

Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art (FICA) and Tate Modern's South Asian acquisitions committee. Most importantly, perhaps, was her appointment as chair of the Confederation of Indian Industry's (CII) clout-worthy task force on art and culture.

## OUTSIDE THE BOX

Knowing her aversion to being boxed in (and her reputation as a former lawyer who once worked in the late Arun Jaitley's chamber), I suggest "catalyst and connector". "Exactly!" she enthuses, the cloud of scepticism lifting. "That's the role I've aimed for—and see growing. I'm not here to help people buy art and I don't want to start another foundation. I see myself as a facilitator, as someone who takes art to the people rather than bringing people to art."

To this end, she has thrown one iron into the fire after another. For three years, she has successfully sponsored FICA's public art project at the India Art Fair, where artists like Sudarshan Shetty and Thukral & Tagra created physically interactive works to engage the public. Apart from awards, schol-

arships and art residencies, she is behind FICA's patrons' programmes. In addition, she has been a key sponsor of the invigorating Students' Biennale at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale for several editions.

This has fit well with her bigger campaign to persuade CII business leaders to include art (and craft skills) in mandatory corporate social responsibility budgets. "Most CSR spending goes towards education, health-care and sanitation, but I think art is a deserving cause too—even if it means employing local craftspeople in factory or office structures." In this, she is ably supported by her husband Tarun Sawhney, the scion of an old industrial family with interests in sugar and engineering.

## A NEW AGENDA

Just as she personally buys art 'vertically' (choosing the best works from an artist's many phases; for example, the best of Zarina's works from the 1960s onwards), so Sawhney believes in dovetailing corporate and institutional patronage of art to create encompassing unities. She is passionate about bridging public-private partnerships. One such recent achievement has been the creation of a synergy between CII, the Ministry of Culture, the National Gallery of Modern Art, and the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) to put



Jitish Kallat's  
*Covering Letter* (2012)

together the India Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale, which concluded last month, after a hiatus of eight years.

Titled *Our Time For A Future Caring*, the show, spread over 64,000sqft, celebrated 150 years of Mahatma Gandhi's birth, with a virtuoso display of Indian art curated by KNMA's director and chief curator, Roobina Karode. The show included the *Haripura Panels* by Nandalal Bose (commissioned by Gandhi in 1938) and MF Husain's landmark painting *Zameen*, as well as a range of contemporary installations by Atul Dodiya, GR Iranna, Ashim Purkayastha and the late Rummana Husain, among others. One of the most arresting exhibits was *Covering Letter* by Jitish Kallat, of a letter written by Gandhi to Hitler, a chronicle of two radically opposed belief systems.

Sawhney, having established a firm foothold at milestone shows at home and overseas, sees her art-to-the-public engagement diversifying. "If we're talking of creating 99 smart cities, then public art must be part of the vocabulary. CII has commissioned a report for local governments, business communities and artists on the benefits of art in public spaces, so that they can channel their energies." But as someone with forensic legal training, she knows the art of persuasion and argument. As a member of CII's steering committees, to throw up ideas for events surrounding its upcoming 125th anniversary, Tarana Sawhney has her job cut out for her. >

The India Pavilion at the  
58th Venice Biennale

