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They chase light and shadows

SOUMITRA DAS



The 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s are the protagonists of Richard and son Pablo Bartholomew's joint exhibition titled, respectively, *A Critic's Eye* and *Outside In — A Tale of Three Cities*, opening at the Harrington Street Arts Centre on Monday. It is presented by Ina Puri.



Pablo Bartholomew is best known for his journalistic work, including on the Bhopal tragedy, published in the *New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek* and *National Geographic*. This exhibition bears no trace of that. This is old work he started "excavating" in 2006, says Pablo, who is in town supervising the display of his and his father's black-and-white photographs.

He looks substantially different from the lean, hirsute spaced-out young man who appears in several of his own prints. "It was extremely refreshing to return to a quiet period of life. You had subverted yourself to feed a big animal", by which he means the international media.

His father Richard (1926-85) was a leading art critic, originally from Burma, whose career started in the late

Details of Pablo Bartholomew's photograph, *Zarine and Priya with a friend, New Delhi, 1975*; (below) Richard Bartholomew's *F.N. Souza at his apartment — New York 1970-71*

50s. He was in the thick of the Indian contemporary art movement at a time when the likes of Husain, Souza, Ram Kumar and even the elusive Gaitonde were anything but superstars, and were regulars at the Bartholomew household. How else could he have shot them the moment they dropped their guard? In these illuminating portraits they seem to be as unconcerned as his two sons and wife whom he catches sleeping amidst the domestic clutter or reading inside their rooms.

People of a certain age will immediately be able to identify with these scenes from the Swinging Sixties and Seventies that Pablo catches in his shots of young men, and women in saris (yes, not in jeans) shaking a leg, relaxing (not chilling out) with friends, of a three-some lolling on a bed, smoking nonchalantly (few talked of cancer then), of a couple making out, and of a gleaming motor bike (shades of *Easy Rider*). The sanganeri block print bed spread, cheese cloth shirt and even the beautiful people from the ad world can be easily dated. As an insider of this English-speaking world, Pablo gets the zeitgeist just right.

Pablo, born 1955, says he started taking photographs from age seven or eight when his father gifted him a box camera. He dropped out of high school and pursued photography. It was then that he spent some time in Calcutta. He seems to know south of Park Street well enough, and was disappointed to discover that an old house he was looking for had turned into a concrete block.

Although he is displaying digital prints, he admits they "don't have the sense of grain. They are either too sharp or there is too much detail." He uses film.

Both father and son make good use of light and shadows composed of millions of grains of powdered darkness in these gritty prints. One of Pablo's prints is composed almost entirely of a black rectangle and horizontal plane under it with the barely discernible figure of a woman lying supine. The play of shadows is intriguing in Richard's work, and in some night shots of Delhi he chases light to create haunting images of city life. The magic of light brings both father and son together.