

**G. R. Iranna**

b. 1970, Karnataka, India  
Lives and works in New Delhi, India

*Naavu (We Together)*, 2012  
Wood and mixed media  
Dimensions variable, site specific.  
500-650 padukas

G. R. Iranna represents Indian art in the second official pavilion of India in the 2019 Venice Biennale.

“I do tend to have deep empathy for the working class and the farmers. It could be because my roots are in the village, though I feel anyone, anywhere can be the victim of violence one way or another”, says G. R. Iranna. Having migrated to New Delhi to study and practice art more than two decades ago, Iranna reflects on the atrocities of an increasingly brutal world, critiquing forms of violence, also appealing to resist provocations and unnecessary aggression.



In recent years, Iranna has taken to working with the unpredictable medium of ash, engaging with the ephemeral, with marks and traces and the dematerialization of matter. Subsequently, he has worked with commonplace objects such as *padukas*, or Indian slippers traditionally made of wood, associated since antiquity with spirituality and reverence. Doing away with Gandhi's widely identifiable eyeglasses, the spinning wheel or walking staff, Iranna turns to a less referenced object-symbol. Gandhi's *padukas* (indicative of his adherence to non-violence in the rejection of leather) allude to his idea of *Satyagraha* (passive political resistance), attained through collective mass action of walking/marching. Gandhi, it is believed, in the forty years of active political life, on an average, walked twenty kilometres every day.

The on-site installation titled *Naavu (We Together)*, uses the *padukas* in congregation. In it's conception, Iranna plays with the idea of proximity and distance: the swarm of *padukas* on the wall when seen from a distance appear as a solid mass of energy, bearing a single identity. On a closer viewing, they draw the viewers to engage with individual symbols/stories that hint at people from all walks of life - the farmer, barber, moneylender, coppersmith or artist, all together to uphold values of self-dignity, peace and freedom.



During his youth, Iranna studied in a Gurukul (a system of education where the student resides with the teacher) and lived in an ashram for almost seven years. This helped to form a strong connection to his cultural roots, which enters his work alongside his exploration of the antitheses of inherent dualities of the world. Iranna endeavors to translate an internal landscape onto tactile surfaces and aspects of Buddhist art influences are evident. Although he began painting oil on canvases, Iranna later developed his range of medium, embarking on his now primary use of tarpaulin.

## Education

- 1999-2000 Artist-in-Residence, Wimbledon School of Art, London
- 1994 Master of Fine Art (Painting), College of Art, New Delhi
- 1992 Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting), College of Visual Art, Gulbarga, Karnataka

## Select Solo Exhibitions

- 2017 The Primordial Ash, Aicon Gallery, New York
- 2017 Ether is all that is, Gallery Espace, New Delhi
- 2016 And the last shall be the first: G R Iranna Works 1995-2015, National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Bengaluru
- 2014 Tempered Branches, Aicon Gallery, New York
- 2012 Limning Heterotopias, Gallery Espace, New Delhi
- 2012 Thought of the day, Kashi Art Gallery Cochi, curated by Tanya Abraham
- 2011 Scaffolding the Absent: G. R. Iranna's Phenomenological Interventions, The Guild Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2010 Ribbed Routes, The Guild Art Gallery, Mumbai / New York

## Select Group Exhibitions

- 2019 Venice Biennale, India Pavilion, Venice
- 2018 Art Now '18, Art Alive Gallery, New Delhi
- 2018 Delicate Bond of Steel, Aicon Gallery at Cincinnati Exhibition
- 2016 Delicate Bond of Steel, Aicon Gallery at Mumbai Exhibition, Chatterjee & Lal Gallery, Mumbai
- 2014 Unmarked, collective project at BC Gallery Cochi Biennale
- 2014 Ode to Monumental: Celebration, Visuality, Ideology, presented by Saffronart at Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi and Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2013 When High and Low Art Meet, Curated by Rupika Chawla, Art Alive Gallery, Gurgaon
- 2013 Living Walls, Art Alive Gallery, Gurgaon
- 2012 On a Journey, Art Alive Gallery, Gurgaon
- 2012 Alone/Together, Aicon Gallery, New York
- 2011 Reprise, Aicon Gallery, New York
- 2010 San Jose Museum of Art San Jose California
- 2010 Group Show, Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei Taiwan, by Sakshi Gallery
- 2010 Indian (sub) Way, Grosvenor Vadhera Gallery, London, curated by Yashodhara Dalmia
- 2010 Go See India, Contemporary Indian Art at Gothenburg, Sweden. Curated by Amith Mukhopadyya & Oscar Aschan

# The Venice Biennale's 10 Best Pavilions in the Arsenale and Giardini



Casey Lesser May 10, 2019

## India

Nandalal Bose, MF Husain, Atul Dodiya, Jitish Kallat, Ashim Purkayastha, Shakuntala Kulkarni, Rummana Hussain, and GR Iranna, "Our Time for a Future Caring"

Curated by Roobina Karode

Arsenale

Installation view of the India Pavilion, "Our Time for a Future Caring," featuring GR Iranna, *Naavu (We Together)*, 2012, at the 58th Venice Biennale, 2019. Courtesy of the artist.



In its second-ever showing at the Biennale, India is honoring the 150th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth. Rather than showing literal representations of the celebrated leader and activist, however, curator Roobina Karode, director and chief curator at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, chose eight artists who channel Gandhi's timeless influence. Sculptures, installations, painting, and video evoke peaceful protest, passive resistance, and respect for the environment.



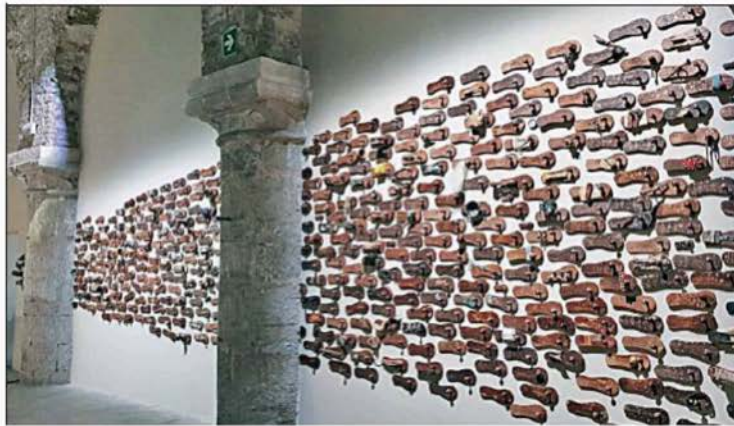
The crown jewel of the pavilion is an installation, *Covering Letter* (2012), by the Mumbai-based artist Jitish Kallat. Walk into the pitch-black theater, and you'll find a glowing stream of mist and a projection of words flowing through it. Look carefully, and you'll see that it's a letter, written five weeks before the start of World War II, from Gandhi to Adolf Hitler. You can walk through Gandhi's plea for peace, in which he addresses Hitler: "Dear Friend." "You actually find yourself in that long corridor of human possibility, a letter going from one of the most well-known proponents of peace to one of the most brutal perpetrators of violence, cohabitating the planet at that same moment in time," Kallat explained. "And I think that becomes a space for self-reflection in some ways."

# ART SPREADS BAPU'S MESSAGE IN VENICE



The Times of India (New Delhi edition)

10 May 2019

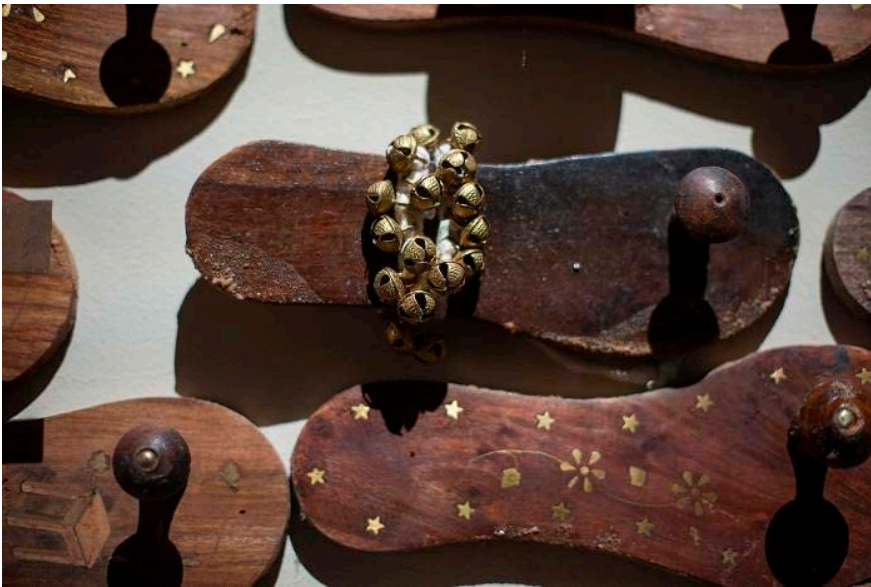


## **WALK THROUGH HISTORY:**

Delhi-based artist G R Iranna uses hundreds of padukas to capture the energy and togetherness of Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March at the Indian pavilion at the prestigious Venice art biennale. India has made a much-talked-about comeback in Venice after eight years

## The top five national pavilions at the Venice Biennale

India: 'Our Time for a Future Caring'



Back after an eight-year lapse and now funded through a private-public partnership, India's compelling group presentation addresses Gandhi's legacy, beginning with Nandalal Bose's posters for the 1938 Haripura Congress. Installed under the Arsenale arches and from a distance seeming to move in a collective Gandhi-esque march are GR Iranna's hundreds of wooden sandals, "Naavu (We Together)", 2019 (pictured above); close up, each is individualised, denoting the wearer's craft. Jitish Kallat's "Covering Letter", projecting a plea for peace sent by Gandhi to Hitler on a curtain of descending mist through which audiences walk, simultaneously inhabiting and dissipating the text, is exceptional.

# THE ART NEWSPAPER

## Venice Biennale 2019: the must-see pavilions in the Arsenale

The former shipyards house many of the star national displays this year, here are some of the best

ALISON COLE, JULIA MICHALSKA,  
HANNAH MCGIVERN, JOSÉ DA SILVA  
and GARETH HARRIS



### Indian Pavilion

**Our Time for a Future Caring**, Nandalal Bose, MF Husain, Atul Dodiya, Jitish Kallat, Ashim Purkayastha, Shakuntala Kulkarni, Rummana Hussain and GR Iranna

Mahatma Gandhi, perhaps the most famous Indian of all time, forms the central theme to the group exhibition at the India Pavilion. In *Broken Branches* (2002), Atul Dodiya has recreated the old wooden cabinets found in the Gandhi museum in Porbandar, filling them with prosthetics, books, tools and weaving in personal items, while GR Iranna has covered one of the walls with hundreds of wooden padukas for his work *Naavu (We Together)* (2012), which refers to Gandhi's choice of wood slippers—he rejected leather—and the power of collective marching. Jitish Kallat is showing *Covering Letter* (2012), a screen of mist—which seems to be in vogue at this year's Biennial—onto which is projected a letter that Gandhi sent to Adolf Hitler in July 1939 urging him to resist “reducing humanity to a savage state”. The theme marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of the Indian independence leader—and sometime controversial character—and also sees a return for the Indian Pavilion after an eight-year hiatus.