



Pablo Bartholomew, from *The Nagas – Marked with Beauty* series. The young Naga people are extremely fashion-conscious, often adopting the worst of the “Western” styles. Here, kids imitate a rock band. Rock music and pop are popular amongst the Naga hill tribes.



Pablo Bartholomew, from *The Nagas – Marked with Beauty* series. Today Christianity is an accepted and vital part of Naga identity. Young flower girls of the Angami tribe participate in a wedding service at the Khadi Baptist Church in Bara Basti, Kohima, the largest village in Nagaland.

of the Naga people as much as I do. A few years back, Belgian photojournalist Thierry Faïsse did a similar piece of work but the story is flat.

The Nagas – Marked with Beauty fulfilled the emotional role of the personal work I have not done in Myanmar. As a thinking photographer, you have to deal with questions of identity, somehow or another, in your work. That’s why I can’t see how half the European photographers can live between Hong Kong, Cambodia, and Bangkok. For them, they engage the region for various reasons. Maybe it’s easier to have a better life style here, since they get more out of their Euros. However, there’s always a distance in their work. Very few go beyond that. Photography is all about spending enough time.

In any case, this series is very much work-in-progress. When I first started it, I took a lot of images in the visual anthropological tradition, documenting their rituals and practices carefully. That decision was important because with the onslaught of Christianity, everything was disappearing.

Today, I have some of the most obscure images of the Naga people that nobody else has, like the skull-house, which was gone by the early 1990s. I was supposed to start on the “modern” side of their lives a few years back but I found myself burnt out. Anyway, I started going back to Nagaland in 2006. It will be interesting to juxtapose the two parts when everything is done.

After your family moved to Delhi, you led a safe, middle-

class life. What turned you to the fringe?

At that time, people seldom married outside their ethnic groups. But my grandma did. And my mum, whose family came from Pakistan, West Bengal in Indian, and Bangladesh—did by marry an Indian from Myanmar. My mother fled Pakistan during the Partition in 1947. As refugees in New Delhi, they met in college in the late 1940s and married for love, which was rare in those days. Today, I have relatives from Pakistan to the Punjab, from Dhaka to Chittagong Hill Tracts, and from Kolkata to Myanmar, where I assume I have family members of whom I’m unaware. I’m from all these places but in a way, I’m from none of them. At home, I spoke English—that was my first language. And I have this funny name, which doesn’t suggest that I’m Indian.

I grew up in a socialist family. We didn’t have a phone until I was 14. We always rented a place rather than bought a house. Everyone in class had a car. We didn’t. I also came from a very artistic



Pablo Bartholomew, from the *Early Work* series. On location near Lucknow for the film *Junoon*, actress Nafisa Ali is seen with her make-up attendants.

family. My father, Richard Bartholomew, was a painter, poet, writer, curator, and, above all, one of India’s most prolific art critics. My mum, Rati Bartholomew, was an English professor at Delhi University, founder of several important theater groups and, most important, a street-theater activist who worked with groups across the sub-continent.

At the same time, my parents practiced no religion. I guess my parents were probably very alienated from mainstream India in the first place. My upbringing left me with the freedom to look at India with unattached engagement. It allows me not to be biased against caste, religion, or regional points-of-view. Being not from any geographical location allows me to appreciate everyone and everything.

When I was kicked out of that famous school, I became a scandal. Delhi was then a small, stratified society. Everyone came to know me. Thankfully, the cultural collateral back home was a rescue net. With so much confusion in my head, photography provided me with a sense of

purpose and identity. I started photographing my friends, family, artists, and painters who would visit my father, art openings, and rock shows. But my restlessness was not fulfilled.

One of the great cultural upheavals in the 1970s was the hippie movement. The influence of drugs and music was wide and profound. It was my way of connecting with the Western world that was looking to the East, post-Vietnam. I smoked dope then and I still do now. That kind of isola-

tion naturally led me to the fringes. The images went into *Early Work*.

Despite winning the WPP Award, it didn’t do much for your career and you found yourself working as a stills photographer on the film sets of Satyajit Ray in Kolkata (Calcutta). Through Ray’s introduction, you subsequently shot stills for Richard Attenborough’s *Gandhi* and *Mercantile Ivory’s Heat and Dust*. What did you pick up as a photographer on film sets?

Working on the sets was the first time I earned some money. I did theater when I was younger and I treated films as an exten-



Pablo Bartholomew, from the *Early Work* series. Roadside photo studio. Bombay 1979.

sion of that. It was very enlightening to see how Satyajit Ray worked. He was a classic filmmaker who wrote his scripts, composed the music, and shot his films. Any film student would give their left eye to see Ray work. Looking back, I was paying my

terms of our engagement with the “other” world. No one had documented the fringe previously. In retrospect, the work was groundbreaking.

With *The Indian Émigré* series were



Pablo Bartholomew, from the *Early Work* series. A eunuch dresses up at the runch quarters around Shuklajee Street, Bombay.



Pablo Bartholomew, from the *Early Work* series. Danish woman prepares for a morphine fix in a Delhi hotel.