



Linda Kato, RSCJ, Ph.D.

Sister Linda Kato is a member of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, an international order of Catholic nuns with a mission of human development and social justice. She began her career teaching in middle and high schools and engaged in activism for racial equity, peace, and labor organizing in the US and overseas. After earning her Ph.D. in political economy, she spent decades working as a corporate researcher (e.g., MDRC, Goodwill Industries International), designing and evaluating employment and social service programs for low-income communities and persons with disabilities.

Linda was introduced to doll artistry later in life when she had the great fortune to meet and take a doll making class taught by Gwendolyn (“Wendi”) Daniels, a master doll artist and instructor at Montgomery College. Ms. Daniels uses air dry clay for sculpting doll heads and body parts, which precludes the need for baking the clay with a kiln. She continues to be Linda’s mentor and inspiration.

Linda’s focus from the outset was to make portrait dolls of women in history who overcame the monumental barriers imposed by societies around the world on their gender, to become political, business, or religious leaders, revolutionaries, intellectuals, artists, authors or soldiers. Linda highlights women whose significance is not well known, particularly in the West. Linda’s deep interest in and knowledge of fashion history are also displayed in the dolls’ clothing and accessories. These carefully replicate the fashions and sewing techniques of the doll’s era. Each doll comes with a description of the life and accomplishments of the women she represents.

Linda’s portrait dolls help her advance educational and social justice objectives. In a time of much division and conflict, dolls – like the arts in general – offer a universal medium for engaging and communicating across barriers of ideology, age, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, gender, etc. They help to lower the temperature somewhat and open up discussion in the public arena about divisive topics such as racism and sexism. For instance, Linda presented her African-American dolls as a co-panelist for the US Library of Congress Benjamin A. Botkin Lecture “African American Dollmaking and Puppetry: Renegotiating Identity, Restoring Community.” She is scheduled by the Silver Spring Town Center to present via ZOOM in May her Asian and Asian-American dolls as part of National Asian History and Culture Month. In their stories will be information about the history of Asian immigration to the US, and of racism against Americans of Asian descent.

Linda lives in Gaithersburg, Maryland. She has recently set up a shop on Etsy.com, KatoHerstoricalDolls, where she sells her portrait dolls. All proceeds from sales support leadership programs for women and girls.

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