



ART *for* INDIA

*The art collector and patron **Kiran Nadar** shares her thoughts on growing the Indian art scene, promoting female artists and educating the public through art, writes Skye Arundhati Thomas*



Of all the openings that take place during the week of India Art Fair in New Delhi—none is more hotly anticipated than the midday brunch at the house of Indian art collector and patron Kiran Nadar. Under a cool winter sun, we gather on the lawn at Nadar’s modernist bungalow in South Delhi. The house is quite casually, and irresistibly, left open to the crowd—and visitors may be spotted having a quick peek around the space that holds India’s most extensive private art collection. To put it bluntly, what Nadar chooses to collect directly affects what is seen, written about, or considered as important to the Indian canon. “In the current moment, individuals have a tremendous role to play toward public infrastructure,” she says, aware of the influence of her collection. “Especially when you feel that an artist has great potential to show—there is the responsibility of promoting that artist well. It is also a matter of picking these artists very wisely.”

Nadar reminisces how the house is where the collection began, a relatively small beginning that now undertakes over 5,500 works and is growing everyday. These works form the heart of the collection at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) in Saket, New Delhi, and Noida, located at the outskirts of the city. Nadar established the museum in 2010. “I had the base of a collection, and I knew that I wanted to do something meaningful for the arts in the country. I felt that as a collector I have an immediate responsibility to educate, and this seemed the best way to do so,” she says. In fact, the collection travels as much as it maintains a regional focus—with the KNMA loaning, participating and sponsoring shows all over the world. A Nasreen Mohamedi retrospective, first hosted at the KNMA in 2013, travelled to the Reina Sofia in Madrid in 2016, and then to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York that same year. “We try to show our collection wherever possible,” says Nadar. The KNMA also contributed several works to the Bhupen Khakhar retrospective at the Tate Modern, London, in 2016.

Nadar has always been one to champion overlooked artists, particularly women artists that have been historically ignored in favour of their male colleagues. The shows put on by the KNMA thus have a visible effect on the market—Mohamedi being a significant example of this. The same goes for the work of artist Nalini Malani, who had a retrospective at the KNMA in 2014, the first such showing of her work in South Asia, and has recently opened an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, supported by the KNMA. Currently, the museum is also showcasing the work of artist Jayashree Chakravarthy, who is showing at the Musée Guimet in Paris as part of their ‘Carte Blanche’ programme of artist interventions.

What makes Nadar’s collection significant is the team that maintains its focus. At its helm is art historian and curator Roobina Karode, whose research reflects the multiple histories of South Asia. “Kiran Nadar has made an effort to collect seminal pieces of the Modern and the Indian Modern,” says Karode. “The depth of her collection inspires our exhibitions and makes connections that are not immediately visible. For example, our most recent show on Indian Modernism dedicated a whole section to architectural practices. Architecture remains isolated from the arts, but we see it as an intersection.”

In a market that is otherwise dominated by painting and sculptural works, Nadar is not afraid to collect ephemeral pieces—and at the



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beginning of this year the KNMA purchased a body of work by artist Naeem Mohaiemen, whose films *Two Meetings and a Funeral* (2017) and *Tripoli Cancelled* (2017) were well received at documenta14. The KNMA also purchased several works by artist Prabhakar Pachpute, whose politicised works about the mining industry in India are often site-specific. “I am very interested to support cutting-edge work,” she said. The KNMA also sponsored filmmaker Amar Kanwar’s 80-minute feature film *Such a Morning* (2017) at documenta14. “These are the artists that may not be the popular Moderns or the blockbuster contemporary artists, but they are very important artists that deserve attention and recognition for their significant contribution.”

Nadar believes the Indian art market it is at a crossroads. “After the crash that happened in 2008, the entire market collapsed. But the Moderns and senior contemporaries seem to have made a comeback.” She is sharply aware of the ebb and flow of the art market. “The contemporary art market is still very slow and the base of collectors is still very small. And that needs to increase. We cannot survive without having a depth of collectors. If you look at the Chinese market, which had also crashed, it has come back in full force and become dynamic and huge. That is where we need to be.”

In a country where the state does not actively build collections, nor supports the infrastructure for it—Nadar has taken the matter into her own hands. “When our public infrastructure is falling short, the *onus* falls onto museums and public institutions to stimulate the market culture, as well as the local galleries.” Nadar wants the general public to have greater access to art in India, not just the elite. “We really want to increase the footfall into the museum. We see how it is important to make the museum space more dynamic, and less precious.” Nadar, as always, is on the move. ■

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