart, & on [http://www.richardbartholomew.info/art book/](http://www.richardbartholomew.info/art%20book/)