

Baptist Coelho

Selected Projects

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www.baptistcoelho.com (*under construction*)

Selected Press <http://baptistcoelho.com/press.php>

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Updated: June 2020

Artist Statement

Multi-layered aspects of people and places form the foundation of my practice that extend beyond the studio. My focus has been to articulate unspoken stories and to conjure meaning from psychological and physical disruptions caused by war. Through a process of archival and ethnographic research, and engagement with military and civilian personnel, I investigate issues surrounding conflict, war (and war museums), conscription, heroism, emotion, fear, the body and gender. A key focus of my practice brings together research from personal conversations and institutional knowledge to reveal how the history of war and conflict affects and relates to everyday life. The Siachen Glacier conflict between India and Pakistan; and India's contribution to the two World Wars are at the core of my practice, amongst other geographies.

The narratives of war are not linear, but instead form intricate trajectories. Over the last decade I have tried to deconstruct these crucial and complex layers by approaching them from various positions. This requires an exhaustive process of investigation, questioning, collaboration and interpretation that generates critical and ambiguous outcomes that question and confront established histories and power structures. Like an excavator, I move back and forth in time retrieving traces of the past and documenting the present across various geographies. My artworks probe beyond the surface to complicate, counter and rethink oral histories, facts, memory and its loss. Through meticulous observations of found objects, languages, translations, random thoughts, imagined stories and strategically archived narratives. I develop varied interpretations. My interdisciplinary projects use diverse media including installation, sculpture, video, sound, photography, collage and performance.

- June 2020

Artist Biography

In 2006, Baptist Coelho received his Masters of Arts from the Birmingham Institute of Art & Design (BIAD), UK. He was awarded the Sovereign Asian Art Prize, Hong Kong (2016); Façade Video Award, Bulgaria (2011); Promising Artist Award, India (2007); among others. Solo Exhibitions include, JSLH Art Gallery, Sonipat (2019); Somerset House, London (2016); Goethe-Zentrum, Hyderabad (2015); Project 88, Mumbai (2015, 2009); Ladakh Arts and Media Organization (LAMO), Leh (2015); Pump House Gallery, London (2012); Grand Palais, Bern (2009); among others.

Baptist has performed live at Stamford Arts Centre, Singapore (2019); SH Ervin Gallery, Sydney (2019); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2018); New Art Exchange, Nottingham (2018), among others. His works have been exhibited at Villa Radet, Paris (2019); Botanic Garden of the Moscow State University, Russia (2016); Arab-Jewish Culture Center, Haifa (2015); Museo de la Ciudad, Cuernavaca (2013); CASS Sculpture Foundation, Goodwood (2012); Zacheta National Art Gallery, Warsaw (2011); Gwangju Museum of Art, South Korea (2010); among others. Baptist's videos have been screened at the Centre Pompidou, Paris (2018); Torrance Art Museum, Los Angeles (2016); Jönköpings Läns Museum, Sweden (2013); The Film Society of Lincoln Center, New York (2013); MAXXI, Rome (2011); MAC, Lyon (2011); HEART - Herring Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark (2010); MuVIM, Valencia (2009); among others.

Baptist has done artist residencies at NTU CCA Singapore (2019); Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris (2019); Artspace, Sydney (2019); Leverhulme Artist-in-Residence at the Department of War Studies, King's College London, UK (2015-16); Delfina Foundation, London (2011); PROGR, Bern (2009); among others. The artist was awarded various grants from institutions in India, Australia, UK and Europe. Baptist has conducted many community workshops, artist talks, panel discussions across Asia, UAE, South Africa, Australia, UK and Europe. Baptist is represented by Project 88, Mumbai and his works are in public and private collections. The artist lives and works in Mumbai, India.

- June 2020

Resume PDF link: <http://baptistcoelho.com/fileupload/files/BaptistCoelho-Resume.pdf>

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Siachen Glacier Conflict

Siachen Glacier Conflict, 2007-2020

Since 1984, India and Pakistan have been zealously guarding their territories on the Siachen Glacier. This endless conflict, over the ownership of the glacier, has been fought at an altitude of 17,000 feet which makes it the coldest battlefield on earth, with temperatures reaching around -60° Celsius. In 2007, Baptist Coelho began researching the conflict about the Siachen Glacier and developed a large body of work in various media which has been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions worldwide. These artworks reveal the paradox of heroism when confronted by brutal cold and the perils of an uncertain terrain.

In 2009, Baptist presented a solo exhibition, “**You can’t afford to have emotions out there...**” at the Visual Arts Gallery, Delhi and Project 88, Mumbai. The exhibition focused on the life of the soldier not as a machine of war but as a man with vulnerabilities who serves up to three months on the glacier. In 2015, the artist presented another solo exhibition, **thread by thread** at the Goethe-Zentrum, Hyderabad and the Ladakh Arts and Media Organization (LAMO), Leh. This exhibition drew its inspiration from the various fabrics used by the Siachen soldiers. Continuing in 2016, Baptist developed the project to include archives about the glacier before it became a conflict zone in 1984. From this research, Baptist developed a large installation for his solo exhibition, **Traces of War** at Somerset House, London. Baptist's recent research is about the Ladakhi porters who assist the Indian soldiers and officers posted on the glacier. A selection of photographs developed from this research was part of his solo exhibition, **Body-Automaton** at JSLH Gallery, Sonipat. This project continues to grow as developing research unfolds.

- *Davide Allison*

Tsering Puntsog & Stanzin Padma #1, 2019

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 43 X length 28.5 or
centimetres: width 109 X length 72.5

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 308 gsm, acid-free

Printer: Canon Pro 560 with Lucia Pigment Inks

The photograph examines the relationship and camaraderie between a Ladakhi father and his son, both of whom are Siachen porters.

- *Davide Allison*



Digital print

Tsering Puntsog #1, 2019

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 43 X length 28.5 or
centimetres: width 109 X length 72.5

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 308 gsm, acid-free

Printer: Canon Pro 560 with Lucia Pigment Inks

The photograph explores the complex relationship and dependency that Ladakhi porters have with the military, while dealing with extreme weather conditions of the Siachen Glacier.

- *Davide Allison*



Digital print

Stanzin Padma #1, 2019

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 43 X length 28.5 or
centimetres: width 109 X length 72.5

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 308 gsm, acid-free

Printer: Canon Pro 560 with Lucia Pigment Inks

The photograph alludes to a response by a Ladakhi porter toward the certificates of bravery received from the state for his service on the Siachen Glacier.

- *Davide Allison*



Digital print

Stanzin Padma #2, 2019

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 43 X length 28.5 or
centimetres: width 109 X length 72.5

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 308 gsm, acid-free

Printer: Canon Pro 560 with Lucia Pigment Inks

The work explores, limbo and uncertainty experienced by
a porter when confronted with the state awards received
for his services on the Siachen Glacier.

- *Davide Allison*



Digital print

Mountain Lassitude, 2016

Installation with 2 large wall leaning glass cabinets with doors and shelves, 6 free-standing wooden display plinths, 1 framed and 30 unframed photographs on archival paper (Hahemühle Photo Matt, 200 gsm, acid-free), white gauze bandages, acrylic sheets, graph paper, sand paper, tracing paper, jute string, masking tape, silica gel, sponge, plastic, 4 books, 3 plaster of Paris casts, 3 digital data loggers, 3 magnifying glasses with LED lights, 2 mirrors, 2 collages, 1 drawing, 1 acrylic case, 1 hardboard clipboard, and 1 stone

Installation dimensions: variable

Mountain Lassitude, is an installation of two large wall leaning glass cabinets with doors and shelves, six free-standing wooden display plinths, one framed and thirty unframed photographs on archival paper, white gauze bandages, acrylic sheets, graph paper, sand paper, tracing paper, jute string, masking tape, silica gel, sponge, plastic, four books, three plaster of Paris casts, three digital data loggers, three magnifying glasses with LED lights, two mirrors, two collages, one drawing, one acrylic case, one hardboard clipboard, and one stone.

The title is borrowed from a British Major the Hon. Charles Granville Bruce, who invented the term, Mountain Lassitude, which means 'diminution in the strength of a man due diminished atmospheric pressure'. The artist came across this term in a hand book that he found at the Royal Geographic Society in London. This booklet was entitled: 'Mountain Sickness and its Probable Causes' by Tom George Longstaff and was published in 1906. This finding and the artist's audio/video, "**If it would only end...**", 2009 were the starting points to investigate the physical and political nature of the Siachen Glacier before it became a conflict zone in 1984.

The other two vital elements of this labyrinth traces a testimony by a Siachen Officer who lost some of his fingers and toes due to frost bites he endured on the glacier during 2002-03 and the chapter, 'Surviving Extremes / Coping to keep out the cold' from a book, 'How to avoid being killed in a War Zone' by Rosie Garthwaite, published in 2011. The juxtaposition of three narratives documented in different times, under specific political conditions, site themselves on extreme altitudes. An individual's way to survive draws parallels and questions guidebooks thus presenting the gaps that exist between the personal and the institutional.

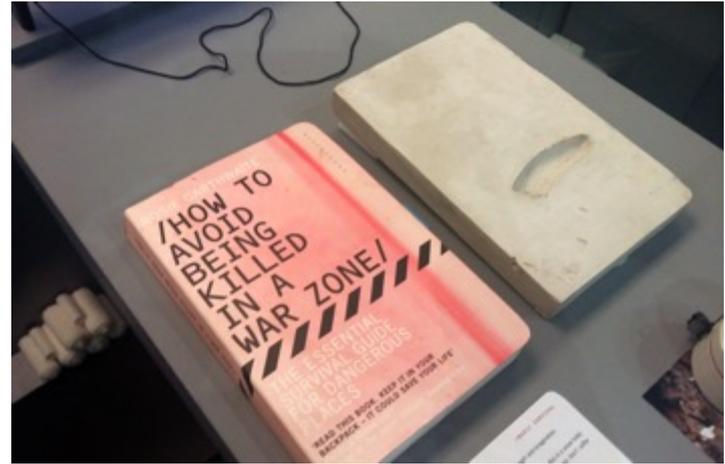
Mountain Lassitude, was developed during Baptist Coelho's 2015-16 Leverhulme Artist-in-Residence at the Department of War Studies at King's College London. Supported by the Leverhulme Trust, the Department of War Studies and Cultural Programming at King's College London & Delfina Foundation, UK

- *Davide Allison*

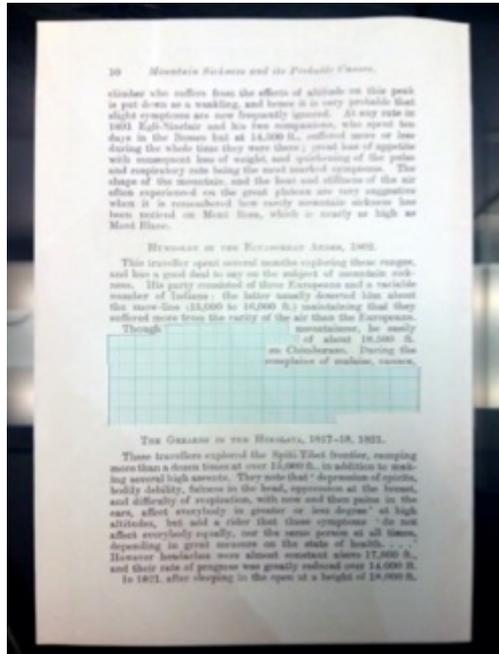


Installation detail

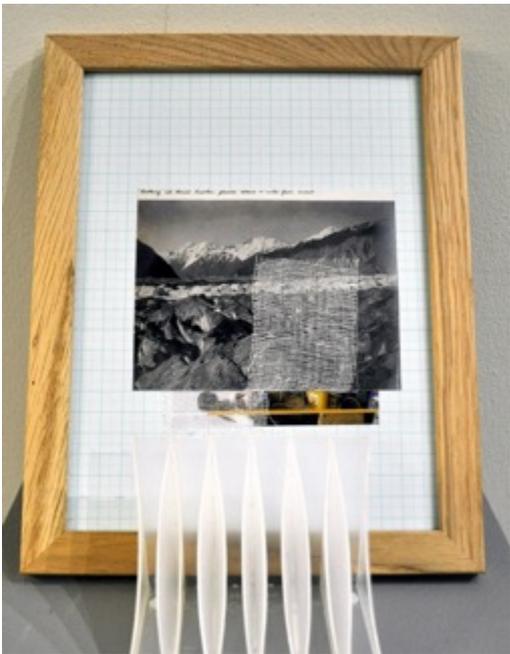
Photos: Somerset House, London



Installation details



Installation details



The Rose I, 2015

Rose made of white gauze bandages, MDF plywood and synthetic resin adhesive

Rose dimensions inches: width 50 X length 60 X depth 6 or centimetres: width 127 X length 152.4 X depth 15.2

Approximate display dimensions inches: width 50 X length 93 X depth 6 or centimetres: width 127 X length 236.2 X depth 15.2

The symbol of the rose has been immortalized in literature and history from ancient mythology to modern times. This work was initially inspired by *Untitled (Blue Roses)*, a 2008 painting by the American artist Cy Twombly (1928-2011). That work is one of eleven large-scale paintings of roses that belong to a two-part series. The painting includes multi-layered swirls and drips of vibrant blue and purple colours, and a two-columned excerpt inscribed and layered like a palimpsest from 'Borrowed Time,' a poem by the Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann.

In the Storm of Roses	The night is lit up by thorns
Wherever we turn in the Storm	and thunder
of Roses	rumbling at our heels

Coelho's work focuses on the word *Siachen*, a Balti term (this is Tibetan language spoken in the Baltistan Division in Gilgit-Baltistan, a part of Pakistan which adjoins parts of Ladakh). *Sia* refers to the genera of roses which widely grow in the region and *chen* refers to any object found in abundance: *Siachen* is thus a land of many roses. However, this terrain is mainly known for the endless conflict between India and Pakistan, where many lives have been sacrificed for national pride. **The Rose I**, is constructed of white gauze bandages of various sizes; grouped next to each other to form one of the four roses from Twombly's painting.

The fragile white gauze bandages, collectively placed, echo the shape of the brushstrokes, drips and finger prints of the colossal flower by Twombly. The bandages transform the meaning of this work to one of healing and protection under the soldiers' collective solidarity.

- *Davide Allison*



View

Photos: LAMO, Leh



View and details

Ribbons I, 2015

Six bars made of Siachen soldier's clothing, sponge and wood

Each bar's dimensions inches: width 9.5 X length 72 X depth 1 or centimetres: width 24.1 X length 182.8 X depth 2.5

Approximate display dimensions inches: width 75 X length 71 X depth 14 or centimetres: width 190.5 X length 180.34 X depth 35.5

Ribbons I, consists of 6 vertical forms in which different colors, textures, and patterns create intricate geometric compositions. Made from pants, jackets, socks, blankets and other articles used by soldiers posted on the glacier, they were inspired by the service ribbons worn by a Siachen officer. Each bar consists of 4 different awards which have a unique design that represents bravery and an achievement of service that would have been presented to a soldier during his service in the Indian Army.

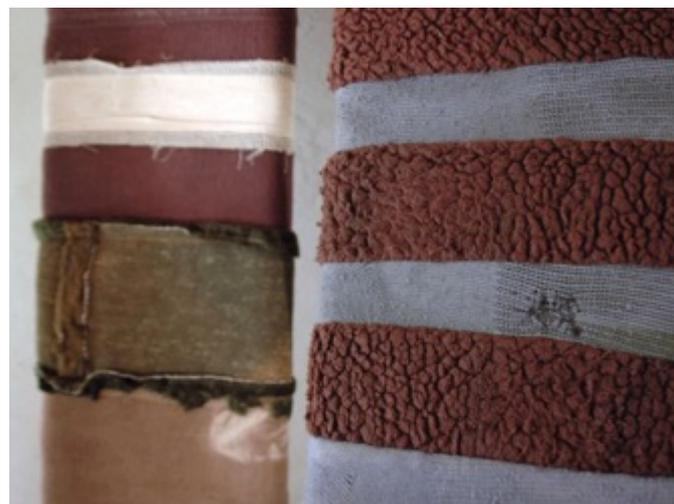
The clothing, which was worn to protect the soldiers from the inhospitable temperatures (which drop to as low as -60 °Celsius), has been transformed into an award of valour. Ribbons and other such awards are part of a political and social system that support the act of heroism. These decorative, multi-coloured, ribbons raise several questions about the meaning of such an award within the context of the army and whether this external display of bravery can actually reflect a soldier's honour and his personal struggle between aggression and protection.

- *Davide Allison*



View

Photos: LAMO, Leh



Details

Attempts to contain, 2015

10 digital prints on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: 2 (width 30 X length 20),
2 (width 16 X length 20), 3 (width 18 X length 12),
1 (width 12 X length 8), 1 (width 12 X length 15),
1 (width 15 X length 12)

Print dimensions centimetres: 2 (width 76.2 X length 50.8),
2 (width 40.6 X length 50.8), 3 (width 45.7 X
length 30.4), 1 (width 30.4 X length 20.3), 1 (width
30.4 X length 38.1), 1 (width 38.1 X length 30.4)

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 308 gsm,
acid-free

Display dimensions: variable

Attempts to contain, explores how the body responds to the physical and psychological need to protect by forming a mesh of interlocking body parts. The work takes its starting point from the artist's audio/video, "**Beneath it all... I am human...**", 2009, where a Siachen soldier's clothing is mysteriously removed layer by layer to finally reveal the skin. The soldier's body can be safeguarded by sophisticated clothing manufactured to endure extreme temperatures and to withstand illnesses such as, Hypothermia, High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema, to name a few. However, beneath these fabrics there exists the vulnerable inner-layer of the human body. The artist broadens his investigation by asking; 'How does one shield the body from a mental state, when these protective layers of clothing are removed?'

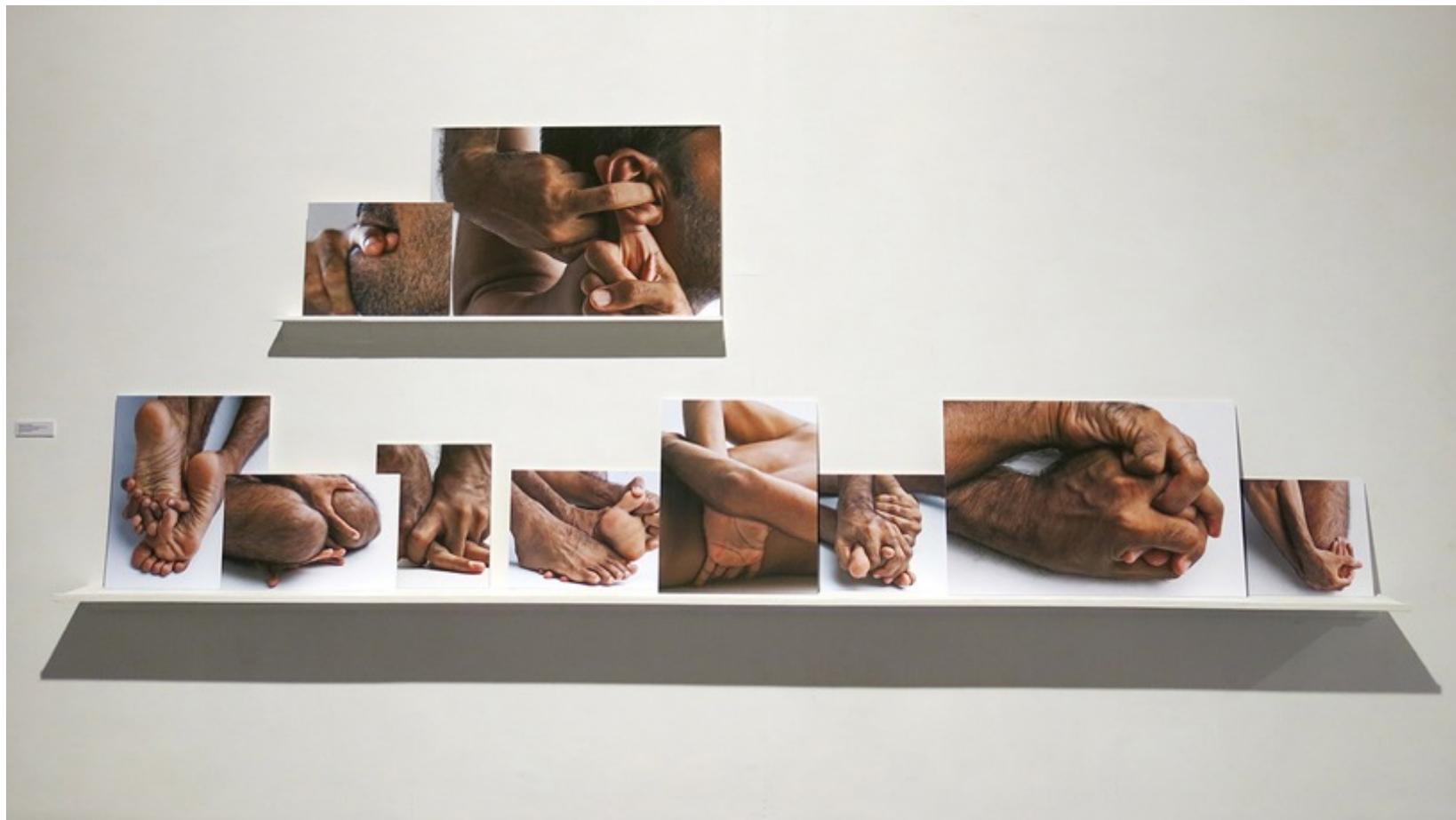
Attempts to contain, is a series of photographs of varied dimensions layered in tandem. Here, the artist illustrates the trajectory of various attempts at weaving and intertwining the human body in order to provide its own layer of protection. The work draws similarities to the act of weaving, which involves interlinking the warp: a set of vertical threads with the weft: a set of horizontal threads to form fabric. Creating textiles is a fundamental human interaction and one of the oldest surviving crafts.

This work begins to explore the corporeality of the Siachen soldier's body when confronted with the intricate relations of the psyche; where fingers, toes, hands, legs and other parts desperately attempt to weave and interlock; forming its own composition of twisted and tense shapes. This interaction between the warp and weft of mind and body implies a deeper psychological understanding; where the soldier seeks his own personal resolve; often unconsciously weaving a mesh that would psychologically hold, protect and contain.

- *Davide Allison*

In 2016, **Attempts to contain**, was awarded the Sovereign Asian Art Prize by The Sovereign Art Foundation, Hong Kong. More details here:

<http://www.baptistcoelho.com/fileupload/files/BCoelho-2016SovereignAsianArtPrize-HongKong-Artwork.pdf>



View

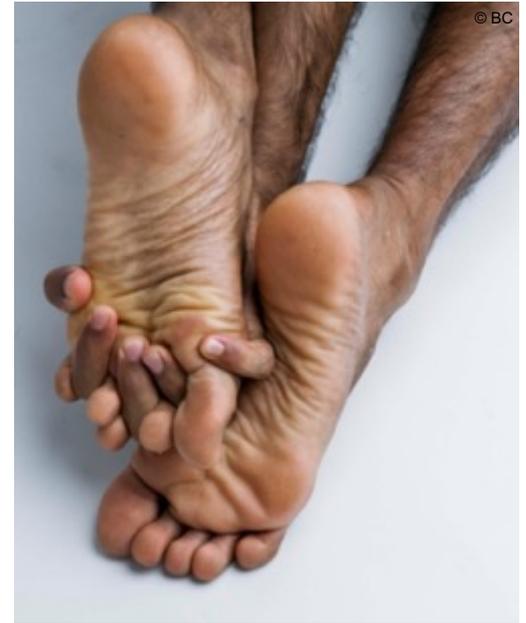
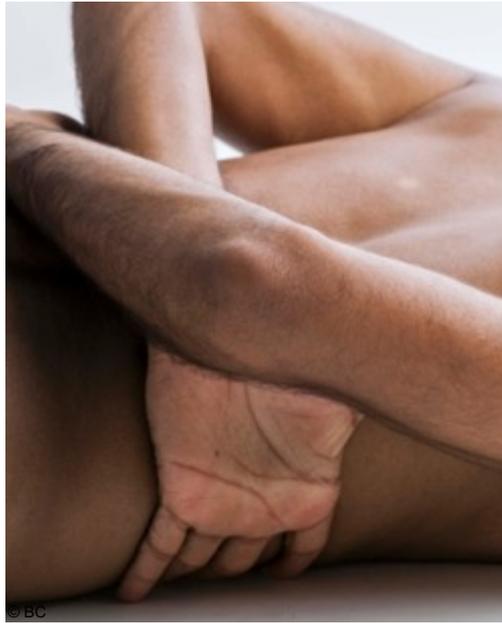
Photos: Project 88, Mumbai



Digital prints



Digital prints





Digital prints

Nowhere but here, 2015

Parachute made of Siachen soldier's thermal shirts and pants, nylon cords and metal rings

Diameter of parachute canopy inches: 320 or centimetres: 812

Display dimensions: variable

Nowhere but here, takes its starting point from the artist's large scale artwork, "**We waited for days but no sign of hope...**", 2009, which consisted of a large army-supply parachute juxtaposed between an intimidating barricade of sand-filled nylon bags.

Nowhere but here, continues to explore the use of the parachute as a metaphor for conflict. The work seems to be an abandoned military parachute that has fallen out of place, but the soft sculpture has actually been fabricated from soldiers' thermal clothing stitched together to form the canopy. Nylon cords and metal rings, attached to this parachute, connect to the supply box and are essential in order to carry life-sustaining goods to the soldiers. The supply parachute is also constructed with a vent in the canopy which allows for a slower and more controlled descent. However, due to sudden changes in wind patterns, these parachutes drift from their targets and often become abandoned in the landscape or suspended from cliffs. If retrievable, it takes days for soldiers to locate them.

The thermal clothing, used to form the canopy of the parachute, metaphorically draws a connection to the thermal currents of hot air which a parachute interacts with while descending toward its hopeful destination. The stitching together of the clothing represents the solidarity and strength of the soldiers during this endless struggle under freezing weather conditions. As part of the barren and isolated world of the soldier, the supply parachute is also seen as a symbol of hope and connection to the outside world. During these unstable times, when destinations are often unclear, a soldier's survival depends on the immediacy of each task and his awareness of being nowhere but here.

- Davide Allison



Detail

Photos: LAMO, Leh



Details

Dream Speech, 2015

5 Siachen soldier's sleeping bags, five headphones and audio

Approximate display dimensions inches: width 65 X length 94 X height 90 or centimetres: width 165.1 X length 238.7 X height 228.6

5 channel audio running time: 29 minutes 58 seconds

Audio extract: <https://vimeo.com/134809563>

Complete audio: <https://vimeo.com/134809188>

(Please request password)

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Dream Speech, consists of five sleeping bags that have been placed adjacent to each other and were used by soldiers on the Siachen Glacier. This artwork includes a five-channel audio with voices of four soldiers and an officer who appear to be communicating with each other through a dream. The Siachen Glacier lies at an altitude of 5,753 meters above sea level. The lack of oxygen disrupts the sleeping patterns of the soldiers; often making their dreams even more vivid. The artist reflects on the dream state of these soldiers and how they might communicate with each other through a subconscious medium.

Dreams are an outlet to express our subconscious thoughts. Our dreams are endless even though we may not remember them; in fact during a lifetime we spend an average of six years dreaming. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), an Austrian neurologist, theorized that the content of dreams is shaped by an unconscious wish fulfillment. The title of the artwork is taken from the writing of Emil Kraepelin (1856-1926); a German psychiatrist who developed the important concept of "dream speech", (originally written in German as *Traumsprache*), which describes the internal speech that occurs during a dream.

Dream Speech, facilitates a personal conversation between four soldiers and an officer while they are sleeping. After a typical day of rigid military protocol, the soldiers find solace in their dreams, often expressing their feelings of anxiety, vulnerability and repression; sometimes with a sense of humour, from the confinement of their sleeping bags. The durable fabric of the sleeping bag is crucial to a soldier for his comfort and protection. This envelope of security that surrounds him while he sleeps represents the intimate inner world of the soldier and the safeguard of his ominous dreams.

A dedicated head phone is attached to each sleeping bag, where the viewer is only able to listen to one soldier's voice at a time. The participant could attempt to piece together the fragments of the narrative by individually listening to the audio tracks of all five headphones. The silent pauses between words and sentences allow the participants to include their own subliminal thoughts about the soldiers' dreams. The intimate narrative developed by the artist uses references from various literary sources about war; as well as personal recorded conversations that he has conducted with various army personnel since 2007.

- *Davide Allison*



View

Photo: LAMO, Leh

No one knows where or when, 2015

Bitumen felt, mica chips, cotton & nylon thread and industrial adhesive

Approximate display dimensions inches:
width 57 X length 34 X height 93 or
centimetres: width 144.7 X length 86.3
X height 236.2

No one knows where or when, refers to the fear of encountering unknown crevasses, when soldiers navigate the icy terrains of the Siachen Glacier. The work consists of various thick layers of bitumen felt (*tar patra in Hindi*), that have been bound together with industrial adhesive and suspended from the ceiling by nylon wire. Exploring the notion that context-dependent stimuli can cause behavioral responses, the artist used tangible material to convey psychological changes of vulnerability, fear and anxiety experienced on these hostile landscapes.

The sculptural work takes the shape of the negative space which defines a crevasse; a deep, hollow, crack with almost vertical walls. These formations are one of the most feared natural obstacles on the glacier. The crevasses are formed as a result of stress between two semi-rigid pieces of ice. The intensity of this shear stress causes deep fissures in the ice which often are concealed by blankets of snow.

Bitumen, which has been impregnated with petroleum residues, is commonly used as roofing and insulation for the shelters on the Siachen Glacier and provides protection against severe weather conditions. These silver-grey sheets are commonly used for construction because of their stability and adhesive properties. The surface of the felt is coarse due to the mica mineral chips that cover the sheets, which inhibits them from sticking together. When the mica chips shimmer in the light, it is reminiscent of the sun striking snow crystals on the glacier.

Petroleum has been used by the artist in a previous work titled **14th July 2012**, 2012-13 which explores the concept of fear through the stimulus of smell. In **No one knows where or when**, Coelho revisits this concept through the use of petroleum residues in the bitumen felt; which is paradoxically a flammable material. The looming mass of suspended felt attempts to construct the visible and emotional void encountered by soldiers on the glacier and questions if fear is discrete or dimensional.

- *Davide Allison*



View & details



Photos: LAMO, Leh

“Out there nothing really survives...”, 2009

1 cold-display unit, various Siachen soldier’s objects and audio

Cold-display unit dimensions inches: width 24 X length 27 X height 48 inches or centimetres: width 60.9 X length 68.5 X height 121.9

Display dimensions: variable

Audio running time: 21 minutes 8 seconds

Audio extract: <https://vimeo.com/69139272>

Complete audio: <https://vimeo.com/69139105>

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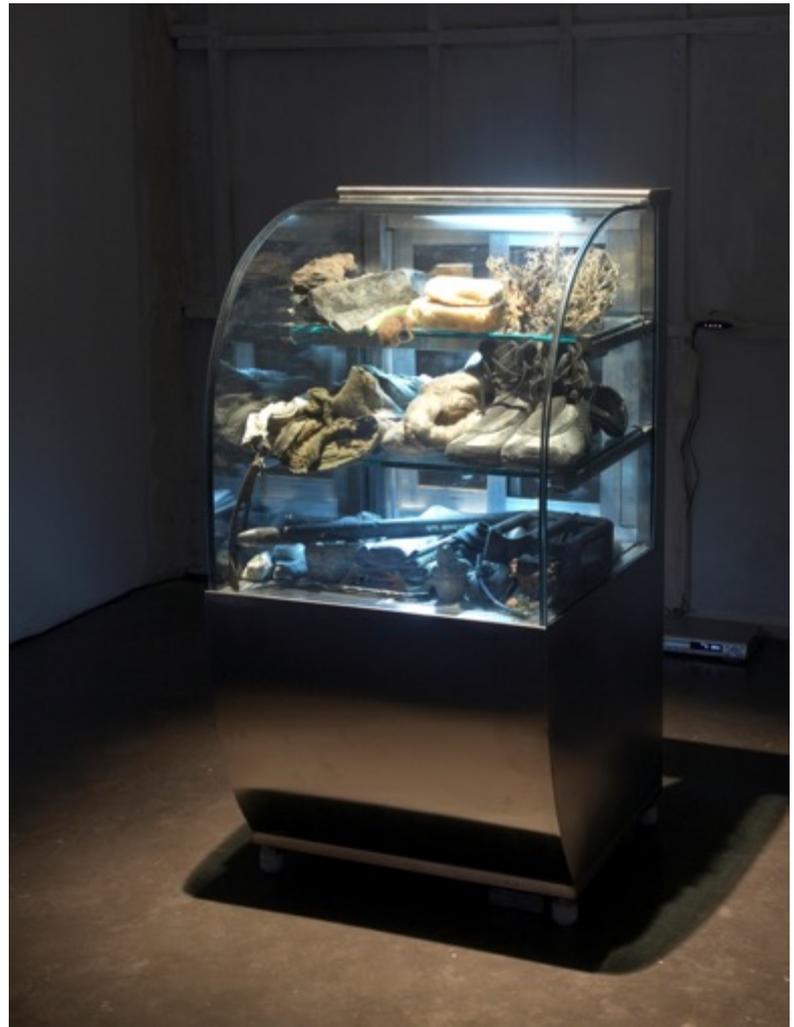
“Out there nothing really survives...”, is an artwork of collected objects that have been preserved inside a cold-display unit and includes an audio soundtrack. These various items consist of: a soldier’s uniform, yak dung, metal scraps, dried shrub and other utilitarian objects that were collected from the frozen terrain of the Siachen Glacier and surrounding regions. These artifacts have been protected inside an industrial display unit, which would normally serve the purpose of extending the shelf life of perishable comestibles consumed by society.

While examining the displayed objects, the voice of a Siachen Officer can be heard in the background, fortelling his life experiences on the glacier, via an audio soundtrack. This unexpected juxtaposition of objects and narrative allow the viewer to reflect on the characteristics and origin of these intimate, time-worn, possessions which contain the concealed personal histories of soldiers and locals. These items, which were discarded and rendered useless, have now taken on a meaning and purpose of their own by being transformed into artifacts preserved in glass. This display unit becomes a metaphor for the glacier as it also defines these objects and conserves them in time by generating a cold temperature. As we imbue this experience with memory, we realize that the soldier’s story and these intimate items are what remain from a conflict that has endured for twenty-five years. While these objects of survival have been themselves rescued from extinction, the question remains; does anything really survive out there?

- Davide Allison



View & details



Photos: Project 88, Mumbai

“We waited for days, but no sign of hope...”, 2009

1 Siachen glacier’s supply parachute, various sand filled nylon bags and audio

Approximate display dimensions inches: width 240 X length 240 X height 84 or centimetres: width 609.6 X length 609.6 X height 213.3

Audio running time: 3 minutes 8 seconds

Audio extract: <https://vimeo.com/69138861>

Complete audio: <https://vimeo.com/69138682>

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“We waited for days but no sign of hope...”, is a mixed-media artwork with sound and creates an emotional response from its viewers, who are confronted with the presence of a large, army-supply, parachute which has been juxtaposed between an intimidating barricade of sand-filled nylon bags. When entering the space, the sound of wind contrasts disturbingly with the austere, immobile, wall which is often used as a barrier to protect the soldiers from the enemy. This wind, which would otherwise navigate a parachute to great distances, no longer serves this purpose. The white parachute used to carry supplies to sustain the soldiers and symbolized hope, but now it has been left abandoned and motionless.

- Davide Allison



View (front)

Photos: Visual Arts Gallery, Delhi



Detail (back)

“Beneath it all... I am human...”, 2009

Audio/video running time:

11 minutes 5 seconds

Audio/video extract: <https://vimeo.com/69136182>

Complete audio/video: <https://vimeo.com/69135736>

(Please request password)

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“Beneath it all... I am human...”, explores the notion that what is concealed is often revealed. This video depicts a Siachen soldier’s clothing being systematically and mysteriously removed to reveal the nature and physical body of a man. This act reminds us that beneath the protective fabric there exists the vulnerable inner-layer of the human body and psyche.

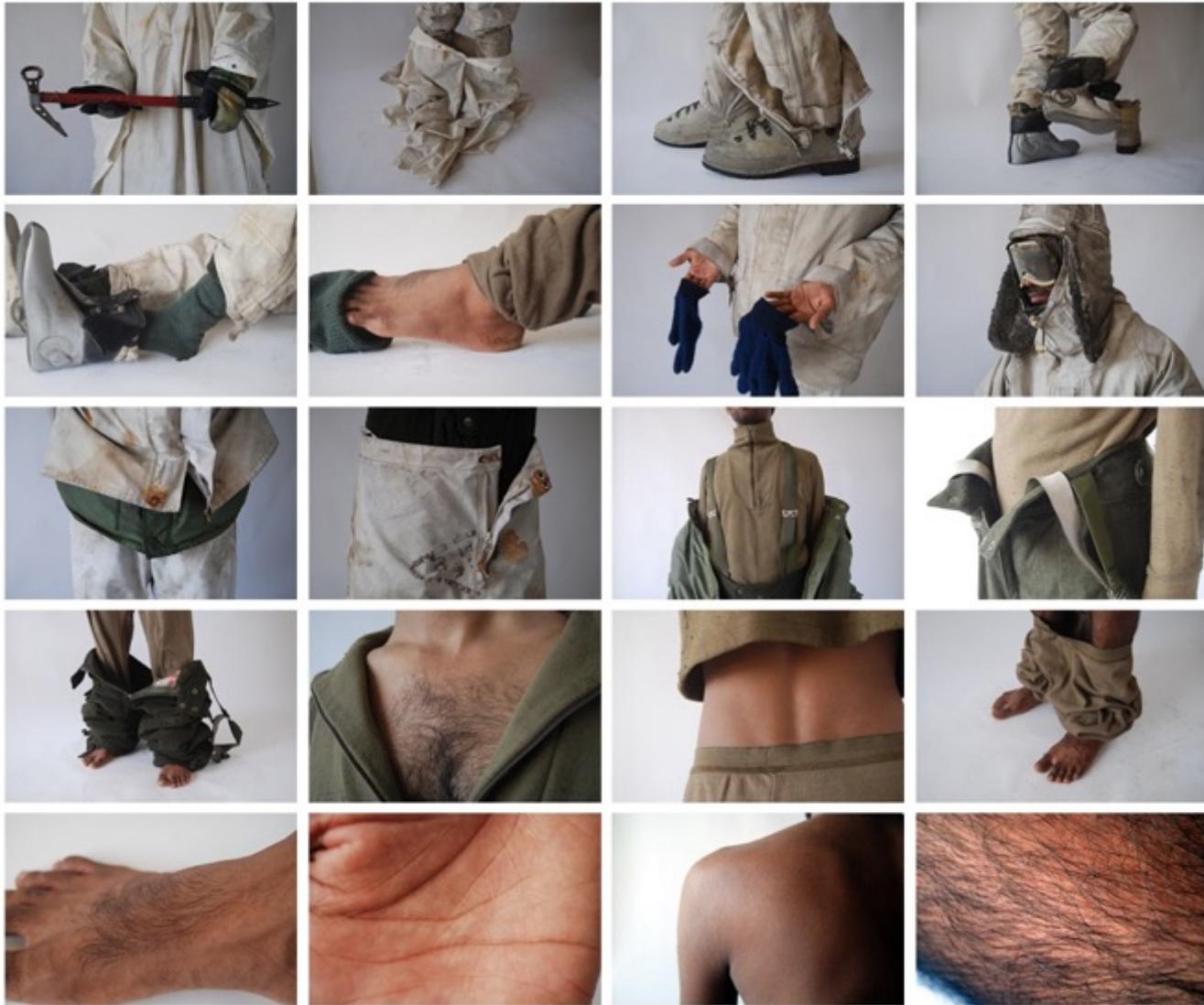
The meticulous unzipping and unbuttoning is reminiscent of the laborious task that the soldiers endure daily, in a climate where the brutal weather conditions are often life-threatening. In conclusion of this undressing, detail of the soldier’s body is exposed which appears to liberate him from the conflict and his identity as a soldier. These contrasts are not without peril: as an exposed body would soon perish in the cold.

- Davide Allison



View

Photo: LAMO, Leh



DVD stills

"I long to see some colour...", 2009

1 Siachen soldier's nylon rucksack and 70 photo frames

Approximate display dimensions inches: width 24 X

length 24 X height 24 or centimetres: width 60.9 X

length 60.9 X height 60.9

The unforgiving terrain of the Siachen Glacier distorts a Soldier's sense of being; a place where he often hallucinates due to the extreme weather conditions. The blinding white of the snow and the lack of oxygen; provoked by the high altitudes, takes a toll on the soldiers' psyche. The colour white, which is also a symbol for death, surrounds the soldiers at every moment and those, who seek a reprieve from it, yearn for the true colours of everyday life. In the artwork, **"I long to see some colour..."**, the viewer witnesses a soldier's time-worn rucksack; stacked with empty, white, picture-frames which symbolize the colour-scape of the soldiers' memories on the glacier.

- *Davide Allison*



View & details



Photos: Visual Arts Gallery, Delhi

"If it would only end...", 2009

Audio/video running time: 3 minutes 50 seconds

Audio/video extract: <https://vimeo.com/69134925>

Complete audio/video: <https://vimeo.com/69134778>

(Please request password)

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The struggle over the ownership of the Siachen Glacier, between India and Pakistan, continues to this day. The video **"If it would only end..."**, explores the past 25 years of this war through the fabric and goods that the soldiers have worn and consumed, as well as how these commodities have affected them. In the video, personal possessions that reflect life on the glacier appear to mysteriously move in a controlled formation. The saga persists and the constant accumulation appears to be without end. Nevertheless, the work raises hope that somehow, there might one day be an end to this conflict.

- *Davide Allison*



View

Photo: LAMO, Leh



DVD stills

“Altitude Sickness, Frostbite, Chilblains, Arterial Hypertension, Deep Vein Thrombosis, Snow-blindness, Hypothermia, High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema, High Altitude Cerebral Oedema...”, 2009

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 43 X length 32.2 or
centimetres: width 109.2 X length 81.7

Archival Paper: Epson Premium Semi Matt, 260 gsm

Printer: Epson Stylus Pro 11880

“Altitude Sickness, Frostbite, Chilblains, Arterial Hypertension, Deep Vein Thrombosis, Snow-blindness, Hypothermia, High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema, High Altitude Cerebral Oedema...”, refers to the fatal illnesses that might befall soldiers during their posting on the Siachen Glacier. These illnesses contrast sharply with the bandages which have been abandoned in the snow. The discarded white fabric is camouflaged against the harsh reality of the cold and unforgiving environment. This work reflects on the casualties of conflict and how the memory of a soldier’s pain are easily forgotten.

- Davide Allison



Digital print

"I'm not sure if I will return...", 2009

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 43 X length 32.2 or
centimetres: width 109.2 X length 81.7

Archival Paper: Epson Premium Semi Matt, 260 gsm

Printer: Epson Stylus Pro 11880

In the life of every fearless soldier there comes a time when he faces the uncertainties regarding his own life. **"I'm not sure if I will return..."**, reflects on a soldier's thoughts concerning the return to his family. The construction material used in the fabrication of the army shelter is in stark contrast to the hand which appears from a small window. Doubts about survival can weaken a soldier's resolve to continue the fight and yet at times the thought of family gives him hope and strength to survive; to move past fear itself and accomplish heroic acts.
- Davide Allison



Digital print

"Sixty-five days more to go...", 2009

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 43 X length 32.2 or
centimetres: width 109.2 X length 81.7

Archival Paper: Epson Premium Semi Matt, 260 gsm

Printer: Epson Stylus Pro 11880

The notion of time for a soldier becomes distorted during his 90 days of service with his battalion on the Siachen Glacier. The brutal temperatures of -60 degrees Celsius, along with inhabitable living conditions, take their toll on a soldier's state of mind. Even though he counts each passing day of his survival, he also awaits his return to home and normality. **"Sixty-five days more to go..."**, reflects on the soldier's will to survive and his detachment from this cold, unsympathetic, place.

- Davide Allison



Digital print

"If only I could see my children...", 2009

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 23.5 X length 17.6 or
centimetres: width 59.6 X length 44.7

Archival Paper: Epson Premium Semi Matt, 260 gsm

Printer: Epson Stylus Pro 11880

Our basic instinct to bond with our loved ones is one of the most powerful motivations in life.

Soldiers, who are left isolated on the battlefield, are consumed by this loss of personal contact.

"If only I could see my children..." highlights this fundamental connection with family and how it becomes an enduring symbol of life and hope.

- *Daide Allison*



Digital print

(un)identified #2, 2009

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 43 X length 32.2 or
centimetres: width 109.2 X length 81.7

Archival Paper: Epson Premium Semi Matt, 260 gsm

Printer: Epson Stylus Pro 11880

(un)identified #2 is part of a multi-disciplinary series which focuses on varied occurrences and personal objects which have been abandoned. These stories and objects mysteriously resurface within our subconscious and on the hostile terrain of the Siachen Glacier.
- Davide Allison

© Baptist Coelho



Digital print

“I count each day...”, 2009

1 Siachen soldier’s poncho and video

Approximate poncho dimensions inches: width 65 X length 43 or centimetres: width 165.1 X length 109.2

Display dimensions: variable

Video running time: 3 minutes 30 seconds

Video extract: <https://vimeo.com/69134465>

Complete video: <https://vimeo.com/69134283>

(Please request password)

>> If the weblink does not open by clicking on it, then please copy and paste it into your browser

The artwork, **“I count each day...”**, includes a video projected onto a suspended poncho. The video records a Siachen soldier marking the snow as he counts the number of days that he has survived on the glacier. This repeated action documents the soldier’s existence and is reminiscent of man’s prehistoric attempt to record time and space. The concept of time for a soldier becomes distorted during his 90 days of service and this video interprets this struggle. The soldier seeks solace in marking each passing day and this action brings him hope since it measures the time closer to his return home. The connection between the video and poncho becomes heartrending when we realize that both the act of counting days and the soldier’s poncho were used as protection and escape from this cold, unsympathetic, terrain.

- Davide Allison



View

Photo: Project 88, Mumbai



View



DVD stills

“Yes! It is very comfortable...”, 2009

1 Siachen soldier’s tent, various objects and audio

Tent dimensions inches: width 44 X length 68 X height 40
or centimetres: width 111.7 X length 172.7 X height 101.6

Display dimensions: variable

Audio running time: 3 minutes 26 seconds

Audio extract: <https://vimeo.com/69138240>

Complete audio: <https://vimeo.com/69137196>

(Please request password)

*>> If the weblink does not open by clicking on it, then
please copy and paste it into your browser*

“Yes! It is very comfortable...”, is an artwork involving the juxtaposition of unfamiliar objects from what would appear to be contrary spaces. Here luxury items, reminiscent of a comfortable hotel room, have been staged inside an old, makeshift, tent and ambient music can be heard from within. This work conceptualizes the idea of perceived comfort and contentment which are relative expressions used in our day to day lives. For a soldier, the options for well-being and solace are limited and he must make do with what is available. During ascending and descending the glacier, the tent becomes a soldier’s temporary home; where he finds relief from the high altitudes and from his nomadic existence, which is comparable to the way other travelers would check into a hotel room.

By staging the inside of the tent with hotel amenities, we see two worlds collide. Soothing, instrumental, music has replaced the sound of mortar shells and howling winds from the glacier. This juxtaposition not only questions how we view what brings us comfort but contrasts with the reality of what a soldier must endure while stationed on the glacier.

- Davide Allison

Interior



View & detail

Exterior



Photos: Project 88, Mumbai

Gurgaon to Panamik, 2008-09

11 glass & plastic bottles with plastic & metal lids containing leaves, stones and air along with 11 notes on paper

Display dimensions inches: width 80 X length 16 X height 40
or centimetres: width 203.2 X length 40.6 X height 101.6

Gurgaon to Panamik, includes a set of glass bottles which have been gathered from a particular place and sealed; containing leaves, stones and air. These artifacts were collected from a wide range of locations along the artist's research trail. These areas included: the ever-growing city of Gurgaon, the world's highest accessible road of Khardung La and the serene village of Panamik, which is the furthest point a civilian can travel along the road to the Siachen Glacier. These time capsules, along with handwritten thoughts, were documented by locals from various walks of life; some of whom were: soldiers, a student, a monk, a Ladakhi shopkeeper and other indigenous people. This project becomes a testament to life and draws together a strong, ethereal, connection between the air, the natural space, and the thoughts of common people. The project also speaks of how people's lives have been directly or indirectly affected by the Siachen conflict.

- *Davide Allison*

“Do we have a choice?” #1, 2009

Siachen soldier's clothing, sponge,
string and wood

Display dimensions: variable

The artwork, **“Do we have a choice?” #1**, consists of clothing from a Siachen soldier which have been suspended from a wooden cross-bar by way of strings and takes the shape of a marionette. By controlling the cross-bar, this silhouette captures movement and makes reference to the puppeteer who is called a “manipulator”. While the puppeteer remains anonymous, the audience is able to form their own conclusions about the independence of a soldier's life and the choices available to him. The staging of these clothes, in a very controlled manner, draws attention to the contrary notion that soldiers are not machines to be manipulated for the purpose of war and politics.

- Davide Allison



View & details



Photos: Project 88, Mumbai

537, 2007

537 white gauze bandages

Approximate display dimensions inches: width
43.3 X length 33.4 X height 8.2 or centimetres:
width 110 X length 85 X height 21

537, is an entreaty for peace, a call to end the ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan, who have been fighting for control over the Siachen Glacier for the last several decades. Coelho has used gauze fabric as a metaphor for the care, protection and healing of the many lives lost during the conflict. The white bandages, which have been rolled and assembled together, add up to a total length of one mile and represent the Siachen Glacier, which is 47 miles long. This was the first artwork created for the Siachen Glacier project and has continued to inspire the development of new works.

- *Daide Allison*



Views and detail

Photos: LAMO, Leh

India and World Wars One & Two

India and World Wars One & Two, 2011-2020

“One million one hundred thousand Indian soldiers served in the First World War, 60,000 died, 9200 were decorated for their valour, yet they are the forgotten heroes of the horrific bloodshed that eventually led to the defeat of Germany. Yet the memory of this crucial contribution of manpower, transport and money finds no place in the Eurocentric histories of the First World War”
- Mark Tully in David Omissi's. *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18.*

“Two-and-a-half million men from undivided India served the British during the Second World War. Their experiences have been little remembered, neither in the UK where a Euro/US-centric memory of the war dominates, nor in modern South Asia where nationalist histories of independence from the British Empire have prevailed”
- Divya Gupta, *Institute of English Studies, University of London.*

Since 2011, Baptist Coelho has been researching the contribution of Indian soldiers in the two World Wars. His field work spans across Asia, UK, Europe and Australia from which he has developed artworks in various media which have been exhibited worldwide.

- Davide Allison

They agreed to eat biscuits and European bread, but our regiment refused, 2019

Performance with army uniform, various objects and audio/video

Performance running time: 20 minutes

Audio/video running time: 20 minutes

Audio/video extract: <https://vimeo.com/385849368>

Complete audio/video: <https://vimeo.com/385848980>

(Please request password)

Audio/video recording: <https://vimeo.com/385850169>

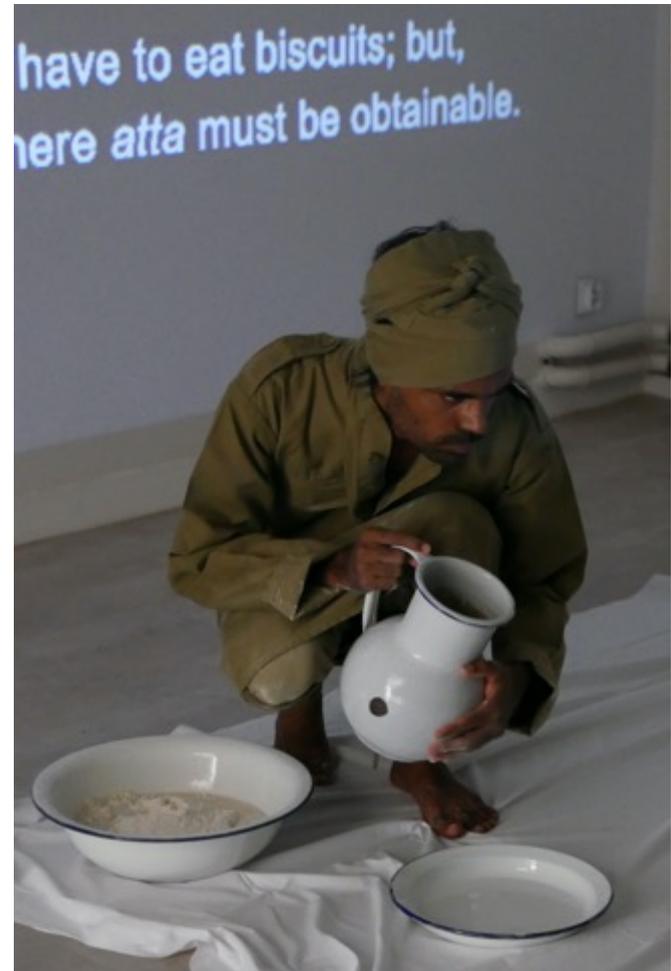
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They agreed to eat biscuits and European bread, but our regiment refused, is an extract from Bir Singh's letter (Sikh, 55th Rifles Regiment) to Gunga Singh (55th Rifles Regiment, Kohat, NWFP). This excerpt along with other letters is part of the book *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18* by David Omissi. The performance consist of a projected audio/video and is inspired by the food and eating habits the British Indian Army soldiers during World War One.
- *Davide Allison*



Performance still

Photos: Maurine Tric & Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris



Performance stills

What have we done for you?, 2018

Performance with army uniform and various objects

Performance running time: 15 to 30 minutes

Audio/video recording: <https://vimeo.com/265996450>

>> *If the weblink does not open by clicking on it, then please copy and paste it into your browser*

What have we done for you? is a performance where we observe a soldier dressed in camouflage uniform gradually washing the feet of an invisible entity. This gesture continues with a switch of positions, whereby the soldier's feet are now being washed by an unseen individual. These rituals alternate in a from the washer to the washed on either side of a bench. The performance then gradually progresses into a series of spontaneous and peculiar actions, where the soldier is seen interacting with his leather shoes and socks, enamel washbasins and jugs along with water, towels, soaps, saucers and a wooden bench. These unusual gesticulations with varied objects question political dominance and subservience, self and the other.

This performance is developed from Baptist Coelho's performance "**What have I done to you?**", 2011 and was inspired by a World War One photograph in which an Indian soldier washes his feet as a German sentry observes him at the Prisoner of War (POW) Camp in Wünsdorf, Germany.

What have we done for you? was first realised on 16th February, 2018 (18:00-18:45). It was produced and facilitated by the Centre Pompidou, Paris. The performance was part of the exhibition's programme, *Mémoires des Futurs Modernités Indiennes*, curated by Catherine David at Gallery 0, Centre Pompidou (18 October, 2017-19 February, 2018).

- *Davide Allison*



Performance still

Photos: Hervé Veronese & Centre Pompidou, Paris



Performance stills



You, me and them, 2019

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 43 X height 32.5 or
centimetres: width 109.2 X height 82.5

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 308 gsm, acid-free

Printer: Canon Pro 560 with Lucia Pigment Inks

You, me and them, investigates the correlation of ideologies and expectations that existed between the soldiers of the British Indian Army, the civilians, and the British Empire during the two World Wars. The photograph draws reference to the act of washing another's feet which is representative of a cross-cultural act demonstrating humility, respect and service. In contrast to the act of chivalry, the soldier and the state also represent forces of brutality and authority.

The correlation between civilian, soldier and state brings to the forefront the expectations and understandings that may or may not exist between them. These inter-relationships are often not clearly defined and marred by underlying agendas and motivations. The photograph also alludes to a broader political strategy of how the British forces mobilized their colonial troops through patriotism during the World Wars.

- *Davide Allison*



Digital print

© BC

Restage, 2018

Performance with army uniform and various objects

Performance running time: 15 to 30 minutes

Audio/video recording: <https://vimeo.com/265989695>

>> If the weblink does not open by clicking on it, then please copy and paste it into your browser

During World War One, the British Indian Army fought for Great Britain against Germany, for which they contributed a large number of divisions and independent brigades to the European, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern theatres of war. Approximately 1.3 million Indian soldiers served in World War One of which 74,000 lost their lives and many others were wounded. The most visible, flamboyant and well-documented troops among the British Indian Army, however, remained the 140,000 who served in Europe. There were hundreds of photographs of Indian soldiers taken by official staff, photographers, amateur enthusiasts and onlookers.

Restage, is a performance where we observe a soldier dressed in camouflage uniform taking orders from an invisible authority who is ordering him to move back and forth. These varied instructions continue until a certain mood and posture of the body is achieved, which is also reminiscent of the poses of the Indians soldiers as seen in the archival photographs. These bodily adjustments and recurring drills of the soldier in **Restage**, reopens the narratives of these images by speculating what could have transpired to achieve such picture-perfect (mainly orchestrated) moments. The performance confronts the problematic dynamics of documentation and/or propaganda.

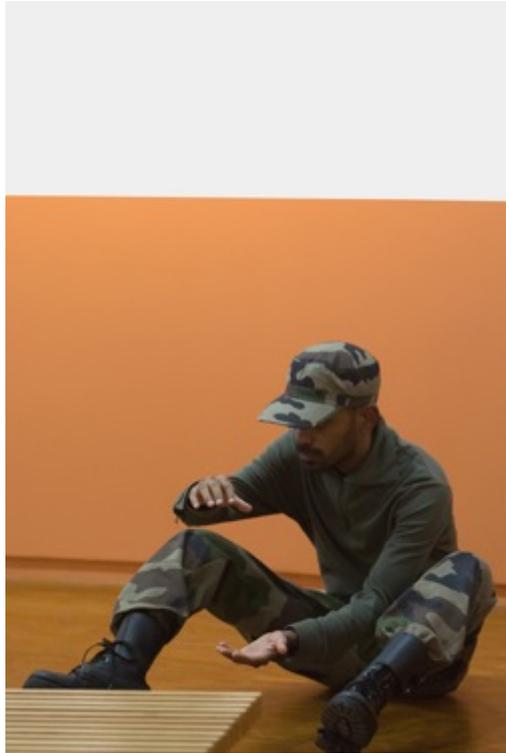
Restage was first realised on 16th February, 2018 (19:00-19:45). It was produced and facilitated by the Centre Pompidou, Paris. The performance was part of the exhibition's programme, Mémoires des Futurs Modernités Indiennes, curated by Catherine David at Gallery 0, Centre Pompidou (18 October, 2017-19 February, 2018).

- *Davide Allison*



Performance still

Photos: Hervé Veronese & Centre Pompidou, Paris



Performance stills

Camouflage #1, 2018

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 24 X length 16 or
centimetres: width 60.9 X length 40.6

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 308 gsm, acid-free

Printer: Canon Pro 560 with Lucia Pigment Inks

Display dimensions: variable



Digital print

Camouflage #2, 2018

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 24 X length 16 or
centimetres: width 60.9 X length 40.6

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 308 gsm, acid-free

Printer: Canon Pro 560 with Lucia Pigment Inks

Display dimensions: variable



Digital print

Camouflage #3, 2018

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 24 X length 16 or
centimetres: width 60.9 X length 40.6

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 308 gsm, acid-free

Printer: Canon Pro 560 with Lucia Pigment Inks

Display dimensions: variable



Digital print

Camouflage #4, 2018

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 24 X length 16 or
centimetres: width 60.9 X length 40.6

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 308 gsm, acid-free

Printer: Canon Pro 560 with Lucia Pigment Inks

Display dimensions: variable



Digital print

Une pièce de monnaie de Monsieur Risso, 2012-13

Audio/video running time:
16 minutes 9 seconds

Audio/video extract:

<https://vimeo.com/84537717>

Complete audio/video in French:

<https://vimeo.com/79959595>

(Please request password)

Complete audio/video with
English subtitles:

<https://vimeo.com/134806993>

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your browser*

The video, **Une pièce de monnaie de Monsieur Risso**, takes its starting point from an interview by the artist with Mr. Pierre Risso at his apartment in St. Denis; a northern suburb of Paris. Mr. Risso, who was born in 1928, recounted his heroic life as part of the Northern Liberation Movement in France during World War II. This meeting with Mr. Risso was initiated as part of the artist's research involving the history of munitions factories in St. Denis.

During the conversation, Mr. Risso gave the artist a two franc aluminum coin, which was minted in 1947. Mr. Risso recalled that aluminum coins were substituted for the original copper ones when they were melted down to make munitions for the War. The coin's origin was later questioned when the artist consulted a local historian and another story was revealed. This inspired the artist to explore the difference between perceptual experiences that happen in the present and the interplay of remembering and imagination that takes place after time has lapsed.

The video became a mechanism for the artist to explore how history is interpreted and shared; while at the same time questioning the validity of stories that emerge from personal interactions and informed attestations by the state. The video begins with a dialogue between Coelho and Mr. Risso, which develops into an animated story. As the narrative unfolds, the coin embarks on a journey to discover its identity; coming in contact with people from various places such as a Flea Market, Church, Public Garden, History Museum and Public Library; located within the département of Seine-Saint-Denis. The story does not arrive at a final conclusion; but rather more questions emerge when the coin finds itself in a Public Library and is confronted with various interpretations of its origin.

While developing this video, the artist reflected on his own journey of discovery about the correlation between myth and reality. By creating this coin's personal story, the artist explores the complexity of history and whether myth is at the heart of our understanding, which in turn can influence our sense of present reality.

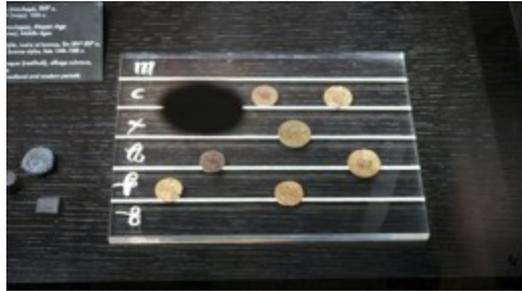
Une pièce de monnaie de Monsieur Risso, was developed while Baptist Coelho was Artist-in-Residence at the Centre International d'Accueil et d'Echanges des Récollets in Paris, 2012. The video was produced by Buchet Ponsoye Foundation, Paris; Espace Synesthésie, St Denis and TRIAD, London.

- *Davide Allison*



View

Photo: Project 88, Mumbai



DVD stills

Avenue des Champs-Élysées, 2012-13

Digital print on archival paper

Print dimensions inches: width 16.5 X length 11.6
or centimetres: width 42 X length 29.7

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 188 gsm, acid-free

Printer: Epson Stylus Pro 11880

Avenue des Champs-Élysées is a photograph taken on Bastille Day; a national event presided over by the President of France and foreign dignitaries. While previously held elsewhere within Paris, it was first hosted along the Champs-Élysées* on the 14th of July, 1915 and has continued as an annual event.

Amidst tight security and vigilance, spectators gather behind a metal barricade to observe and cheer the spectacle which displays the country's munitions and military force. The sensate experience of the parade brings to question the contemporary meaning and intention of hosting a military parade as part of a national event in France, or other such similar demonstrations around the world. This event is in stark contrast to the original focus of Bastille Day which was celebrated as a feast, before France became militarized in 1880.

Paradoxically, military parades are designed to create a sense of national pride and civil protection but on the other hand one can feel intimidated by the force of these armaments which evoke an aggressive and foreboding atmosphere. The photograph reflects the transitory nature of the parade; leaving many spectators to further question what may or may not have existed.

Avenue des Champs-Élysées was developed while Baptist was Artist-in-Residence at the Centre International d'Accueil et d'Echanges des Récollets in Paris, 2012.

*In the 17th century, the avenue was originally fields and market gardens and has gone through several transformations; including the name which was changed to Champs-Élysées in 1709. During the 18th century it became a fashionable venue and even today it is one of the principal tourist destinations; lined with luxury shops and cafés. The avenue runs for 1.91 kilometers, in the northwest district of Paris and ends at the Arc de Triomphe.

- *Davide Allison*



© Baptist Coelho

Digital print

“What have I done to you?”, 2011

Performance with army uniform and various objects

Performance’s running time: 1 to 4 hours

Audio/video recording:

<https://vimeo.com/69141196>

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“What have I done to you?”, is a performance work where the artist is dressed in a British camouflage uniform and washes and wipes the feet of various participants as they note down their random thoughts and other personal information. The act of washing another’s feet is by and large universally seen as sign of service or showing respect. In India, elders feet are touched in reverence; the young or those less experienced symbolically bow down to the greater knowledge of someone older and ask for their blessing. The feet in some cultures are considered a very unclean part of the body, therefore in many religious places one must wash their feet prior to entering the space. Washing someone’s feet can also be seen as an ultimate demonstration of love and service. The title of the performance refers to the words of Jesus spoken to his twelve disciples on the eve of his capture and crucifixion. He washed each disciples’ feet, (including his betrayer’s) and inspired them to do the same.

The notion of unconditional service reflects back to the duty of the British Indian soldier during the World Wars. They served anonymously for the benefit of British Empire. Ironically and symbolically, they were ‘cleansing’ the political turmoil created by individuals and institutions of power. The subtle nuances of the performance go beyond the periphery of the actual act of washing feet. The person who washes the feet, while dressed as a soldier, constructs a series of undetermined reactions from the participants. The anonymity of the soldier and his apparent silence might register fear, doubt, amusement, questioning or even mirth. Through the controlled actions of the proceedings, feelings alternate between the washer and the washed; the latter finding themselves vulnerable when their feet are completely immersed and being touched by a stranger. The performance raises ongoing questions about the dynamics between the British and their colonial troops; between dominance and subservience; between the self and the other.

“What have I done to you?”, was developed during Baptist Coelho’s Artist-in-Residence, at Delfina Foundation, London, 2011-12. The residency was in partnership with the Creative India Foundation, Hyderabad and in collaboration with Pump House Gallery, London.

- *Davide Allison*



Performance stills



Photo: Pump House Gallery, London

Display #1 (Battersea Park - London),
2011-12

Installation with 29 glass bottles, water, soap water, 29 towels, 28 notes on paper, 2 enamel basins, 3 enamel jugs, 1 soap, 1 porcelain saucer, various soldier gear, MDF shelves, metal brackets and video

Approximate installation dimensions
inches: width 103.5 X length 100 X depth 12
or centimetres: width 263 X length 254 X depth 30.4

Video running time: 7 minutes 4 seconds

Video extract: <https://vimeo.com/69142155>

Complete video:

<https://vimeo.com/69141944>

(Please request password)

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The work displayed the material aftermath of the act of ‘washing of feet’ from **“What have I done to you?”**, 2011. The arrangement resembled a museum setting, consisting of glass jars filled with the washing water, soiled towels and notes containing the random thoughts and personal details of each participant. Also included were used enamel jugs, soap, and various army gear neatly placed on shelves. A monitor showing a video of swirling unclean water completed the display.

The installation consciously projects the notion of a museum display; where objects are detached from their original surroundings and provided with politically correct information tags. On Baptist’s visits to the war museums in the UK, he reasoned the nature of documentation is such that it might just as easily conceal information as reveal it. The clinically manufactured vitrines bestow upon the objects a sense of unreality, perceived and presented as a particular set of people thought right. Significantly, generations of viewers take away with them what they consider facts. The notion of the everyday reinterpretation of historical details, and again, the constant overlapping of myth with reality becomes the basis of the display. The monitor, displaying a video of swirling water dotted with randomly moving bits of grime and foam, refers again to the process of historical recollection and its continual disruption and distribution over time.

Display #1 (Battersea Park - London) conveys obliquely satirical meanings. On the one hand, placing an object in a museum raises its value historically and materially. Here however, the objects are either throw-away items, or commonplace ones. By the act of placing them in pristine cabinets, the artist is masking their reality and camouflaging their origins for the viewer to perceive it as different.

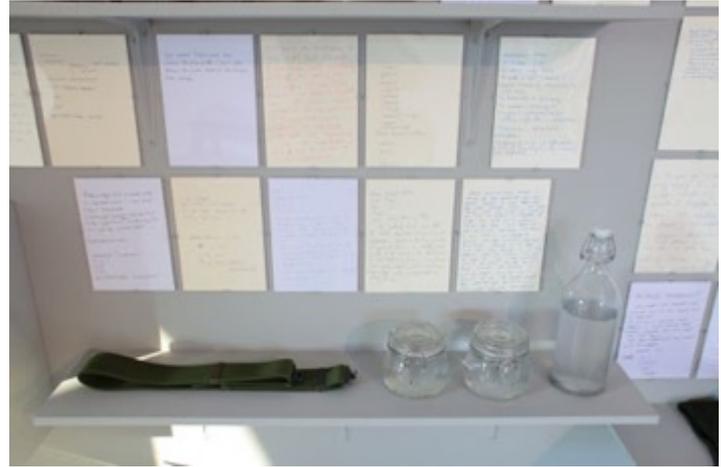
Display #1 (Battersea Park - London), was developed during Baptist Coelho’s Artist-in-Residence, at Delfina Foundation, London, 2011-12. The residency was in partnership with the Creative India Foundation, Hyderabad and in collaboration with Pump House Gallery, London.

- Davide Allison



Installation view

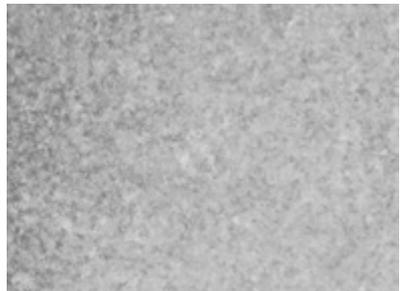
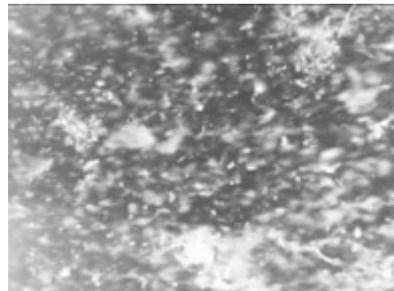
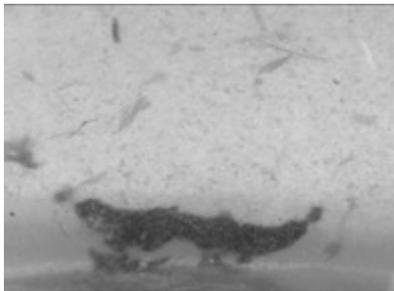
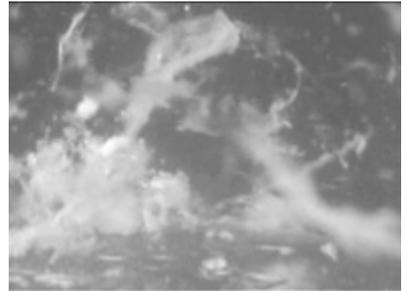
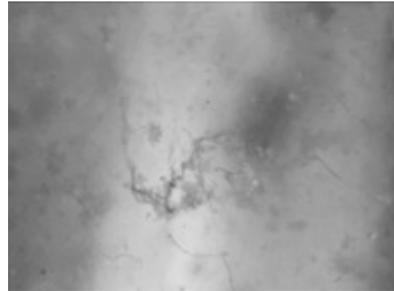
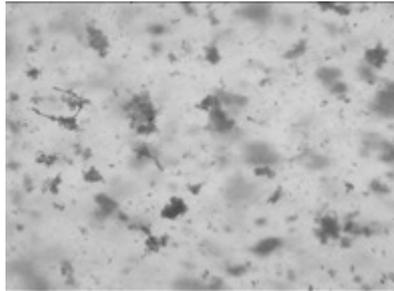
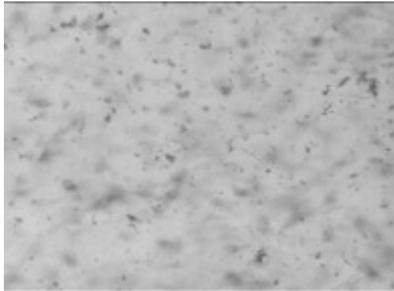
Photos: Pump House Gallery, London



Installation view & details



Installation detail



DVD stills

“Why is he here?”, 2011

Performance with army uniform and various objects

Performance’s running time: 1.5 to 2.5 hours

Audio/video recording:

<https://vimeo.com/69139938>

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“Why is he here?”, is a performance where the artist dressed as a British soldier and walked around the park in London, pausing at the eight positions where bombs had fallen during World War Two. An associate moved along with the artist at a discreet distance, asking onlookers to record their random thoughts at the sight of a soldier. They were also asked to record personal details like name, date, time, location and approximate temperature. When standing, the artist was in the ‘stand at ease’ position, reflecting a less rigid aspect or someone who is perhaps off-duty. The performance was also a means to navigate a space that was once a bombing site, but in the current day disconnected from its past.

A finding of a map on a research visit to the Wansdworth Museum in London introduced the artist to the fact that eight bombs had fallen within the Battersea Park. The memories of those bombings have been erased in time and the physical changes to the landscape meticulously renovated. The recording of participant’s thoughts was a way in which to link the past and present. **“Why is he here?”** is a reference to the immediate query that follows the appearance of someone unexpected.

To prepare for the part, Baptist procured authentic army combat clothing from the British Military Surplus Stores in Essex, UK. These were clothes once used by a soldier in the British Army. The artist had a ‘crew-cut’ and had discussions with an ex-military officer to familiarise himself with the poise and body language of a soldier. He also consulted a theatre actor to overcome inhibitions associated with moving around in public dressed in camouflage.

The army combat clothing here acts as a catalyst in inspiring response, thought and participation. The nature of the camouflage helps the artist to be anonymous; and on the other hand invites reaction and speculation. To some, the artist’s appearance as a soldier (in a site with a physical memory of the war) was a masquerade, to others, an intrusion, and to yet more, a sight to jerk the memory.

“Why is he here?”, was developed during Baptist Coelho’s Artist-in-Residence, at Delfina Foundation, London, 2011-12. The residency was in partnership with the Creative India Foundation, Hyderabad and in collaboration with Pump House Gallery, London.

- Davide Allison



Performance stills

Photo: Battersea Park, London

Eight Pauses, 2011-12

8 digital prints on archival paper and video

Single print dimensions inches: width 13.3 X length 10 or centimetres: width 33.7 X length 25.4

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 188 gsm, acid-free Printer: Epson Stylus Pro 11880

Approximate display dimensions inches: width 148.9 X length 23.6 X depth 11.2 or centimetres: width 378.3 X length 60 X depth 28.5

Video running time: 5 minutes 21 seconds

Video extract: <https://vimeo.com/69145112>

Complete video: <https://vimeo.com/69144209>

(Please request password)

>> *If the weblink does not open by clicking on it, then please copy and paste it into your browser*

Eight Pauses, is an artwork of eight photographs and a video. These photos take their starting point from a map created by the Wandsworth Heritage Service at Battersea Library entitled “Where the Bombs Fell in Battersea Park” which depicts the locations of where World War Two bombs fell between 1939 and 1945. Discovering this map was part of the research that the artist conducted while looking at the local history of the London Borough of Wandsworth and Battersea Park during World Wars. The map indicated the number of bombs that fell around Wandsworth and depicted eight sites where bombs had fallen in Battersea Park.

While discovering the past the artist explored the present day Battersea Park to create a dialogue with the memories of war and more specifically the presence of soldiers. The eight photographs document a soldier in the stand at ease position at the eight different locations where the bombs had fallen in the park. The memories of the bombings and the landscape may have changed with time but the presence of a soldier in the present day brought memories and landscape to life. The video consists of the handwritten random thoughts collected from various people who observed the soldier in the ‘stand at ease’ position in the park.

In the photographs, the artist wears camouflage combat gear which was once used by a British soldier. The act of wearing this British gear became a symbolic gesture and references the complex role and contributions that Indian allied soldiers played alongside the British during the World Wars. In observance, soldiers also present an image of bravery, honour and being of service which contrasts with realities of death and violence associated with their role. The occurrences of the soldier in the park are ominous and questions whether his presence as a memory is actually concealed or revealed. In the context of this work, camouflage provokes various reactions such as fear, aggression and disdain from passersby. Yet the army uniform not only allows the soldier to integrate with the background but also allows him to become anonymous. This act of camouflage suggests the idea of illusion and concealment which in itself generates diverse trains of thought.

Eight Pauses, offers a moment to contemplate the conflict and contradiction that often surrounds the presence of a soldier and poses questions concerning the apparent randomness of military events in a given place and their historical reference in the present day. **Eight Pauses**, was developed from a performance entitled “**Why is he here?**”, 2011, where the artist explored people’s reaction to a soldier in uniform as he walked and paused through Battersea Park. The artwork was developed during Baptist Coelho’s Artist-in-Residence, at Delfina Foundation, London, 2011-12. The residency was in partnership with the Creative India Foundation, Hyderabad and in collaboration with Pump House Gallery, London.

- *Davide Allison*



View

Photos: Pump House Gallery, London



Digital prints



Digital prints

Stand at ease, 2012

1 digital print on archival paper and a pair of leather boots

Print dimensions inches: width 9.4 X length 6 or

centimetres: width 24.1 X length 15.4

Archival Paper: Hahemühle Photo Rag, 188 gsm, acid-free

Printer: Epson Stylus Pro 11880

Approximate display dimensions inches: width 19.6 X

length 37.4 X depth 13.7 or centimetres: width 50 X length

95 X depth 35

Stand at ease is an artwork which consists of leather boots placed below a black and white photograph depicting the artist's hands, placed one over the other. The photograph and shoes are positioned in such a manner as to represent a soldier in a relaxed posture; as opposed to standing at/in attention.

Part of the artwork is installed facing the wall and eliminates the presence of a full body. This allows the viewer to dwell on the anonymity and isolation of the soldier; while the blank wall signifies a void or barrier. The army combat boots which are part of the artwork was once used by a British soldier. The act of wearing this British gear became a symbolic gesture and references the complex role and contributions that Indian allied soldiers played alongside the British during the World Wars.

The notion of being at 'ease' is in contrast to the rigid discipline that often defines a soldier's existence. The artwork reflects on the military expression "standing at ease" and questions the ease that a soldier feels within the strict regime of the army.

The artwork was developed from the work, **Eight Pauses**, 2011-12, a set of eight photographs which show the artist dressed as a soldier standing at ease in Battersea Park, London. **Stand at ease**, was developed during Baptist Coelho's Artist-in-Residence, at Delfina Foundation, London, 2011-12. The residency was in partnership with the Creative India Foundation, Hyderabad and in collaboration with Pump House Gallery, London.

- *Davide Allison*



View

Photos: Project 88, Mumbai



Digital print, view & details

“I thought I had forgotten about it...”, 2011-12

Raster engraving on oak veneered medium-density fibreboard (MDF) and wooden table

Display dimensions inches:
width 72 X length 28.8 X
height 30 or centimetres:
width 182.8 X length 73.1 X
height 76.2

“I thought I had forgotten about it...”, juxtaposes official documentation of events with personal recollections of an individual. The oral history here is presented as etched text upon a wooden tabletop, a memoir of the time when the person had to hide under a table as a measure of safety against bombings. The work consists of a wooden table with raster engraving done on oak veneered MDF. Arranged along with the table are completed ‘Incident Report’ forms, documents with set templates that were filled in by wardens on the occurrence of a war disaster.

The work grew out of a meeting with an individual who had experienced World War Two, and remembered and shared his traumatic experiences. Though the person remains anonymous, his memories form the basis of the work, engraved on wood in the template of an ‘incident report’ and taking the form of a wooden table, a direct reference to the act of sheltering under a table in the time of bombings, something the protagonist recalled vividly. The questioning of what is lost or forgotten and what is recorded from personal experiences continues in the artist work in **“I thought I had forgotten about it...”**.

In the process of researching various archives the artist came across ‘Incident Reports at the Wandsworth Heritage Service at the Battersea Library in London. These documents were filled by war-wardens who recorded in them, incidents as they happened. These incident reports were constructed on predetermined parameters, and therefore had to accommodate the specific details of diverse events of attacks, destruction, rescue or deaths within a similar format. They were in a sense, designed for regular use and to maintain a sense of objectivity in the reports.

In placing official templates of incident reports together with secondary records of personal memories, the artist was questioning and exploring the complexities of recording history, and the visible distinction that is sometimes seen between supposedly objective documentation and that which is subjective and combined with emotional and psychological memory. The authenticity of both is open to discussion, though commonly official reports are considered the greater truth because of being ‘officially’ authorized.

“I thought I had forgotten about it...”, was developed during Baptist Coelho’s Artist-in-Residence, at Delfina Foundation, London, 2011-12. The residency was in partnership with the Creative India Foundation, Hyderabad and in collaboration with Pump House Gallery, London.

- *Davide Allison*



View

Photos: Pump House Gallery, London

A.R.P. M.2

Message Form for Use at Report Centres.

(For "IN" Messages. For the text of messages other than reports of Air Raid Damage only the "Remarks" space should be used.)

Date:—	Time at which reception of message was completed	Initials of Receiving Operator
6.2.41	04-51	A.H.
AIR RAID DAMAGE	Designation of Reporting Agent (e.g., Warden's Sector No. <u>4</u>)	

Position of occurrence:—

*Type of bombs. H.E. In incendiary Poison Gas

Casualties:—Approx. No. NIL Whether any trapped under wreckage

Fire. If reported, write word "FIRE" YES.

*Damage to Mains:—Water NIL Coal Gas Overhead Electric Cables Sowers

Names of any roads blocked NIL

Position of any unexploded bombs NIL

Time of occurrence (approx.):— 04:37

Services already on the spot or coming:— A.F.S.

Remarks:

I. BOMBS, in BATTERSEA PARK, ALEXANDER AVENUE, I through roof of 1 ALEXANDER AVENUE

Hole in roof.
No appreciable damage

Serial No. of Occurrence

780

* Delete those NOT reported.

Absolute Terror That's Because You Feel There

KNOW ER, SO

Was erm... I didn't know what was going on. When you're two you don't do you the adults and all they were absolutely terrified and screaming at

Well so that	Was dramatic but yeah... yeah... I suppose it's embarrassing	So... yeah... but it's erm you know...
--------------	--	--

I MEAN ER BECAUSE AS I say I have forgotten about, but it er it must have been there,

It's still in my mind, terrible

Isn't it. (blows his nose) Nasty dreams Once a long

Time ago er by er Treating them As though they were entertainment as I went

Through a series of dreams, when I was being

Chased by er monsters and er	Giant insects.	It was oil, must have been	Before
------------------------------	----------------	----------------------------	--------

When I was about something

Between fifteen and twenty, I suppose

And ah... I don't think so so well its

Possible I suppose yeah... yeah... yeah... so... yeah

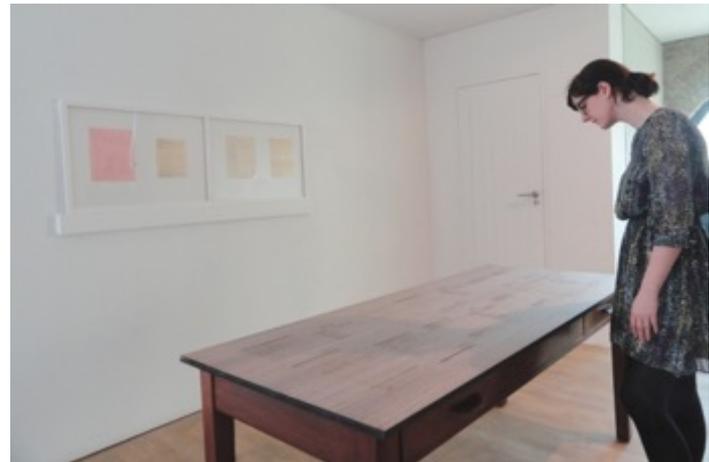
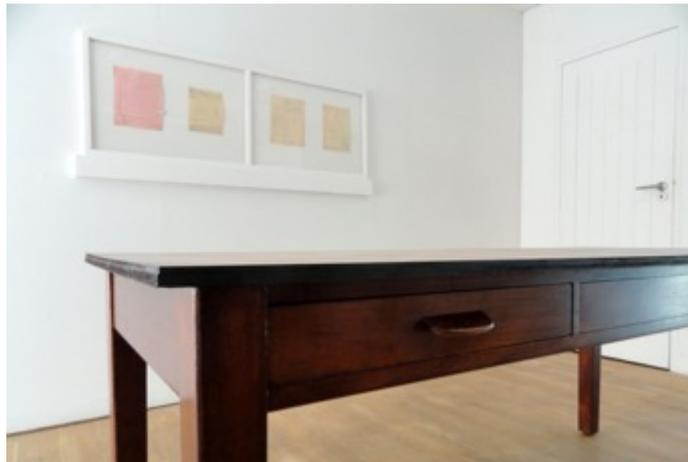
I don't think

So of it yeah... well this

Before they er they you know

Incident form (original)

Detail



Details

17.10.1953, 2011

Installation with chipboards, wood,
63 bulbs and notes on paper

Approximate installation dimensions
inches: width 250.8 X length 432 X
height 98.4 or centimetres: width
637 X length 1097.2 X height 249.9

The Installation **17.10.1953**, is a mixed media installation that explores random thought of an individual as part of a social and political commentary. The work is a labyrinth made up of wooden hoardings which are lined inside with several posters and 63 bulbs suspended above it. The artwork takes its starting point from a drawing made by the Indian artist, Kattingeri Krishna Hebbar during his visit to Warsaw. The drawing is dated 17.10.1953 and shows a section of the Castle Square where Sigismund's Column is situated in the centre of the drawing. The column which was built in 1644 and was destroyed on the night of 1-2 September 1944, by shells from a German tank during the German Occupation and was rebuilt in 1949.

The installation's silhouette when seen from above is a reference to the fallen down column. What were Hebbar's thoughts when he was drawing the Column in its restored glory considering it had witnessed a very sad past. Baptist set out collecting random thoughts of local people who documented their thoughts on paper as they saw the column. Their thoughts were reprinted as posters and are collectively stuck towards the inner side of the installation walls. These ethereal and unpredictable thoughts become tangible through the association with space, time and surrounding conditions. During the process of collecting factual to random information in relationship to the history of Castle Square (as seen by K. K. Hebbar and other people), the artist discovered varied nuances and meaning from what may appear as unrelated incidents. Through these occurrences of randomness (written on paper) their relationship with history, experiences and cultural norms become significant. Whilst associating words (written or spoken) with space (Castle Square), Baptist continues to focus on the cultural values of the past and question what is universal and dissimilar within our present global history. The 63 bulbs are in memoriam of the 63 days of the brave resistance put up during the German occupation.

While merging the notion of investigative research with ideas and values, **17.10.1953**, invites inquiry and brings together collective and individual memories of the past with random thoughts of the present. **17.10.1953**, was produced and exhibited at the Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 2011

- *Daive Allison*



Installation detail

Photos: Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



Installation details



Miscellaneous

Blueys, 2016

Installation with 18 letters and 2 language phrase cards on paper along with 3 digital prints on archival paper (Hahemühle Photo Matt, 200 gsm, acid-free), 2 magnifying glasses, 3 free-standing display vitrines made of wood, medium-density fibreboard (MDF), acrylic and an audio/video.

Installation dimensions: variable

Audio/video running time: 2 minutes 9 seconds

Audio/video extract: <https://vimeo.com/229835914>

Complete audio/video: <https://vimeo.com/223975344>

(Please request password)

>> If the weblink does not open by clicking on it, then please copy and paste it into your browser

Blueys, is an installation of eighteen letters and two language phrase cards on paper along with three digital prints on archival paper, two magnifying glasses, three free-standing display vitrines made of wood, medium-density fibreboard (MDF), acrylic and an audio/video.

When British Armed Forces are deployed on operations they are entitled to free aerogrammes (colloquially known as “blueys” because of their colour) to and from their families and friends. The work is a collection of eighteen hand written and printed blueys exchanged in 2003 by a British soldier with his wife and children during his posting in Iraq. An American English to Arabic language phrase card issued by the British government was used by this soldier and consist of limited words that would assist in communicating with local Iraqis.

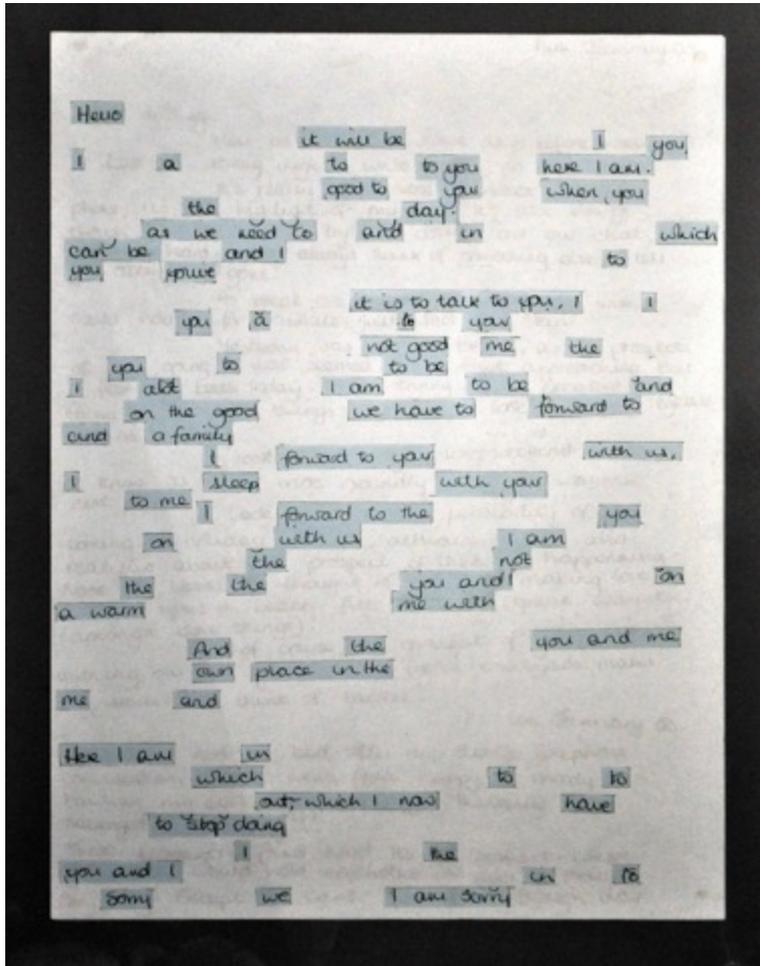
Blueys, traces the English and Arabic languages used by the soldier through personal letters and a rigid language phrase card. The work also highlights the trajectory of such tools of communication within distinct geographies by literally overlapping them onto each other. On closer inspection of the displayed letters, one observes that certain words are revealed and some masked. This play of visible and hidden texts takes its lead from what is permitted and suggested in the language phrase card. On the other hand, the video depicts an improvised version of the language phrase card where English words commonly used by the British family are listed alongside their Arabic translation and phonetics.

Blueys, was developed during Baptist Coelho’s 2015-16 Leverhulme Artist-in-Residence at the Department of War Studies at King’s College London, UK. Supported by the Leverhulme Trust, the Department of War Studies and Cultural Programming at King’s College London & Delfina Foundation, UK
- *Davide Allison*

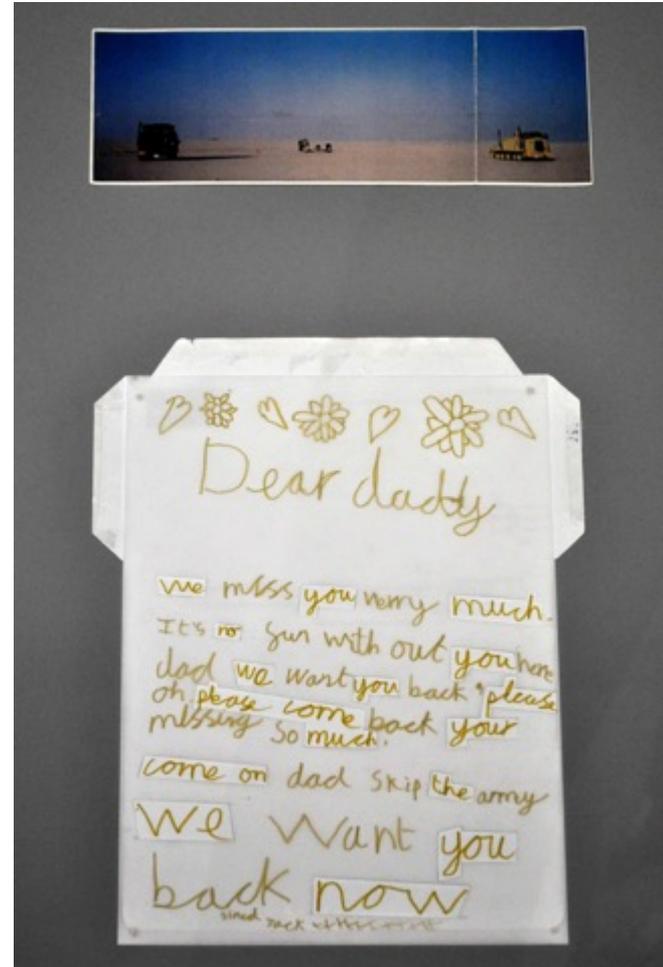


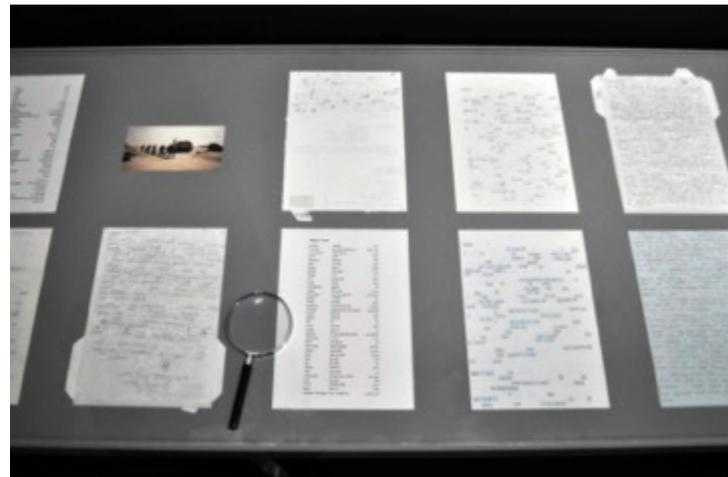
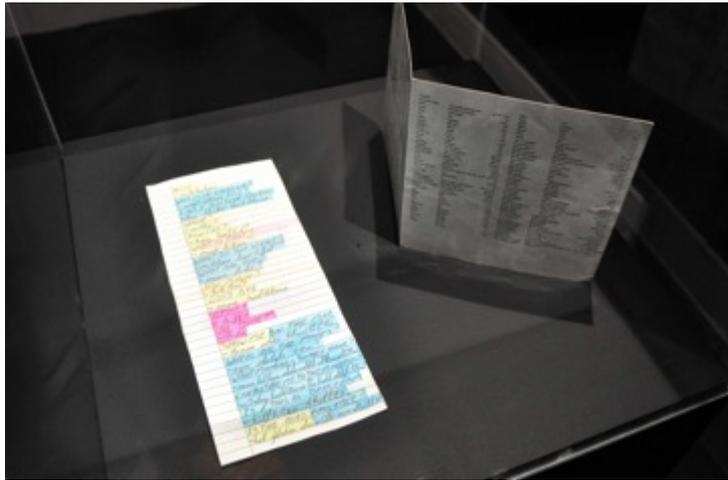
Installation detail

Photos: Somerset House, London



Installation details





Installation details

Commands		
Answer the question	jawib alaa assoo- al	جاوب على السؤال
Be quiet	ooss-koet	سكت
Calm down	Ha-dde naf sak	هدأ نفسك
Come here	ta'-aa-la Hoona	تعال هنا
Come one at a time	ta'-aa-loo wa-hed til-wa al aakh er	تعالوا واحدًا تلو الآخر
Come with us	ta'-aa-la maa-na	تعال معنا
Do not move	la tata harrak	لا تتحرك
Do not resist	la too-qaa-wim	لا تقاوم
Drink	ish-rub	اشرب
Drop your weapons	irr mee see lahak	ارم سلاحك
Eat	qal	كل
Follow me	it-baa-nee	اتبعني
Form a line	shakk-elo sauf	شكلوا صفًا
Get up	in-hud	اقم
Give me your weapon	aa-tee-nee see-la-hack	اصلي سلاحك
Hands up	irfa ya-dayeka	ارفع يديك
Hurry up	bee sur-aa	يسرعه
Keep away	ib-taa'-id	ابتعد
Keep out	mam-noo add-du-khool	منع دخول
Kneel down	im-kaa'	اركع
Lie down	inn bat-ih	استلمح
Lie on the ground	inn bat-ih ala al-Arrd	استلمح على الأرض
Stay where you are	ib qa makanak	ابق مكانك
Move slowly	tu-harrak aala mahb-lack	تحرك على مهلك
Move/Walk forward	Tahar-ak, / iruhec ila el amam	تحرك، امشي إلى الأمام
No talking	mem noo el kalaam	منع الكلام
One at a time	Wahid wahid	واحد واحد
Repeat it	karr-rer	كرر
Silence	iss-kut	سكت
Speak slowly	takel-am ala mahlak	تكل على مهلك
Stay where you are	Intazir fee makanak	انتظر في مكانك
Stay here	ib-qa hoona	ابق هنا
Stop	qif	قف
Stop or I will shoot/fire	qif wa-il-la Sa-et-leq an-naar	قف، وإلا سأطلق قناري
Stop, who goes there?	Qif men hoo-naak?	قف، من هناك؟
Surrender /Give up	sal-ilm naf-tak, las-tess-ilm	سلم نفسك، امتثل
Take me to	khuz nee ila	خذي إلى
Turn around	dust li-khalf	دور الخلف
Unload	far-regh	فزع



Installation detail

دائما	dayimaan	always
بعيدا	baeidanaan	apart
الأوغاد	al'awghad	bastards
جميل	jamil	beautiful

رجل	rajol	dude
متشوق	mtshawig	eager
إلا	illa	except
يشعر	yasheur	feel
إلى الأبد	ilaa al'abad	forever
غفر	ghafar	forgive
خليج	khalij	gulf
سعيد	saeid	happy
الاجازة	al'ijaza	holiday

فقط	faqat	just
كاتشب	kattashib	ketchup
شفاف	shafaf	lips
حب	hubb	love
دراجة نارية	dirajat naria	motorbike
ماما	mama	mum
معنوية	maenawia	morale
عادي	eadi	normal
فقط	faqat	only

لحاف	libaf	quilt
اختبار قصير	aikhtibar qasir	quiz
واقعي	waqiei	realistic
حقا	haqqanaan	really
استرخاء	aistirkha'	relax
سلطة	sulta	salad
ساطع	satie	shining
بشرة	bashira	skin
مبتسم	mubtasim	smiley

الفيديو	alvideo	videoing
الوادي	alwadi	valley
طقس	taqs	weather
نهاية الأسبوع	nihayat al'usbue	weekend
زوجة	zawja	wife
عيد الميلاد	eid almilad	xmas
شاب	shab	youth
فتى	fata	youthful
حديقة حيوان	hadiqat hiwan	zoo

زوجة	zawja	wife
عيد الميلاد	eid almilad	xmas
شاب	shab	youth
فتى	fata	youthful
حديقة حيوان	hadiqat hiwan	zoo

DVD stills

14th July 2012, 2012-13

1 steel drum, liquid fuel and audio/video

Drum dimensions inches: height 34 X diameter 22.6 or centimetres: height 86.5 X diameter 57.5

Display dimensions inches: height 59.8 X diameter 22.6 or centimetres: height 152 X diameter 57.5

Audio/video running time: 9 minutes 53 seconds

Audio/video running time: 9 minutes 53 seconds

Audio/video extract:

<https://vimeo.com/69125275>

Complete audio/video:

<https://vimeo.com/69123950>

(Please request password)

Audio/video recording:

<https://vimeo.com/69123225>

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The **14th of July 2012** is an artwork which consists of a steel drum, with a video projected onto its suspended lid and the smell of liquid fuel.

The work takes its inspiration from Bastille Day* which the artist observed on the 14th of July, 2012, along the Avenue of Champs-Élysée in Paris; one of the oldest and largest military parades in Europe. Amidst tight security and vigilance, spectators cheered the passing cavalcades which displayed the country's manufactured munitions and various marching military regiments.

The empty steel drum was acquired in Paris and represents the volatility of human life and the depletion of resources that a society experiences in order to perpetuate conflict. The video displays fragmented images of a military parade with accompanying sounds of the marching bands. The captured footage progressively slows and blurs to finally terminate into a white void. While we observe the details of the weaponry, the audio also gradually slows down and the distorted sounds become reminiscent of bombing. The blurred images reveal an ambiguity and complexity in the relationship between civilians and the military.

The smell of liquid fuel, experienced as part of the artwork, replicates the strong fumes expelled by the tanks and large military vehicles which were part of the parade along the Avenue. The unsettling odor is reminiscent of the smell from machinery on an actual battlefield. Sensorial experiences of the artwork are intentionally disruptive and leave the viewer confused and curious. This work brings to question the significance and importance of hosting military parades, as part of a national event in France, or creating other such similar presentations around the world.

14th of July 2012 was developed while Baptist was Artist-in-Residence at the Centre International d'Accueil et d'Echanges des Récollets in Paris, 2012.

*Bastille Day is the English name given to the French National Day, which is celebrated on 14th of July each year. In France it is formally called "La Fête Nationale"; when translated means "The National Celebration". This event commemorates the 1789 storming of the Bastille prison fortress and is seen as a symbol for the uprising of a modern nation.

- Davide Allison



Views



Photos: Espace Synthésie, Saint-Denis



Detail



DVD stills

18th May 1980, 2010

Installation with 140 glass bottles with metal & plastic lids containing leaves, various objects and air along with notes on paper

Approximate installation dimensions
inches: width 239.7 X length 71.6 X
height 141.7 or centimetres: width 609
X length 182 X height 360

18th May 1980, includes glass bottles sealed with air, leaves and various objects; along with handwritten notes on paper. The installation draws together an important and ethereal connection between the inter-relationship of found-objects, location, history and the private thoughts of the individuals. The artist's childhood hobby of collecting tangible objects from around the world was the inspiration for projects that began in 2006. Since then, the project **Air(Travel)** has collaborated with local people from various countries and has been developed to reflect unique locations.

The Gwangju Democratization Movement refers to a civil uprising which took place in the city of Gwangju, South Korea, on May 18 to May 27, 1980. During this period, citizens rose up against the military dictatorship and took control of the city. The crisis is often referred to as "5.18", which is in reference to the start of the uprising. To commemorate this event, Bus route No. "518" was created and navigates through the city making sixty-one stops; some of these stops mark the incidents where the uprisings occurred.

For **18th May 1980**, the local people of Gwangju, who use the bus route "No. 518", sealed leaves into bottles and noted a random thought on paper. Details such as: name, date, time location and approximate temperature were also noted. These time capsules are suspended from the ceiling and collectively take form of the numerals 518, in Sino Korean. Upon closer inspection and contemplation, the viewer becomes aware of the connections, similarities and differences between the randomness of thought, experience and space.

18th May 1980, was produced and facilitated by the Gwangju Biennale Foundation, South Korea. The installation was part of the group exhibition, 'The Flower of May' at the Gwangju Museum, curated by Yongwoo Lee in 2010, to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of Gwangju Democratization Movement.

- *Davide Allison*



Installation view

Photos: Gwangju Museum of Art, South Korea



Installation view & details

Research images: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150277419891159.380897.682426158&type=1&l=cd0c1dfd1e>

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Remind the Forgotten, 2009

1 carpet, 411 newsprint paper sheets and nylon thread

Approximate display dimensions
inches: width 52 X length 76 X
height 15 or centimetres: width 132
X length 193 X height 38.1

Remind the Forgotten, incorporates newspaper articles which have been randomly swept under a carpet. On November 26th, 2008, the world was shocked to learn of the urban terrorism that transformed the city of Mumbai. Media technology allowed the tragedy to be documented and transmitted around the world as it unfolded.

Time has passed, and the artwork reflects on the power of the media to shape and influence current events; as well as our ability to forget. The reveal from one corner of the carpet reminds us of our human frailties; that with the desire to move on with life, we tend to forget the painful past.

- *Davide Allison*



View & detail

How To Be Your Self, 2008

How To Be Your Self, is a multidisciplinary project which has been inspired by the book entitled “How To Be A Lady”, written by the American writer Candace Simpson-Giles (Copyright 2001). This book is compiled of chapters with simple guidelines for women on how to apply certain “common courtesies” and behaviours within a patriarchal society. This book raises many contemporary issues regarding the world of feminism and was the impetus for women to tell their stories about identity and roles in society. In general, the book focuses on how society judges women superficially through action and appearance, which often goes unquestioned.

- *Daive Allison*

How to be Your Self (Chapter 01 - I Experience Real Life), 2008

Installation with a pair of women's red leather stiletto shoes, acrylic case, wooden pedestal and audio/video

Installation dimensions: variable

2 channel audio/video running time:
9 minutes 30 seconds

Audio/video extract:

<https://vimeo.com/68957237>

Complete audio/video:

<https://vimeo.com/68956315>

(Please request password)

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How to be Your Self (Chapter 01 - I Experience Real Life), is an installation with a twin channel video projection which accompanies a pair of women's red stiletto shoes, placed high on a wooden pedestal. In channel 02, fifty-eight women who vary in: age, occupation, culture and economic backgrounds recite modified excerpts from chapter 01 of the book "How To Be A Lady". This text declares the proper codes of conduct which should be adhered to during social interactions. In the video, the proclamation of claiming these rightful acts of behaviour for women is sharply contrasted with channel 01, where fifty-eight men are seen trying to fit into a pair of women's red, stiletto, shoes.

The historical portrayal of women is brought to the forefront by having present-day women recite these notions of correct behaviour. Through story-telling and the juxtaposition of images, the viewer is encouraged to uncover the hidden message from under the naiveté of these spoken words. This need to define women through behaviour often creates inhibition and conflict in society. Through the dialogue, the viewer soon discovers the truth behind the strong emphasis of "doing" rather than "being" and an important message surfaces about the need to be your self without judgment.

Through the reading of these codes of conduct in **How to be Your Self (Chapter 01 - I Experience Real Life)**, women express their dilemma on how to be their own person while societal pressure enforces them to be someone else. The reciting of these phrases becomes a powerful gesture as they allude to an act of obligation and personal testimony. In channel 01, men struggle to fit into a pair of red, stiletto, shoes which also become an allegory for the societal pressures that women endure in order to conform to the patriarchal ideal of beauty. Not only is the act of frivolity evident here but also the sheer will and patience required in accomplishing the task at hand. The artist begins to tell the story with these staged segments involving real people's lives and the diversity of real women surfaces. This absurd story continues to be told on video in the presence of these red shoes which are placed high on top of a pedestal; revealing what appears to be unapproachable and revered in our society.

- *Davide Allison*



Installation view

Photos: FICA, Delhi



Installation view



DVD stills Channel 1



DVD stills Channel 2



How to be Your Self (Chapter 02 - You Get Dressed), 2008

Installation with cotton fabric, emulsion paint, iron spool, regzine apron and audio/video

2 channel audio/video running time:
5 minutes 33 seconds

Installation dimensions: variable

Audio/video extract:

<https://vimeo.com/68955916>

Complete audio/video:

<https://vimeo.com/68955237>

(Please request password)

>> *If the weblink does not open by clicking on it, then please copy and paste it into your browser*

The installation, **How to be Your Self (Chapter 02 - You Get Dressed)**, consists of a twin channel video which is projected beside: a regzine apron, an iron spool and a seemingly endless scroll of cotton fabric which has been inscribed with hand-painted text. The installation focuses on the role of women and how society judges them superficially through appearance and action.

How to be Your Self (Chapter 02 - You Get Dressed), acts out the mythological Hindu tale of *Draupadi's Cheer-Haran*, which is one of the significant stories from the epic *Mahabharata* and is considered a very important sacred text in Hinduism. Here *Draupadi*, who has become the epitome of feminine power, is involved in a polyandrous marriage with five brothers who are called the *Pandavas*. She is insulted in the King's court when her husbands decide to gamble with her life in a crucial game of dice playing. *Cheer-Haran*, which literally means stripping of one's clothes, was imposed on her by the successful winner. *Draupadi* pleads with *Lord Krishna* for help and in response His Grace turns her clothing into a never-ending ream of cloth which prevents *Draupadi* from being disrobed.

The installation draw parallels between this ancient story and the women of today, who may still experience shame from the patriarchal world. Channel 01 of the video demonstrates the gruesome act of stripping away, while Channel 02 reveals an array of hand-painted phrases which depict a code of behaviour regarding how women should dress and act. The iron spool and apron are symbols of the patriarchal world which seem to perpetuate these codes of conduct for women. This social dialogue and fabric appear to be endless and become a metaphor for the constant 'disrobing' of women in our society.

- *Davide Allison*



Installation detail

Photos: FICA, Delhi



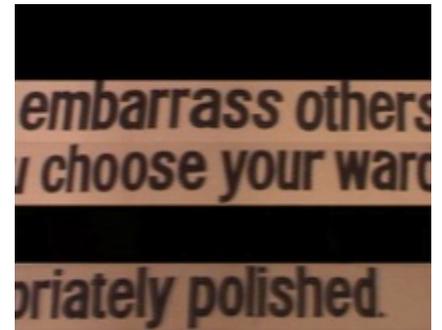
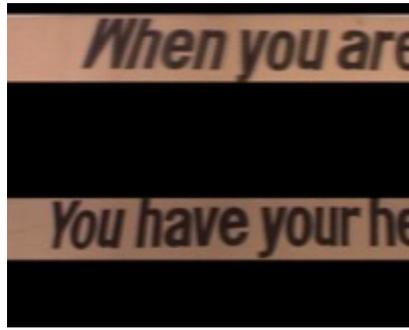
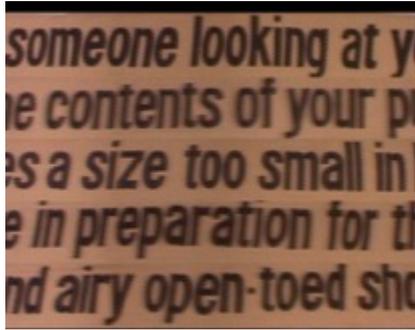
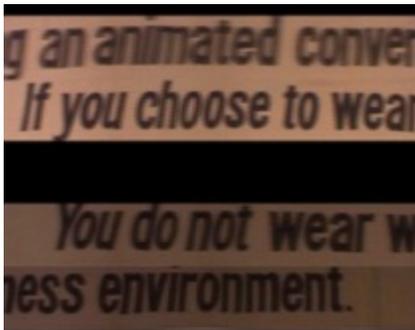
Installation details



Installation detail



DVD stills Channel 1



DVD stills Channel 2