

THE HINDU

The dolls speak

Artiste Francoise Bosteels uses dolls as tools of social awareness

SHIVANI AND PAAVANI
PEGATRAJU

Everyone loves dolls. And when they are dolls that represent scenes from the country made by someone from outside India, they are extra special. A collection of dolls made by artiste Francoise Bosteels was exhibited at Jain University recently. A former healthcare worker hailing from Belgium, Francoise makes dolls that depict various aspects of village life in India to spread social awareness. She has also published two books with pictures of the dolls accompanied by poems.

"Being exposed to rural life in India when I moved here from Belgium 42 years ago, I was captivated by its sim-

licity and beauty and decided to depict it through doll-making, which grew into a passionate hobby. I want to portray things that touch the heart and bring tears to the eyes." By celebrating everyday life, she wishes to depict aspects of everyday life that need attention. Francoise explains: "Using these dolls, I want to highlight pressing issues of today's world such as domestic violence, gender equality, child labour, caste and sexual abuse as well as how the everyday lives of men and women in India is limited by gender, class and caste. My aim is to raise awareness regarding what society is and what it ought to be."

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TOY STORY
Telling
tales from
real life



Evoking emotions

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Made of flannel cloth, wood, wire and wool, each doll requires around 11 to 13 hours of work.

"I work alone, sometimes I work through the night making these dolls," she says. When asked whether the

dolls are for sale, she says: "They are only for exhibition purposes as art pieces and not for sale. I want people to question and reflect on social issues when they see the dolls, and to share their stories, experiences, and childhood memories."

One interesting aspect that intrigued most spectators was the lack of facial features

on the dolls. In response to this, Francoise says: "It was a spontaneous decision. I wanted to focus more on the themes and background of the dolls to convey strong social messages, rather than on the facial features. Apart from that, I think body language talks to you more than facial expressions at times. The dolls evoke different emotions in people precisely because there are no facial expressions - this allows for freedom in interpreting the art."

Sridevi Santosh, the head of the English Department at Jain University, adds: "These dolls are almost life-like and speak louder than words. The excitement at the exhibition was two-way - from students demonstrating and explaining about the dolls, to children watching the exhibits and learning from them. Although we often conceptualise caste, gender and inequality in classrooms, this depiction of these concepts was a very good learning experience for the kids."

MAKING IMPRESSIONS
Francoise Bosteels