

A Critic's Eye



Self-portrait with Rati and Pablo, Almora, 1959

A writer, art critic, curator, painter and poet, is how Bartholomew is remembered. Bartholomew's love for literature and art remained lifelong companions and he became one of the finest voices in art criticism in India. He was one of the first art critics to start a serious dialogue with the painters of his time. He created a community with them and engendered a sense of direction at a time when the public was not fully receptive to the bold artistic exploration of India's Progressive Art Movement. His photographs however, remained a more private introspection of life around him and were rarely exhibited. Twenty-five years after his death, we visit his archive and discover an intense and sophisticated eye that provides a rare glimpse into the beginnings

of Modernism in India. He recorded art and its practitioners with a custodian's eye. Ever watchful and yet unobtrusive, like the man he intrinsically was, Bartholomew perhaps understood the evidentiary and historical role of the photograph. That many of the artists he photographed became significant underscores the importance of his archive today. When he photographed his wife and sons, the same watchful eye sought comfort in observing, but from a distance. He watched them sleep and read books as the years went by and the photographs are unusually tender and yet unsentimental. When he photographed on his travels in India and abroad, his attention to the banal detail reinforced his profound engagement with photography. He looked for the peculiar, the mundane and configured it with meaning that only a highly attuned mind would.

Richard Bartholomew would have been 83 today, had he been alive. As a remembrance and to mark the occasion of his first major exhibition in Mumbai, a book titled *A Critic's Eye*, released in 2009, will accompany the exhibition.

Born in Tavoy, Burma, Father of [Pablo Bartholomew \(APT Mumbai\)](#), Richard Bartholomew fled to India during the Second World War to escape the Japanese capture of Burma. He received a Master's degree in English from St. Stephen's College, Delhi in 1950. His major literary works include articles on Indian and Tibetan art, contemporary Indian art and the Indian experience, as well as poems, monographs, short stories, a co-authored book on M.F. Husain, published in 1972 by Harry Abrams, New York, and a monograph on Krishna Reddy in 1974.

From 1960 to 1963 Bartholomew was the Gallery Director of Kunika–Chemould, the first commercial gallery for contemporary art in New Delhi. Subsequently he worked with the Tibet House, New Delhi, from 1966 to 1973 as their curator and development officer where he personally catalogued the Dalai Lama's collection of religious artifacts, traveling with them to the US and Japan. From 1977 to 1985 Bartholomew served as the Secretary of the Lalit Kala Akademi, India's prestigious national academy of art. Among his other many honors and achievements are a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship in 1970; Commissioner of the Silver Jubilee Indian Independence exhibition held in Washington DC, 1973; a British Council Visitor in 1982; and Commissioner of the Art Exhibition of the Festival of India, held in Britain in 1982.

[A CRITIC'S EYE Photographs by RICHARD BARTHOLOMEW from the 50s, 60s & 70s](#)

Opening 9th February. On view till 8th March 2010

Chatterjee & Lal, 01/18 Kamal Mansion Floor 1, Arthur Bunder Road, Colaba, Mumbai 400 005