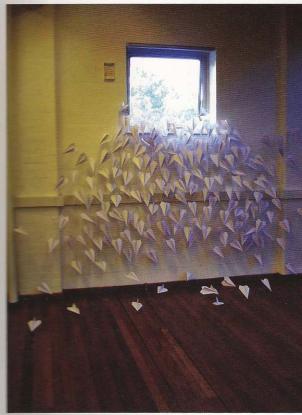Baptist Coelho. *Re(wind)*. Installation. 2006.

Baptist Coelho. *On the Edge*. Video Installation. 2006.

Season Three

Zehra Jumabhoy provides the inside scoop on ART *India's* Promising Artist Award 2007.

Chinmoy Pramanick. Installation shot of *Germs*. 2007.

ON OCTOBER 18TH 2007, A JURY MET TO DECIDE WHICH LUCKY youngster would be given the ART *India* - IHC Promising Artist Award 2007. For the first time in the history of the three-year-old Award, it was split between two winners: Mumbai-based Baptist Coelho and Baroda-based Chinmoy Pramanick shared the 3 lakhs prize money.

The Promising Artist Award is meant to help talented Indian artists, below the age of 40, to navigate the tricky waters of the art world. Unlike the awards given away by commercial galleries, ART *India's* initiative comes with no strings attached. The Award is organised in collaboration with the Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, and winners are given a non-commercial solo show at this venue. Our jury members, who helped shortlist and select winners out of the 250 hopefuls from all over the country, were Gulammohammed Sheikh, Shireen Gandhy, Baiju Parthan, Namita Saraf, Urmila Kanoria, Alka Pande, Raj Liberhan, Sangita Jindal, and Abhay Sardesai.

Coelho's kinetic installations (there were also video installations)

used the tussle between light and shadowy forms, to address personal themes. In one video clip, paper constructions were arranged close to a window, their flying shapes suggesting the ephemeral nature of reality. Pramanick's offerings to the jury consisted of sculpture-installations (think big brass sculptures of men and small metal pieces, resembling pills, popping over wooden tables), most of which dealt with the ills of modern society.

This time, the jury meet was an especially fraught affair – with the jury divided as to which of the two should win. In Coelho's favour, was the fact that he seemed to be trying to carve out a niche for himself using New Media. Pramanick, however, was a hot favourite because of his use of sculpture to develop a consistent thematic.

However, some jury members felt that since Pramanick had already had a solo show, *Germs*, at GALLERYSKE in August 2007, prior to the Award (and could boast of a less than flattering review in ART *India* for it), he was already 'established' enough not to need the leg

up the art-world ladder that ART *India's* Award hopes to provide.

Squabbles and nail-biting tension for the two winners aside, the jury's feisty debaters threw up some interesting questions. What does it mean to choose a Promising Artist? Does the term denote someone who has already done good work, or does it refer to someone who has the potential – given adequate funding – to do that? And does the fledgling artist get brownie points for using unconventional media (at least, unconventional by the standards of contemporary Indian art)? For

instance, some members of the jury tended to favour artists experimenting with video installations and large-scale sculptures. Is the Award – despite its objective distance from the machinations of the art-market – just as seduced by the 'big-is-beautiful-and-better-for-Biennales' aesthetic that is the motivating force behind many of the selections that commercial galleries make? Or is it just that the definition of contemporary art increasingly rules out pretty Photo-realistic paintings that made up the majority of the entries that artists from non-metropolitan spaces sent in as their 'best works'?

Despite such brow-creasing ruminatio... we at ART *India* think we have much celebrate in the performance of our pa... awardees. George Martin walked away wi... the prize in 2005 and has chalked up a fe... solos to his name since then. He also got t... Kashi Art Award later that year. In 2006, Sh... Kumar Verma won the prize and his work ha... been well-received. It remains to be seen ... and, of course, written about – wha... Pramanick and Coelho do with their portio... of the pie.