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COIMBATORE · MONDAY, MARCH 7, 2011

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## Wings of fire

**ART** A paper plane becomes the manifestation of dreams and goals of children, when artist Baptist Coelho works with them. NITHYA SIVASHANKAR speaks to the artist who has made it his business to encourage children to chase their dreams

make paper planes. These simple, hand-made objects define the experience of my childhood," he says. Coel-ho's experience with childhood continues as he teaches children to make paper planes and encourages them to chase their dreams.

Says the artist, "I had explored the fundamental element of air in one of my installations, 'RE(WIND)' in 2006. contemporary art." Baptist initially felt that the idea of incorporating air in art was an "exaggerated, impractical aim." But, he says that he understands more about his art, only after he is done working with it. "After I finished RE(WIND). I felt that it showed me more directions. I wanted to share the process of creating art and the experience of making paper planes with children."

Baptist works only with pre-teens, especially those between 10 and 12 years of age. On asking him why this narrow frame, he says, "When I wanted to interact with kids for the first time, in 2008, I spoke to an art teacher from a school. She scanned the project and suggested that 10-12 year-old children would be the right target. These children have some idea of what they would like to become when they grow up. At the same time, they don't have a fixed idea either."

Ecole Mondiale World School, Mumbai, was where Baptist first held this project. On receiving a good re-

nine to five kind of a person sponse from the children there, he would definitely be jealous of this went on to work with 35 children from man's job profile. He makes pa- five NGOs in Mumbai. "I began collabper planes for a living! Meet Bap- orating with a lot of schools in India, tist Coelho, a young artist from after that. It became an effective tool Mumbai, and the man behind the 'Paper Airplane Project'. He is smitten visualize their dreams," says the artist, with flight. "As a child, I never played who has taken this project to places with factory-made toys. I used to like South Korea, Switzerland and

The Paper Airplane Project is a very simple one. Baptist explains it. "First, the children are taught to make airplanes. This is followed by an interaction with parents. The children are asked to write what they want to be when they grow up on three separate paper planes and asked to bring two objects related to their dreams. They I had used air as a medium to create are taught to create art work with one plane and one of the objects." The second plane and object are handed over to Baptist.

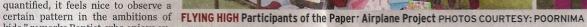
After exhibiting their art works, the children gather around to fly their third plane. Each child picks up one plane after it lands and pastes it on the 'Tower of Dreams', which may be a

pillar or a wall," says Baptist.

Baptist fondly recollects the time spent with the children in Leh, Ladakh. "These children from the mountain ranges have an interesting perspective of life," he says. He finds every school in every region, very interesting. "Even though the project is not a survey or an experiment to be quantified, it feels nice to observe a kids," remarks Baptist, who enjoys experiencing a place, through a child's

"In Ladakh, a lot of kids wanted to be tour guides or adventure sports persons. In South Korea, they wanted to be baseball stars! I did not know bling experience." baseball was popular there. A kid from





Coimbatore wanted to be a music director, because his dad made music. Two boys from the outskirts of Bangalore gave me saplings, because they wanted to be farmers. It was a hum-

On working with physically chal-

lenged children in Bangalore, he says, took more time, yes, but they were "It was a nervous experience for me, determined enough to go ahead and initially. I was wondering if these chil- complete the project. Some hearingdren would be able to experience the impaired kids understood the project process fully, like the others. But, I through sign language," adds Baptist, found out that these kids are blessed who did not tweak the project even a would challenge the ideal of why I with even more feelings for art." "They bit, to suit the needs of these children. collect them."

One wonders what he intends on doing with those planes and objects that have been given to him. Baptist answers,"I have not thought about it yet. I am waiting for a thought that



