



Living art

Goan origin artist Baptist Coelho has been making waves all over the country with his interesting art works. A video compilation of his works entitled 'under my skin...under your skin' was recently screened in Panaji

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One of the striking aspects of Baptist Coelho's works is that they seek to go beneath the surface of our seemingly simple day to day interactions and experiences with the world, and discover often over looked and thought provoking meaning in them. Be it exploring the social disparities that exist with regard to what is feminine or masculine, what is correct behaviour or the ruining of the environment, Coelho takes an unconventional route in looking deeper into these themes, and portrays his interpretations through different mediums like photography, performance, sound, installations, videos etc.

Indeed, his first trysts with using these different media together to tell his stories began back in college in 2006 while he was pursuing his masters at the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, UK.

"I was working on air as a medium

and found that I couldn't translate all the research material that I had into two dimensional art i.e. graphic designing. So I began to look at other mediums like sculpture, performance and videos to express my works," says Coelho, adding, "Although I was aware of these mediums previously, using them all together was an exciting discovery for me and the university was very encouraging."

Ever since then, this young Mumbai-based artist has been making people pause and reflect on life's various intricacies with his various projects which have been exhibited all over India and abroad. Some of his solo exhibitions include Project 88, Mumbai-India (2015); Pump House Gallery, London-UK (2012); Grand Palais, Bern-Switzerland (2009) and BIAD, UK (2006). He was also awarded the 'Façade Video Award' (2011) by Art Today Association, Plovdiv-Bulgaria; 'Promising Artist Award' (2007) by Art India and India Habitat Centre, Delhi-India and 'Johnson Prize Fund'

(2006) by BIAD, UK.

And Coelho truly takes being involved with his art to a new level, often assuming a performative role in them like in 'What have I done to you' in 2011 where dressed in the complete attire of a British soldier, he washed and wiped the feet of all the participants who entered the Pump House Gallery in Battersea Park, London in complete silence. In his other noted Siachen Glacier project 'Beneath it all...I am human' 2009, Coelho sought to highlight the tough bitter cold conditions in which these soldiers fight daily. "The Siachen project shows how the body acts when confronted with cold, something that I myself have a lot of problem adapting to. It also made me think about a lot of things like what it is to be brave? Do you need to be in the army to be brave? How much bravery is man enough?" reveals Coelho.

An assemblage of his works produced between 2006 and 2011 has now been put together in a video collection entitled "under your skin... under my skin" and is curated by Goa-based art historian Lina Vincent Sunish. "I have been working with Lina on many things and putting these works together has been something we have been thinking for a while now. Some of the videos in this collection are actually a part of more extensive

installations and at first I wasn't very comfortable with stripping away from these. But what came together was very interesting and filled with intricate meaning," says Coelho. "The use of skin has been a major part of my work. Also just as the body has many layers of skin, there is a lot of layering that happens in these videos which are filled with a lot of inner meaning. So skin has been used both literally and metaphorically."

The video collection has already been screened in many places like Venice, South Africa, Oslo, etc and Coelho states that observing people's reactions to it has been very interesting. Presently the 2015-16 Leverhulme Artist-in-Residence at the Department of War Studies, King's College London, Coelho is also set to give a solo exhibition on Ladakh at the Goethe-Zentrum in Hyderabad next month.

Apart from this, Coelho also hopes to return to his Goan roots someday. "My dad comes from the village of Merces while my mum is from Chandor. However, I only visited Goa after I completed standard 10 and have still not had a chance to visit these two places. But I do want to come live in Goa sometime in the future and find out the origin behind my surname," he says, adding, "I think knowing the past is important as it plays an important role in forming the future."