

An exhibition on French comics

Ever wondered how the world famous Asterix and Tintin comic characters came to be? A visit to the Voluntary Artists' Studio of Thimphu exhibition hall will give you a clue.

The studio is hosting the first on-going comics exhibition in the country - *A History of Comics in France (La BD)* - from August 8 to 21 which depicts the involvement stages of a wide range of French comics over the centuries.

"The exhibition gives insight into

the cultures of the European countries through these comics," said Sonia V. Josserand-Mercier, a French instructor with the Department of Tourism in Thimphu who initiated the exhibition with support from UNICEF. The material for the exhibition was donated by a French institute in Nepal.

According to Sonia V. Josserand-Mercier, comics were popular drawings picturing pious scenes of tales or legends as early as 1840s. In the early 1900s,

Charlot - a famous French comic character was very popular among the Europeans which later inspired Charlie Chaplin films. With the advent of Tintin and Asterix in 1960s, the comics acquired a new level of quality with more realistic styles.

She said the general term 'comic' is not used in France and other European countries. Instead, they call it '*La BD*' which stands for *La Bande Dessinee* in French, meaning 'drawn strips'. The American term for 'comics' usually implies either super-heroes (like Batman, Superman,) or humour (like MAD, Archie, etc), she said. But the culture of comics in France, Belgium and other European countries where French is officially used is larger and commands lot of respect like any other literary.

Besides the French comics, the exhibition has a 'Bhutanese BD' corner with some collection of Bhutanese comic strips.

The exhibition is also organising a drawing competition for 14 years and above in three frame comic strips and in one page comic story.

Sonia V. Josserand-Mercier said that the sole objective of the exhibition was to promote French language in Bhutan.

By Karma Choden

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