

1. Bristle Dolls

Artist Workshop Text

Bristle doll maker Bai Dacheng has been designated a master artist of Chinese intangible culture and is renowned for his Peking Opera-based figures. Fifty years ago, when Bai was an airplane-maintenance student at the university, he learned to make the dolls from another artist. As with many other folk artists, Bai's production process is a family affair. As he became flooded with orders in the 1980s, his wife and son began to help him assemble and paint the dolls. Bai is now 70 years old and, according to his son, is so talented that his bristle dolls are considered art. Bai sells his work on Golden Street in Beijing, near the Chinese Academy of Fine Arts.

Artist at Work Text

Bristle dolls have truncated clay cores. Bai glues boar bristles onto their wide bottoms. While the figures were originally clothed in paper, they are now clothed in silk. The silk clothing is backed by rice paper that Bai makes himself, and it is attached to the dolls with flour paste. The dolls made by Bai's teacher were made of paper and were also much smaller.

Cultural Heritage Text

Bristle dolls are modeled after Peking Opera. Dolls are arranged on a metal plate and "dance" when the plate is struck. When struck, the plate resonates, sounding much like Peking Opera music. When creating the dolls, Bai takes care to glue to the bristles at a slight angle in the direction he wants the dolls to move. This combination of movement and sound provides a small-scale replica of Peking Opera.

Peking Operas^[David Bow1] themselves are based on the thousands of years of Chinese history. A knowledge of Chinese history is therefore essential when creating the bristle dolls. Bai has studied over 200 years of Peking Opera History to create his dolls, which have opera-based shadow puppet predecessors. Bristle dolls originally developed as toys, but were adapted as a form of entertainment