

Hot stuff

The art fraternity picks is latest star

ANJULY MATHAI

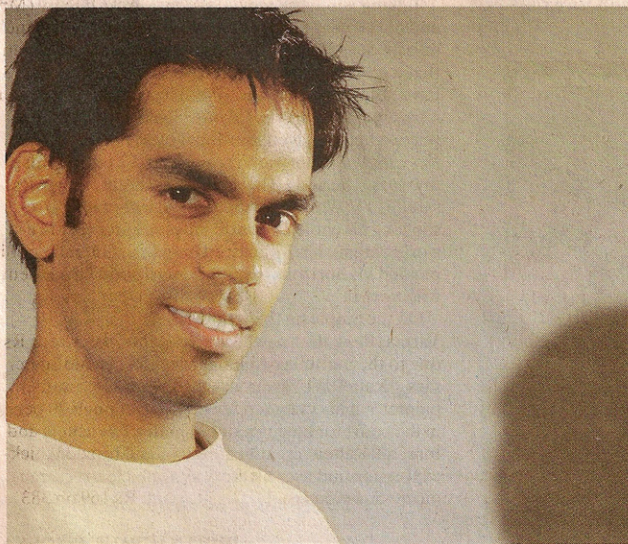
Baptist Coelho is a veritable Jack of all Arts. Through various mediums such as video, photography, acquired and found objects, he unravels the narratives of the Siachen soldiers who, he feels, before donning the mantle of superheroes were normal human beings with vulnerabilities and emotions. His work, along with that of Chinmoy Pramanick, will be displayed at the Most Promising Artist Award Show at the Visual Arts Gallery in New Delhi from June 6 to June 13. "I want to focus on soldiers, not as machines of war, but as men dealing with the day to day complexities of war," says the 30-year-old, Mumbai-based artist. At the same time, Coelho does not begrudge them the accolades they receive for the kind of lives they're leading at the Siachen. "They're living at temperature of below -60 degrees Celsius. It takes them a huge effort just to drink a glass of water."

The saga of a soldier's life is brought alive through Coelho's art. For example, in the video, *If it would only end*, he reveals the past 25 years of this war through the

goods that the soldiers have consumed and how these commodities have consumed them. In the digital print, *I'm not sure if I will return*, he brings to the fore a soldier's perennial fear of dying without seeing his family again. "I wanted to experience what the soldiers were going through. That's why I went to Ladakh. Although civilians weren't allowed beyond a point, I got the feel of the terrain. I got the stories of the soldiers through artifacts, opinions and anecdotes of those who had actually been up there."

Coelho spins stories through his art. In all his works, whether it is a gender-based theme or a discourse on the resources of public spaces, Coelho wants viewers not just to view but to experience his art. "Even for a two-dimensional medium such as a digital print, I want the viewers to imagine what might have happened before and after the moment when the visual image was captured," he says.

Even if they can't physically walk into the frame, I want them to walk in with their thoughts."Who ever said that a picture can tell a thousand words might have been specifically talking about Coelho's art.



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