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The eyes of an outsider

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Concluding his series, Pablo Bartholomew continues his exploration of identity and belonging.

In his new solo exhibition, Pablo Bartholomew once again tries to explore the essence of a photograph and its role as a repository of memory. The exhibition, *The Calcutta Diaries*, tries to “map the complete body of work, sift through it and understand what was done”, keeping it from becoming mere indulgent nostalgia.

The show is a visual journey into the streets and culture of Kolkata from the mid-1970s through Pablo Bartholomew’s exploration of identity and society. There are four distinct strands on display — a social commentary on the slow evisceration of the Chinese community in the Tangra and Dhapa area; shots in black and white of Bartholomew’s grandmother; images of Satyajit Ray on the sets of *Shatranj ke Khiladi* and his own exploration of the city’s streets. Though charting different times and space, and only loosely bound in a physical capacity, the images come together to underline and ponder over the age-old question of identity and belonging.

The Calcutta Diaries concludes a series by Bartholomew that included *Outside In: A Tale of Three Cities* and *Bombay: Chronicles of a Past Life*. Each was about the photographer’s need to explore and reclaim and highlighted Bartholomew’s own feeling of being an outsider.

Born to a Burmese father and a Bengali/Punjabi mother and marked by his name and ethnicity, Bartholomew’s outsider status was further entrenched by his removed and aesthetically inclined upbringing. From an early age, the photographer went beyond documentary practices and a photojournalistic approach, trying to capture moments from his youth and living a life that he even today describes as an ‘outsider’, grappling with his surroundings.

The photographs in this exhibition are a part of Bartholomew’s own archive, focussing on his years in Kolkata from the mid-1970s and present an insightful biography of the everyday life of the city.

Bartholomew’s current show tells the story of a city as well as the photographer as he tries to seek “intellectual traffic through simultaneous visual narratives while dealing with space, and in this case, India’s erstwhile Capital”.

Bartholomew never loses sight of a world in transition, and takes into account the ‘proletariat space of image making’, a rapidly growing digital world in which the 35 mm film shot evokes the mystery and aesthetics of the craft.