PHOTOGRAPHY

In focus, the human being

SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Pablo Bartholomew at his photo exhibition in New Delhi on January 5.

The camera has taken Pablo Bartholomew places—from the fringes of society to colossal tragedies such as the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster, and to accolades and recognitions (he has been chosen for the Padma Shri award this year). Each and every one of his photographs is marked by these journeys. At the core of his work is the human being. Be it of the Mumbai film industry’s junior artists or the countless millions who have made the streets their home, the contours of the human condition are drawn and redrawn innumerable times in his works. His is a tribute to life, its glories and its limitations.

In the world of photography, he is an icon. Yet, he has constantly evaded being one. Despite the flourishing career he has had, he comes across as a person who is still trying to learn and engage with his surroundings. At 58, his zest for life is unparalleled. He channels his cynicisms towards probing the intricacies of life. Perhaps, this is what drives him to subjects such as the morphine addicts of Mumbai. His series of photographs on the drug addicts earned him the World Press Photo award in 1975, when he was only 19.

Who can forget the image of a half-buried child with hollow eyes, the victim of the gas leaked out of the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal? Bartholomew received the World Press Photo of the Year award for that heart-wrenching picture of 1984.

His most important calling now is documenting his familial links, which stretch from Burma (Myanmar) to Punjab.

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