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Exhibition showcasing the Siachen struggle in Delhi

Baptist Coelho's ongoing exhibition in Sonipat, titled *Body Automation*, offers a comprehensive view of the living conditions in the difficult terrain.



Published: 28th September 2019 08:16 AM | Last Updated: 28th September 2019 08:16 AM

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Express News Service

The instrumental version of the National Anthem, composed by AR Rahman which features Indian soldiers at Siachen Glacier, surely leaves the viewers with goosebumps.

But it is still a minute introduction to life at the highest battlefield of the world, where soldiers are stationed as high as 22,000ft.

Baptist Coelho's ongoing exhibition in Sonipat, titled *Body Automation*, offers a comprehensive view of the living conditions in the difficult terrain.

With photographs, installations, videos and mixed media works, the show brings in first-hand accounts of soldiers and porters living in Siachen.

The artist performance brings us face-to-face with the experiences of Indian soldiers, on their food habits, sent to Europe during World War 1.

In Siachen, Captain Sachin Bali had lost a part of his fingers and toes to the frostbite during a 16-hour rescue operation. Coelho, who interviewed him for the research, says, "Sachin told me about his urge to see colours in the white stretch of land and how he used to look at the colourful packaging of any product to fulfil this urge."



Artworks by (inset) artist Baptist Coelho, (Above) I long to see some colour and (left) Attempts to Contain

After the interaction, Coelho researched the hallucinating effects of looking at the snow-covered field for a long time.

"I came up with, I long to see some colour, an installation that features a rucksack filled with photo frames without a picture. I wanted to depict the idea that how we start imagining a picture, once we see a blank frame. Maybe something similar happens to people living in Siachen as they look at the white landscape around them."

It was his artwork created in 2007, titled 537 featuring 537 white gauge bandages, that made him research his subject in a detailed manner. According to writer Davide Allison, "The number of bandages add up to a total length of one mile and represent the Siachen Glacier, which is 47 miles long."

In Coelho's opinion, this one artwork was not sufficient to bring fore the entire narrative of the land." The artist hence decided to work with the objects that have been marked their presence on the land.

A photograph, titled Tsering Puntsog #1, is named after a porter who shared his struggles with the artist. It showcases Puntsog's house, depicting sacks of flour attached with the equipment the Ladakhi porters carry on their back.

The artist also had his fair share of challenges while researching in the region. He says, "I often encounter questions like, 'Why are you here?' 'Where are you staying?' I always carry a portfolio of my artworks, to prove the people that I am an artist."

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