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photofeature



THE REVERSED GAZE



*Partho Bhowmik, who teaches
photography to the blind, discovers
the many ways of seeing*

THE BLIND are also connected to the visual world. They just experience it differently. In 2004, I was just another IT professional. Photography was a passion, but I had never thought of it as anything more than a weekend hobby. Then I happened to pick up an old issue of a photography magazine, which had pictures by Evgen Bavcar, a French photographer who was completely blind. The pictures were stunning. A particular photo of a Paris street, appealed a great deal to me.

I was amazed. How could a blind person take photographs? I managed to get his email-id after a great deal of difficulty and wrote to him telling him how much I loved his photos. The first line of his reply was in English and the rest in French. That is how we have continued

our correspondence. He writes to me in French, I write to him in English and we both use translators.

Evgen opened up a whole new universe to me. He introduced me to artists from around the world who were blind — places as far away as Israel, Norway and Japan. I began corresponding with them regularly and eventually became part of a network of 35 blind visual-artists. I spent the next two years as an informal student of that collective.

The work I did later could not have taken place without those two years of study. Before that my interaction with the blind was limited to occasionally helping people cross the road. Recently a young boy at the Victoria School for the Blind came up to me and said, "You know so much about us." That understanding of