



Reaching for the sky, with every brushstroke

JHINUK MAZUMDAR

Calcutta: The mind reaches for the sky, but the body is bound to a wheelchair, said an artist. After living with cerebral palsy for decades, Putul Biswas found a way to express that feeling through her work — a collage showing a solitary wheelchair beneath a towering coconut tree, almost touching the sky.

The artwork was sold within the first hour of the exhibition My Voice Through Art, which celebrates the creativity and self-expression of persons with disabilities.

Biswas, 55, who has complex communication needs, explained the black-and-white-and-grey collage: "The soul wants to touch the sky,

but the body is bound to the wheelchair."

The advocate for disability rights said the work also took her back to her childhood, when she first experimented with colours.

The exhibition at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, inaugurated on Thursday, will remain open from 11am to 6pm on Friday and Saturday. It is a collaboration between the Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy (IICP), INUTI (Insight) Art Gallery, and the department of special education at the University of Stockholm.

"The most important objective is to make a statement that art is for all. You don't have to be seen as an artist with disability; ultimately, you should be seen as an

artist," said IICP vice-chairperson Reena Sen.

The project began in March 2023 and brought together five artists from IICP and four from INUTI.

Four IICP artists — Biswas, Deep Dolui, Mampi Singh and Barsha Bhattacharya — have cerebral palsy, while Aniket Mukherjee has autism. Bhattacharya passed away recently.

The four artists from INUTI are neurodivergent.

The collaboration with Stockholm took place through a series of online workshops, where participants exchanged ideas, built friendships and challenged perceptions.

The artworks explore diverse themes — from fairytales and landscapes to an

inclusive theme park and the city of Calcutta.

"Your identity as a person with disability is extremely valuable, and it can shape your art and experiences, but it should not define every description used for you," Sen said.

For decades, IICP has worked towards ensuring every individual's right to self-expression, dignity and respect. "Whether it is a crutch, wheelchair or difficulty in speech, these should not become boulders in your way," Sen said.

The exhibition was inaugurated by Swami Tatwasarananda, secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Swami Sumanasananda, who oversees its museum; Anjumit Nobis, honorary consul

for Sweden; Rakhi Sarkar, chairperson of IICP; and artists Biswas and Mukherjee.

"This exhibition is not merely a display of artworks. It is a celebration of creativity, resilience and self-expression," Sarkar said, adding that the gathering reflected a commitment to inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities.

Mukherjee's paintings offer a glimpse into his thoughts. In one black pen sketch featuring multiple eyes, he depicts what he calls the "evil eye of society".

In another, a little girl looks out of a window as butterflies enter her room. "When I sat to draw this, I was transported to the land of fairytales," he said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 ►

Artworks on display at the My Voice Through Art exhibition at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture. Pictures by Sanat Kr Sinha