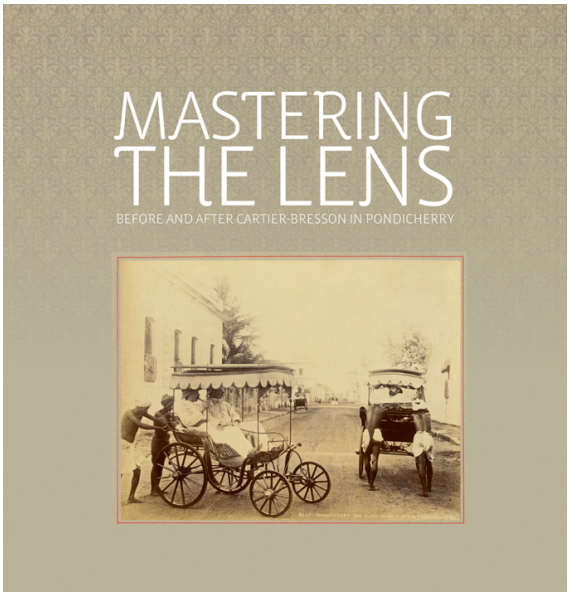
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Mastering the Lens

Before and After Cartier-Bresson in Pondicherry

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- Pondicherry is the French connection with India
- Exhibits Cartier-Bresson's unseen images
- Followers of Sri Aurobindo Ashram

This publication emanates from an exhibition by the same title, displayed for the first time at the Alliance Française de Delhi. It is an attempt to trace the development of photography and the other allied visual arts in Pondicherry spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Drawn exclusively from The Alkazi Collection of Photography, at the core of this initiative is the unpublished album by renowned photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, co-founder of Magnum Photos, who visited the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in April 1950. He took the last pictures of Sri Aurobindo Ghose in the company of his spiritual companion, the Mother. In addition, he meticulously penned his observations almost daily, creating a meta-text around the images, which presents a biographical and anecdotal supplement for his photographic endeavour. The visual material is further enhanced by some extraordinary images of Indian photographers from the same period such as Tara Jauhar and Venkatesh Shirodkar at Aurobindo Ashram, published here for the first time.

In this catalogue a conscious effort has been made to bring out a non-linear, yet credible history of how Pondicherry has been witness to the development of a unique visual trajectory. The use of images as evidence and document create a subtle interplay between cultural context and artistic intent, a conceptual linking of mannerisms and tropes those of landscape, architectural and portrait photography.

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