Sketching IIC’s journey

The Indian Cartoon Gallery in the city celebrates eight years of clever laughs

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While the Indian Institute of Cartoonists (IIC), formed in 2001, completed its 10th year, the Indian Cartoon Gallery in the city, started in August 2007, celebrates its eighth birthday with 115 National and International exhibitions to its credit. Although the art of cartooning came to India as a British import, the word “cartoon” is an Italian derivative, which means “large paper.”

The art is said to have evolved over the last century in India and gradually filtered into newspapers and magazines. Over the years, the messages in the small monochromatic sketches caught the eye of not just commoners but also dictators, heads of state and monarchs, who observed and relished the sarcasm and humour artistically woven together. Thus began cartooning in India, tickling the funny bone, moulding public opinion, drawing attention to political or social developments or the wit of cartoonists voicing people’s follies.

Says V.G. Narendra, Managing Trustee, IIC, “For a long time, despite cartoons gaining popularity, there was no national level organization to represent these artists. A body to recognise and showcase their talent was necessary for the art to flourish. Thus was born the Bengaluru-based IIC.”

In 2001, IIC, in its inaugural valedictory function, felicitated leading cartoonists of India with Lifetime Achievement Awards to Mario de Miranda, S.K. Nadig, S.D. Phadnis, Pran, Gopaul, Biju and Yesudas amongst others. Soon it was recognized by international galleries too, which started taking part in IIC proceedings year after year.

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Later Ashok Kheny, M.D. of NICE Corridor, an admirer of cartoons, helped the institute get a 5,000 sq ft of cartoon gallery space for exhibitions, library and conference hall where it is presently working from.

Exhibitions and workshops

“Live workshops for budding cartoonists to see to it that the art is preserved for posterity,” says Narendra.

“In three years we have had nearly 500 students, who have been trained in our workshops,” he states.

International cartoon contests are also arranged, and IIC also constituted the Maya Kannath Memorial Awards Competition which brings in entries from China, Russia, U.S. and European countries too.

Offering a cash prize of a lakh, it has become India’s popular organised contest for leading cartoonists, says Narendra.

Besides this, it has famous cartoonists such as Mario de Miranda, R.K. Laxman and Narinder as its mentors.

That is not all, since 2006 the leading exhibitors have been Madan Bapu, T. Venkat Rao, Vasant Saravate, Yesudas, Thomas and Prabakar Rao Buil.

It is 15 years since the then Union Minister of Culture and Tourism Ananth Kumar promised the IIC that the Ministry of Culture would accommodate the Institute in the National Gallery of Modern Art.

Later with the Institute’s Honorary Chairman, Ashok Kheny’s offer, he has been functioning off M.G. Road. But Narendra exhorts that the Government instead allocates them 10,000 sq ft so that “we have a House of Cartoonists,” with conference halls, library and residential facilities built in with a special picture hall for screening cartoon films for children.

The Institute is seeking support for garnering funds for taking across the art in many ways.

On a different note

“Recorded history according to IIC says the father of Indian cartooning was K. Shankar Pillai, just as the legendary David Low of World Cartooning.

“Today the archives of the IIC are rich with nearly 15 lakh cartoon exhibits including caricatures, doodles, political and social cartoons.

“Unpublished doodles of R.K. Laxman, Mario de Miranda’s sketches of Karnataka and 500 titles of books are part of the Institute’s Heritage collection.

“The Institute conducts lecture demonstrations by leading cartoonists while attracting cartoonists from experts around the world as U.S., U.S.S.R., China, and European countries.

Pointing people’s follies to making digs at politicians PHOTO: BHAGYA PRakash