

## Talk with BAPTIST COELHO

## BAPTIZED THE BEST

With the *Art India* 'Promising Artist Award' under his belt, this 30-year-old maverick is only set to rise higher, says Vishwas Kulkarni

I don't think returning to advertising is an option at all. It's a world I left behind very consciously."

But what about the world he inhabits now? That's pretty hackneyed too. "Well I don't really inhabit it. That's why this award was such a surprise." Coelho has been rather underground and over the past year after his return from the UK, he has been having private exhibitions, quite literally. A room in Malad or thereabouts, where the artist lives, is sometimes converted into what Baptist keeps referring to "Studio Nights". A "studio night" is where friends and artists are invited to view some of his video art or new media experiments. Fellow artist Sharmila Samant met him at one such "studio night", something that turned out to be an opening of sorts for Baptist, an entry into the art world at large. "I'm not a complete newbie in the art world. I have forthcoming works at Vadhera in Delhi. From the Mumbai galleries, I think Sri Goswami of Project 88 is promoting some very intelligent work. That seems like a fun gallery that I look forward to working with."

"So what next after this award? Are you going to become an art party perennial?" I ask. "The answer is yes and no. No, because I have this love-hate relationship with the art world and like to keep my distance. Yes, because as a matter of fact, I am working on a project based on the Page Three-fication of the art world. So I am collecting cut-outs of artists at parties, pictures of what socialites wear, articles writing about such stuff, and something radical is emerging from this research. I love how this tribe got co-opted into the Page Three culture; it fascinates me. That's my next project," says Baptist in all earnestness. "I absolutely can't wait to see it," I squeal with delight. "Look this isn't some type of *bakra* joke, no?" says the artist again. "Because I still can't believe this is happening to me."



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Look this isn't some type of *bakra* joke, no?" says Baptist Coelho when I call him to tell him that he has won one of the most coveted prizes in the art world. However, it's minutes after the jury has decided on the award and in the flurry that follows, I am told by a committee member that I am allowed to call the winners "since they have now been informed". But they haven't. So it turns out that it is I who breaks the news to this 30-year-old over the telephone. Coelho is ecstatic, almost on the verge of crying, in seventh heaven. When the celebratory spirit settles, we decide to meet at the InOrbit Barista in Malad that very evening for small talk.

At the last table, in the narrow rectangle of the coffee chain branch, a demure, almost anorexic figure is seated, garbed in a grey t-shirt and brown cargo pants. "So when did you start out with the art world?" Baptist is not a permanent fixture at openings, and one has never really seen him. "Well, after my graduation in graphic art from Raheja School of Arts (he failed to enter JJ School of Arts despite repeated attempts), I moved to advertising. But somewhere along the line, I realised that I wanted to become a full-time artist. Being an art director is not really being an artist. So I pursued my Master's at Birmingham."

It is here that Baptist Coelho began researching "air as a medium" to create installation art. "I began researching all possibilities of air. Aeroplanes, the air we breathe, any metaphor I could find." A series of paper rockets are what he considers his favourite work from this series. "How come you didn't return to advertising." "There was no going back. During a music video I did recently, I saw an advertising colleague talking to the videographer. Advertising language and its approach to the visual medium is so hackneyed, it grosses me out. No,

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## BEHIND THE LENS

Sangeeta Datta is on a roll. The former academic and author of a highly acclaimed biography of Shyam Benegal has turned associate director on the screen adaptation of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*.

Sangeeta, who has previously been associate director on *Chakka Bai* and *The Last Lear*, tells me that this is her first involvement with a British unit on an international film and her duties included leading an international team for the India schedule, casting Kolkata based actors and employing Indian crew.



## ROMANCING LONDON

Monika Kapil Mohita, the director of the Nehru Centre, organised the official launch of Dev Anand's autobiography *Romancing with Life* with a select gathering of 250 guests at the Mayfair centre. Among those present to pay respects to the evergreen screen legend were Lord Navnit Dholakia, deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords, Lord Karan Bishnoia of Cobra Beer and 'Curry King' Sir G K Noon. G P Hinduja couldn't resist a plug for the House of Hinduja as he reminded guests that "we were pioneers to take Indian movies with English subtitles to global theatres". But it was left to Special Guest Jaya



## POP SHAADI

When-Bangladeshi pop star Alamin Khansekar of the pop group Chime married 20 years ago he couldn't afford a lavish wedding but now he has achieved his most cherished dream and when he and his wife Man Mun Begum decided to renew their vows last week, it was 2,000 ft above ground as the couple and their family and friends boarded a plane to re-enact a scene from their favourite Hindi film *Love Story*. Caterer Manik Miah and his brothers were entrusted with providing the in-flight starters for 50 guests and

## LIGHT UP!

It has been a long hot Indian summer for Mayor Ken Livingstone as his India Now season celebrating the special relationship between India and London draws to a close. On October 28 the last event of the season - Diwali in Trafalgar Square will be held with a host of exciting events which could make the Indian in India green with envy. Then there are Mayoral elections around the corner and the cynics insist that this is a ploy to get the Indian



LONDON DIARY