



Self-Portrait, Mirror Image © Richard Bartholomew

THIS CATALOGUE INCLUDES ARTIST PHOTOGRAPHS BY

RICHARD BARTHOLOMEW (1926-1985)

A refugee from Burma who became a citizen of his adopted homeland in 1967, Richard Bartholomew was one of India's most influential art critics and scholars. He served as secretary for the Lalit Kala Akademi and curated the Dalai Lama's personal artifacts in a groundbreaking traveling exhibition for Tibet House from 1966 to 1973. As a writer for the *Times of India*, he became a leading voice in the dialogue between the art cognoscenti and the public. He befriended many of the artists whose works he challenged, lauded, and fought for others to understand.

These complicated relationships are reflected in the intimacy of his portraits of the artists Maqbool Fida Husain, Francis Newton Souza, Ram Kumar, and Biren De, which are included in this catalogue. Not satisfied to simply capture the artists as they wish to be portrayed, his photographs probe further, highlighting eccentricities, and questioning motives, ideas and techniques just as Bartholomew did in his writing.

In his portrait, Ram Kumar displays a cool intellectualism and bohemian nonchalance. Souza, the great intellectual, is caught mid-sentence in a moment of explication. Husain is the pensive ascetic, while Biren De tries to balance pride and modesty as he stands next to a completed work.

Bartholomew was a critic who viewed the process of creating not as merely the source of a work but also as a part of its product. It is an idea well-illustrated in his book on Husain, (co-authored with Shiv S. Kapur), in which Bartholomew recounts a 1968 encounter with the artist, which became the impetus for the performance *Six Days of Making* at the Shridharani Gallery, New Delhi. "This demonstration grew out of a casual suggestion that I had made to the artist when he was canceling his booking at the gallery. Since he did not have any canvases ready for the exhibition, I proposed that he hang blank canvases and start to paint during the period of the show. He laughed while we were in the gallery, but on the way home he said 'That's a brilliant idea, come to think of it.'" (Richard Bartholomew and Shiv S. Kapur, *Husain*, Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, New York, 1972, p. 18)

Bartholomew is as actively engaged in his self- portrait and its reflective criticism as he was with the artists -- many of whom he socialized with and covered for the *Times*. He stares not at himself in the mirror but instead into his camera, deliberate in his craft and creation. "Today," Bartholomew wrote in an entry in the Cultural Forum Journal some time in the 1950s, "we tend to separate the activities of creation and criticism. As a matter of fact, they are complementary...Theories of art do not make a critic; he appreciates art the better if he understands, or tries to understand, the nature of the creative process." (Richard Bartholomew, *Cultural Forum Journal*, 1950s). Thus the search for understanding was a constant undercurrent in Bartholomew's life and was expressed through his writing, his own artwork and in his fruitful relationships with some of India's greatest artists.