



Urbanscape

Baptista Coelho, a Mumbai based artist creates installations reflecting built-up space and its utilisation

Installation as Art

Cities by definition are large urban settlements which manage the utilisation of built-up space and contend with the social issues concerning its diverse inhabitants. A metropolis develops complex systems for utilities: land usage, housing, transportation and various other infrastructures. As the density of a space increases so does the demand for greater efficiencies. The cost of this 'progress', to its inhabitants,

is not often measured and the very nature of how we coexist is challenged.

A series of works, from various locations throughout India and around the world, have been developed as part of the CitySpace project by Baptista Coelho, a young Indian artist and designer whose works are creating a buzz across the world today.



Baptista Coelho's projects frequently merge personal research with collaborations from various cultures, geographies and histories. He incorporates various media such as installation, video, sound, photography, performance and found objects. Coelho received his Masters of Arts from Birmingham Institute of Art & Design - BIAD, UK (2006).

He was awarded the Sovereign Asian Art Prize, Hong Kong (2016); Façade Video Award, Bulgaria (2011); Promising Artist Award, India (2007) and Johnson Prize Fund, UK (2006). Solo exhibitions include Goethe-Zentrum, Hyderabad (2015); Project 88, Mumbai (2015, 2009); Ladakh Arts and Media Organization, Leh (2015); Pump House Gallery, London (2012); Grand Palais, Bern (2009); Visual Arts Gallery, Delhi (2009) and BIAD, UK (2006). His works have been exhibited at Somerset House, London (2016); Arab-Jewish Culture Center, Haifa (2015); Jönköpings Läns Museum, Sweden (2013); MAXXI, Rome (2011); Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg (2010); Gwangju Museum of Art, South Korea (2010); amongst others. Baptista has also participated in various artist residencies; conducted workshops, artist talks and panel discussions across Asia, Europe, UAE and South Africa. He lives and works in Mumbai.

Photo Courtesy: Department of War Studies, King's College London



His installation projects uncover stories connected to geography, history, community, or an individual persona. His practice resonates with themes such as random thought, emotional states and corporeality that attempt to reveal the human condition through observation and collaboration. Through many of his works he explores the past and present state of conflict, war and its aftermath. Coelho's multi-disciplinary expressions are filtered from vast tracts of research and oral history which he garners from conversations in diverse parts of the world. His multi-disciplinary projects explore human experiences and responses to urban environments; highlighting what defines the inhabitants and their cities.

Of the many such installations that he created, the ones in Mumbai and Leh come across as representative of two extreme ends of urban environment. The project series, *Your Dream Home*, involved inhabitants from diverse locations around the world who have written





notes and created drawings describing their vision of an ideal home. These handmade aspirations have been gathered from a varied population spanning across countries, cities, culture, age, gender, economic status, educational background and beliefs.

The research material which is compiled locally prompts several queries pertaining to the human condition and reflects on human coexistence in the city environment.

'Your Dream Home' is a work-in-progress which continues to explore the bricks and mortar of people's dreams and aspirations. The contributions of drawings and notes by local inhabitants generate a dialogue and form the impetus for each unique series in this project.

These multidisciplinary, location-specific, artworks provide unique viewpoints and describe the relationships and incongruities that exist between one's dreams and the reality of the architectural spaces that they actually inhabit. The project was initiated in 2008 and is now on travelling display at various art centres globally.

YOUR DREAM HOME - OLD TOWN, LEH, LADAKH

This project was realised during Coelho's Artist-in-Residence program at Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO) in Leh, India.

It is a site-specific installation created with talu (willow), jute and paper. The installation involved inhabitants from the Old Town Leh in Ladakh who wrote notes and created drawings on paper describing their vision of an ideal home.

These handmade aspirations were folded and installed between the wooden slats of willow (talun in Ladakhi language). The taluns were bound together by jute and suspended like scrolls from a traditional Ladakhi ceiling. It is constructed of a labyrinth of scrolls installed on the lower floor of the two-storey library in the LAMO Centre (Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation).

The restored complex, on which the LAMO Centre is located, comprised of two historical houses situated below the 17th century palace of King Sengge Namgyal. The origins of the houses also date back to the same period.

The viewer is encouraged to open the dream home notes and contribute to the installation by inscribing their own vision of a dream home. The paper notes, that need to be opened to discover the dream home descriptions, are wedged between willow sticks and relate to the books of the library in which the work is installed.

Through this anthology, a narrative of the people of Old Town Leh is revealed; reflecting on their lives through the space they inhabit. No matter how inconsequential dreams may appear to be, they still influence and motivate us. This is also the language through which traditional architecture and its reactions to space speak to the milieu.

Your Dream Home - Old Town Leh, 2011-13

Site-specific installation with talu (willow), jute and paper

Installation dimensions: variable



YOUR DREAM HOME - MUMBAI

The city of Mumbai comprises of approximately sixty-five square kilometres and is considered to be one of the most populous cities in the world; where 13.5 million people coexist.

The installation examines the history and expansion of the city in relationship to the aspirations of its inhabitants.

Two hundred and fifty-nine handwritten notes and drawings, which have been set into desktop frames, describe the dream homes of a wide spectrum of the populace. Each unique note portrays the life of an individual and reflects on a different reality. Seven concrete columns, which signify the former islands of Bombay, form the base of these frames and stand as a testament of hope for a better life.

Your Dream Home - Bombay (2008-10)

Installation with concrete blocks, newsprint, glass, wood and paper

Approximate installation dimensions: L 24 X B 12 X H 5 feet

Mumbai's booming real-estate industry has taken on a life of its own; where sustainable living space has been taken over by rampant and unplanned construction. As a metaphor to this phenomenon, a sea of approximately three thousand paper boats have been spread randomly onto the floor and surround the concrete columns.

These fragile boats constructed from newspaper contain real-estate advertisements by property developers and lifestyle features. The newsprint paper boats contrast sharply with each tower of handwritten

dreams and foretell another story where developers lure consumers into the buying of another dream, motivated by profit and financial gain. All these varied aspirations have resulted into a chaotic city which has expanded beyond its infrastructure. A question remains: do these dreams and aspirations threaten the sustainability of the city? ▲

