

## Bhavna Kakar in Conversation with Kiran Nadar



↑ Kiran Nadar, Founder and Chairperson, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art. Image courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art.

Kiran Nadar, a luminary in art, philanthropy, and education, received India's highest civilian honour, the Padma Shri, in recognition of her significant contributions. This accolade reflects her enduring commitment to cultural enrichment and social welfare initiatives nationwide. Nadar, a key figure in India's art market, shapes the nation's cultural landscape. Beyond her international acclaim in bridge playing, her decades-long pursuit of coveted artworks showcases a champion's mindset. As the visionary behind India's first private museum, her curation spans traditional and contemporary expressions. From 19th-century masterpieces to contemporary installations like Subodh

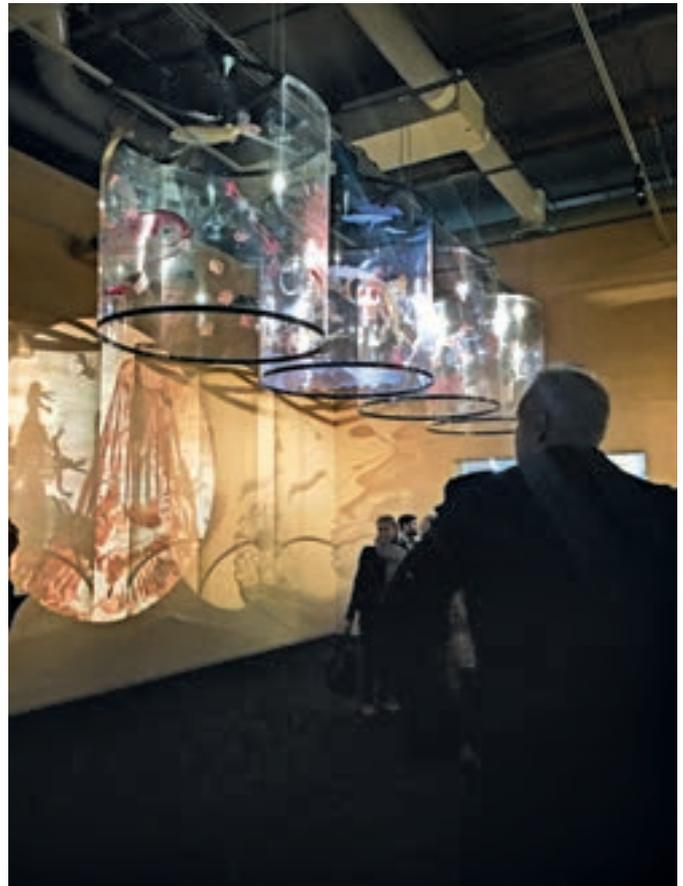
**Kiran Nadar** has been instrumental in shaping and revitalising the Indian art landscape ever since she established the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA). Her vast and diverse art collection now holds over 13,000 pieces spanning all significant periods of modern and contemporary works from India and the sub-continent. Kiran's remarkable contributions to art and philanthropy have garnered widespread recognition. She was recently honoured with the prestigious Padma Shri in the Art category, one of India's highest civilian awards. Furthermore, in 2023, Kiran was named a "Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur" (Knight of the Legion of Honour), the highest French civilian distinction. She spearheaded the India Pavilion initiative, a collaboration between the Ministry of Culture, KNMA, CII, and NGMA, titled "Our Time for a Future Caring," at the 2019 La Biennale in Venice. And has orchestrated notable collaborations with esteemed museums worldwide, such as Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Tate Modern (London), etc. She represented India at the 2018 Jakarta Palembang Asian Games, securing Bronze in the mixed-team category, and as a member of the "Formidables" team, led them to victory at the Commonwealth Nations Bridge Championships 2018, bringing gold to India after 12 years.

Gupta's Line of Control, Nadar's collection epitomizes depth and diversity. Her patronage extends beyond acquisition, fostering global recognition for artists and championing underrepresented talents, especially women. Nadar's unwavering dedication ensures the preservation of cultural legacy, echoing the transformative impact of private endeavors in cultural institutions.

**Bhavan Kakar (BK): What specific aspects of the arts and culture do you find most compelling or inspiring in South Asia and how do these preferences influence your philanthropic endeavours within the artistic communities in South Asia?**

**Kiran Nadar (KN):** I have observed a heightened emphasis on women artists, which I find particularly compelling. There are numerous women artists producing remarkable work, and witnessing their growth is gratifying, especially within the Indian context. While this progress may also be occurring globally, observing it within India is particularly satisfying.

Today, the visibility of women artists holds immense importance to me, and I've had the privilege of collecting works from both established figures and emerging talents. We take great pride in showcasing and supporting the diverse and impactful contributions of women artists in our museum spaces, both locally in New Delhi and on the international stage. Some notable exhibitions have featured works by Nasreen Mohamedi at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA; Nalini Malani at Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Jayashree Chakravarty at Musee Guimet, Paris, France;



↓ Nalini Malani, The Rebellion of the Dead: Retrospective 1969 – 2018, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, 2018  
Exhibition Installation Image, Collection: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art.

Mithu Sen at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art; a solo exhibition of Zarina at KNMA Saket, and Ranjani Shettar currently on view at Barbican in the UK. While our dedication to nurturing exceptional talent emerging from India, including female artists, remains steadfast, we also extend our support to diverse artistic practices.

As we prepare for our forthcoming international presentation alongside La Biennale di Venezia this year, we are thrilled to announce an exhibition and immersive, The Rooted Nomad, featuring MF Husain, one of India's most significant and influential Modernists.

**BK: How do you believe your support for the arts contributes to the broader cultural**



↑ Zarina, A life in Nine Lines, Saket , New Delhi, Exhibition shot, 2020. Collection: Kiran Nadar Musuem of Art.

Nasreen Mohamedi, The Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain, Exhibition shot, 2016



↑ Earth as a Haven: Under the Canopy of Love, Jayashree Chakravarty, Musee Guimet, Paris, France, Exhibition Installation shot, 2018, Collection: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art.

### landscape and what role do art galleries play to facilitate your philanthropy endeavour in this realm?

**KN:** I firmly believe that supporting the arts and the artists contributes significantly to the broader cultural landscape. We aim to make art more accessible and inclusive to all individuals, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status. Our strategy is to extend the support beyond the acquisition of artworks; it encompasses initiatives such as funding art education programs, supporting emerging artists, public programs, and preserving cultural heritage.

While art galleries may not directly drive my philanthropic endeavours, they play a crucial role in facilitating the dissemination and appreciation of art. Galleries provide a platform for artists to showcase their work, connecting them with audiences and potential collectors. It's also heartening to see more people coming forward to support the arts, including institutions such as the BRIJ in New Delhi and MAP in Bangalore, dedicated to promoting and preserving artistic endeavours. This growing interest reflects a collective recognition of the importance of art in our society and underscores the need for continued investment and collaboration in this realm. We are part of the same ecosystem,

and we hope to inspire each other, driving one another forward.

Whether acquiring works from auction houses, galleries, or directly from artists, everyone involved benefits from patronage. Through these platforms, I support artists and contribute to the sustainability of the art market. Furthermore, by showcasing these artworks in public exhibitions and museums for free, we ensure that they are enjoyed by a diverse audience, enriching the cultural landscape for generations to come.

### **BK: Given the vibrant dynamics of South Asia in terms of the lineage of patronage from the dynasty rulers to the present, what role does art play in fostering social change, and how do you seek to align your philanthropic efforts with initiatives that address societal issues through artistic expression?**

**KN:** Art has always played a pivotal role in fostering social change, especially within the vibrant dynamics of South Asia, where the lineage of patronage from dynasty rulers to the present is deeply ingrained. Recognizing the transformative power of artistic expression, our philanthropic efforts aim to align with initiatives that address societal



↑ Exhibition view, *Very Small Feelings* at KNMA Saket, Work by Rupali Gupte and Prasad Shetty, 2023.

issues through various forms of art.

From supporting educational institutions to funding art education programs and initiatives, our endeavors are geared towards leveraging the unifying force of art to drive social change. Art transcends mere aesthetics; it has the remarkable ability to bring people together, heal, and inspire. Make art an outlet, a space for creative expression and exploration. This became especially evident during the pandemic, where art, whether visual or performing, served as a bridge, uniting communities and providing strength and inspiration to keep moving forward.

Through our involvement in schools and other public initiatives, we aim to harness the power of art as a catalyst for positive social transformation. Art local to our community, passed down through generations, holds immense cultural value, and giving it a platform allows for broader awareness and appreciation. By providing access to art education and supporting artists and cultural institutions, we endeavour to create a more inclusive and equitable society where the transformative potential of art is realised for

the betterment of all.

**BK: Are there specific criteria or values that guide your decision-making process when selecting art-related projects or organisations to support, and how do you balance personal preferences with broader community impact?**

**KN:** Integrity and an overarching commitment to the betterment of humanity are paramount considerations. Whether an artist is addressing social or environmental concerns, we carefully evaluate their body of work. We are constantly looking at artists and based on their commitment we support them. Embracing regional art, which holds deep cultural significance passed down through generations, is essential to us. Providing a platform for such art not only fosters broader recognition and appreciation but also preserves our cultural heritage.

In our efforts, we aim to strike a balance between personal preferences and broader community impact, ensuring that our contributions resonate with our values and contribute positively to society as a whole. As custodians of history, the museum carries a significant responsibility in safeguarding



↑ Installation shot, Pop South Asia, Artistic Explorations in the Popular, Work by Lubna Chowdhary, at KNMA Saket, 2023.

forgotten eras. Through art, we have the privilege of narrating the stories of time, offering insights into the past and its enduring impact on our contemporary world.

**BK: What challenges do you perceive in the contemporary art world, and how do you envision your philanthropy addressing or overcoming some of these challenges?**

**KN:** In the contemporary art world, there are both opportunities and challenges. The good news is that the art landscape is expanding, with Indian art gaining global recognition. With a growing number of philanthropists/collectors aggressively pursuing art presents a stimulating challenge, yet it is heartening to witness heightened interest and competition in the field, showing a promising future. Additionally, when acquiring works for the collection, ensuring their authenticity and provenance has become a significant concern.

One of the challenges we face is the growing complexity of the art world. As the art market expands, there is a need for brilliant curators who can navigate and interpret this complexity. Unfortunately, there are only a handful of such curators available.

Additionally, the educational aspect of the art world is lagging behind, which poses another hurdle to addressing these challenges. In response, our philanthropy aims to support initiatives that bridge these gaps. We seek to invest in curatorial programs and educational initiatives that nurture talent and expertise in the art world. By doing so, we hope to contribute to the continued growth and development of the contemporary art scene while ensuring that it remains accessible and enriching for all.



↑ Battles of Ganga and Jamuna : Mahabharata 12, Oil on canvas, 74.30 x 107.30 inches, 1971-72. Collection: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art.  
Yatra, Oil on canvas, 33.5 x 42.2 inches, 1955. Collection: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art.