



Calcutta-based artist Praneet Soi's installations are made with coir, using the skills of the artisans from a coir factory in Alappuzha

GIVING A NEW MEANING TO COIR

Princy Alexander

The first installation that meets your eye at the Pepper House in Fort Kochi is that of a woman falling through thin air. The image is a reproduction of the photographs and footages of victims falling from the exploding twin towers in New York. In order to replicate this image, artist Praneet Soi asked his wife, Argentine-born Irene Kopelman, to model for him (pose as the falling victim) so that he could replicate the feel and emotion of the incident, but in a style entirely his own.

The works, all five of them which have been put up at the

lawn of the Pepper House, one of the venues of the Kochi Muziris Biennale, are made up of coir, the product from an industry that is dying a slow death in Kerala.

The installations are red and black in colour and have been made using the skills of the artisans from a coir factory in Alappuzha.

"When I arrived in Kerala, a few months prior to the Biennale, I was unsure how to convert my drawings into an installation. When I learnt about the relevance of coir in Kerala, I decided to head to the coir factories here. I was amazed by the industriousness of the workers. But what made me sad was how underutilized they were," said

the Calcutta-based artist. It was at the corner of the factory, that he met some workers who were into the business of patterning coir. "They seemed completely out of work. For them, the coir industry had given them means for livelihood. However, owing to the heavy demand for print works, these artisans were almost out of work. I told them about my idea and how I wanted my sketches to be made into installations made up of coir. They were a bit apprehensive because they were used to making floral designs and had never patterned complicated images of people before. However, the result was incredible," says the artist.

For his installation, tufted coir mats dyed in red and black

were made. The patterns were created using traditional machinery. "The talent in the industry is very good which is why I'm planning to associate with them in the future as well," says Praneet.

Praneet's works are also quite abstract, and have used the anamorphosis mechanism, which is a distorted image that appears normal when viewed from one point.

The artist, who is based in Amsterdam with his wife, is constantly associated with workers from small scale industries. He works with the traditional artisans in Kashmir too. "I believe an artist and an artisan have so much to contribute to each other," he adds.

