

Smt. Sonia Gandhi's inaugural address
on the occasion of the opening of the ANISH KAPOOR EXHIBITION,
on 27 November, 2010,
at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi

Your Excellency Sir Richard Stag,
Shri Jawhar Sircar,
Shri Anish Kapoor
Distinguished guests,
Friends,

It is a real pleasure for me to be here with you this evening. Few artists of our time have so captured the imagination of the world as Anish Kapoor. An Anish Kapoor exhibition anywhere is always a major event. Last year, the Royal Academy in London made him the first living artist ever to be invited to hold a solo exhibition in all its galleries. A double exhibition—in Delhi and in Mumbai—is therefore very very special. It is even more special for another reason. Many of us in India have read and heard about his creations and seen pictures of them. Now, at last, after ten long years of persistent effort, we have a chance to see them for ourselves. It is an exciting moment. I thank all those who have made it possible.

It goes without saying that Anish Kapoor's sculptures and installations have broken new ground. They have won acclaim for the inspired, even daring, manner in which architecture and sculpture, space and form, earth and sky, engineering and technology, are brought together. Beyond the technical virtuosity, however, is the singularity of his artistic vision. His forms convey intriguing dualities: the earthy and the ethereal, permanence and impermanence, stillness and movement, darkness and light, illusion and reality. His works are not just visually astonishing, they also stretch our perception. They evoke wonder, a sense of surprise, a realization that things are not what they may seem. Looking at them, we are confronted simultaneously with the mystery of artistic creation and the mystery of being. They take us within and beyond ourselves into a world of reverie and reflection.

It is not the least of Anish Kapoor's achievements that he has created an art which is both profound and accessible. It can be enjoyed by young

and old alike. It draws in the viewer to participate in the work rather than just observing it passively. To quote his own words: "The work itself has a complete circle of meaning and counterpoint, and without your involvement as a viewer there is no story". I am told his Cloud Gate sculpture in Chicago is the most visited artwork in a public space in the world. This is testimony not just to the magnetism and interactive nature of his art, but also to his commitment to taking it beyond the rarefied art world to the public at large. I am sure his exhibitions in Delhi and Mumbai will evoke an enthusiastic response. Viewers will engage with Anish Kapoor's artistic vision, and, will no doubt, be challenged in some way by the experience.

Indira Gandhi often emphasized that development must be about the whole individual, addressing as much aesthetic and spiritual upliftment, as material needs. Art, and particularly public art, plays a vital role in this process. It improves taste and sensibility. It helps open new windows in our mind, freeing it from prejudice and narrowness. It is therefore a matter of regret that our cities and public spaces have so little public art of any real distinction. I hope we may one day see an Anish Kapoor installation in one of our cities - as well as others of true quality by some of our leading artists.

Anish Kapoor is not an artist who can be defined, or indeed confined, by boundaries of geography or nationality, for his is a universal vision. But more than one art critic has noted the influence of India in his work. He himself has spoken of the impact that India's philosophy, and the deep symbolism inherent in so many aspects of life here, have had on him. With this exhibition, he makes a fittingly triumphant return to a country he had left forty years ago, but one that has continued to nourish his artistic imagination. "I am Indian, and I'm proud of it," Anish Kapoor has declared. May I say that we too take pride in this son of India, acclaimed the world over as one of the great sculptors of our time, who has brilliantly fused the timeless and the contemporary and dramatically extended the frontiers of art. I am delighted to inaugurate his Exhibition.