

Mumbai artist set to take city on a journey to Siachen

Baptist
Coelho

Deepu.Joseph@timesgroup.com

Setting up an art installation for his solo show in Hyderabad, Baptist Coelho cuts a busy figure, like a symphony instructor assembling his orchestra. On his third visit to the city, Baptist says that this show at Goethe-Zentrum will focus on the condition of soldiers posted at the Siachen glacier — world's highest battle front. "I'm using materials, fabrics, audio-video clips that one would associate with soldiers and battle stations in Siachen. It opens up a window into understanding how soldiers over there are able to stay sane and sustain themselves in such a unforgiving system and terrain," says the Mumbai-based artist.

It took years of research and travel to

frontier regions to eventually integrate the elements of touch, sight and sound into this complex topic. "I had travelled to a place called Panamik in Ladakh for my research of the terrain, and to experience the area. It is the furthest one can go as a civilian," says Baptist, who also met a mountaineer — Harish Kapadia who knew a great deal about the glacier, while he understood how life would be from

those who had been posted there. "They told me about the food, the materials that they wore, the sleeping bags and tents."

The 38-year-old hopes that the exhibition will give room for people to interpret and think about the soldiers and the idea of sacrifice, and at what cost. "My art is not on behalf of the soldiers, rather it is my interpretation. The sacrifices they have to make is unparalleled. I'm even using large size award ribbons of soldiers in the exhibition — it's my take on bravery awards given to soldiers; but at what cost?"

Baptist, however, says that he still hasn't figured out Hyderabad. "All of my visits to Hyderabad have been touch and go. This time around, though I am on a mission to understand this city," he says.