

# Bad boy, good pictures

By his definition, Pablo Bartholomew is a man who has seen everything. In his *Outside In! A Tale of 3 Cities*, the photographer chronicles the life of three cities as they change.

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PABLO BARTHOLOMEW'S pictures go back a long way. The 70s and 80s, the subject of his exhibition, *Outside In! A Tale of 3 Cities*, are, thanks to constant references in films and fashion, an all-too-familiar present. But the surprise in his pictures are that you don't see them. Not those faces — you don't. "People always go back, that's natural," says Pablo. "Going back to the 70s and 80s is about immediate introspection unless it's done superficially like pulling on beads and bell bottoms to make an obvious connection."

The 70s and the 80s, in the pictures, are about a time. They are also about Pablo. "We were the first free-thinking generation after Independence," says the award-winning photographer and a former chairman of the Forum of Contemporary Photographers. Vietnam and the hippie-movement of America were influences he says, so what do you get? "You get a problem child," says Pablo with a laugh.

The Family Wall, gestures Pablo to the left of the hall at the National Museum, has plenty of evidence hanging: photographs of his mother cringing and his father looking pained while Pablo takes a picture; pictures of friends in bed after what is clearly a wild night; Pablo's razors, his women friends, his rooms, the view from his balcony.... The selection is a series of fascinating self-portraits where the personal has been used as the foreground to follow the life of three different cities at the time of their turn — when the 'old world' was shifting and new worlds were emerging.

The pictures of his women friends are actually a case in point. There's a striking picture of a young girl in braids, at the cusp of womanhood, in jeans and pullover calmly knitting a sweater. "It's an order of beauty that's vanished. She's a friend of mine from school. Girls those days were Indian and Western but not gung-ho about their westernness as they are now," says the photographer. Sari clad girls swaying to music, girls whose pouts speak of their newly awakened sexuality, girls



Snapshots from Pablo Bartholomew's exhibition, *Outside In! A Tale of 3 cities*, at the National Museum.

blowing cigarette smoke — all capture the generational change beautifully.

"I was on the loose periphery of the Juhu gang of Kabir and Protima Bedi, Jalal Agha and the Dev Anand brothers," says Pablo while stopping to point to the Art Deco look of Mumbai's Eros cinema. "See that light fitting. You don't see that anymore." A lot of the story-telling in the exhibition is indeed done through objects. They show the emotion of an era or a place. "We have this concept in photography. It's called Still Life. That doesn't just mean a staid arrangement of porcelain cups and saucers. The arrangement of everyday items (he means his empty glasses, razors, cups, beds and mirrors) have been used in my exhibition like notes. Let's say I'm showing you my diary." At 52, Pablo Bartholomew has surely earned the right to be autobiographical and tell his story.

*Outside In! A Tale of 3 Cities*, is on view at the National Museum, Janpath from Jan 27-29 Feb

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