

## EXHIBITION SPOTLIGHT

# Arts for India

*REBECCA WALLERSTEINER* explores the colourful and voluptuous history, and future, of modern art in India

A STRONG SENSE OF design and the voluptuous characterise both historical and modern Indian art. This brings to mind the colourful, swirling, sensuous designs of Liberty, which were originally inspired by traditional Indian patterns and brought back by the English during the days of the Raj. In the 16th century, Mughal emperors commissioned exquisite painting in miniatures and Royal patronage of the arts continued for centuries. More recently, the Indian emperors' traditional role of supporting artists has been taken over by the country's emerging new elite, like the Modi family, the Mittals and the Caans.

Three years ago, Satish and Abha Modi philanthropically set up the arts foundation Arts for India (AFI) to support the Delhi-based international Institute of Fine Arts (IIFA), which teaches arts, fashion and cinema to 375 talented and often disadvantaged students every year. "Our Foundation aims to create the next generation of outstanding Indian artists for the 21st century, like the distinguished painters M.F. Husain, Anish Kapoor and S.H. Raza," comments David Hawkins, the Executive Director of Arts for India, which offers scholarships to support poor students through the school, with a long-term plan of building India's first private university of art

near the family township of Modinagar, NCR Delhi.

Thanks to the Modi family and other wealthy entrepreneurs, the last decade has witnessed a renaissance of creative Indian art forms and exciting fairs, like the popular annual India Art Fair, now in its sixth year, whilst last year saw India's first Biennale at Kochi-Muziris in Kerala. Growing interest in modern art has led to an increase in the number of vibrant new magazines dedicated to this particular subject: *India, Art and Deal* and *India Contemporary Art Journal*, complementing the exhibition catalogues produced by art galleries. With this

21st century resurgence of the arts, India is rapidly becoming a major international player within the art world.

Although India has a sophisticated culture

thousands of years old and has always been a fertile country for creative talent, its cultural identity in terms of contemporary art has, until recently, been restricted to the domestic market with a few international collectors bucking the trend. Owing to economic forces, the numbers of artists involved in modern and folk art (including painting, metalwork, pottery, jewellery design and weaving) dwindled during the 20th century.

However, this is bound to change thanks to the

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International Institute of Fine Arts, which teaches a variety of forms (both modern and traditional) and offers degree and diploma level education in applied art, fine art, fashion and cinema. The Institute operates a four year scholarship programme to enable potential artists from disadvantaged backgrounds to be educated at this state-of-the-art institution, with excellent facilities and world-class teachers, and escape the generational cycles of poverty.

The Modis have made the fulfilment of youthful dreams possible by generously funding IIFA, enlisting others to join the cause and, with international collectors from around the world start expanding their collections, their future looks promising. HRH The Prince of Wales, a keen painter of watercolour landscape, has given his backing as he too is keen to nurture young artistic talent. The Prince's Drawing School, based at Kensington Palace and Shoreditch, and the London-based University of the Arts are acting as educational partners, each year sending highly trained, dedicated teachers and alumni students to the Institute. Alumni from The Prince's Drawing School travelling to India this year are Max Naylor, Ed Bedlow, Paul Fenner and Constanza Dessain.

Every November, AFI organises an annual Diwali fundraising event to help to subsidise art scholarships and visits by educational partners. Last year it was hosted at the Saatchi Gallery on the King's Road; this year it was held at Kent House in Rutland Gate on 7 November and was sponsored by Asprey, JP Morgan, *B Beyond* Magazine and Knight Frank. Kent House received a colourful Diwali-themed makeover for the night and this high-profile occasion attracted a number of London's modern art-loving Asian families as well as European and American collectors.

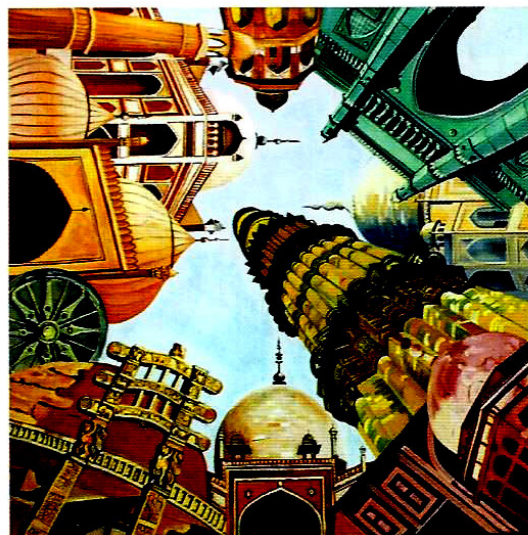
Lord Archer kindly volunteered to act as auctioneer for artwork by the photographer Alison Jackson, sculptor Danny Lane and Aisha Caan, who is herself both a collector and an accomplished artist. There was an accompanying exhibition of modern art by 20 supporting artists and a Diwali-themed jewellery exhibition by Asprey, with champagne provided by Nyetimber. On the evening in question, Simon Beaufoy, the scriptwriter of *Slumdog Millionaire*, was presented with the Modi Creative India Award for his work furthering the UK-Indian arts relationship. Previous winners have included the designer Matthew Williamson, conservationist Mark Shand and artist Aisha Caan, whilst its sister award, the Dayawati Modi, has been presented to HH the Dalai Lama, Goldie Hawn and artists Anish Kapoor and Paresh Maity. Christina Pierce launched a new book entitled *The Art of Cricket*, featuring her illustrations of famous English and Indian cricketers, which is not only a great Christmas present for sport enthusiasts but also another means of supporting the underprivileged art students as the author

plans to donate some of the book's profits. In total, the Foundation's aim was to raise a huge £250,000 through this event alone.

Artists are the shock troops of gentrification and art galleries and art projects around the world can help rejuvenate run-down, tired areas, bringing fresh energy, optimism and hope for the future. They also provide employment, a sense of purpose, fun and cultural unity. London has benefitted hugely from investing into the Tate Britain, which has altogether generated £100 million of economic activity and created 3,000 new jobs.

"Arts for India's long-term ambition is to construct a new 175 acre campus, named the Universe of Art, which will be India's first private fine arts university built to global standards and it will include a performing arts centre and world-class museum," says David Hawkins. We are looking forward to seeing the artistic fruits and benefits of this establishment. ■

[artsforindia.org](http://artsforindia.org); [christinapierce.com](http://christinapierce.com)  
[princesdrawingschool.org](http://princesdrawingschool.org)



*This page, from top/ Visual plan of the proposed Universe of Art, Modinagar, NCR Delhi; Painting by Pooja Paliwal, a recent IIFA graduate  
 Opposite page, from left/ two pieces of artwork by IIFA students: Sachin Tendulkar roo, part of the Icons of India collection by Christina Pierce*