



PHOTOS: FOO YONG KOON

Living colour: Green bud-like shapes seem to be caressed by a breeze and move languidly in Shettar's site-specific *Green Breeze* (above); *Flame of the Forest* (far right) in teak wood captures the vibrant hues of one of Hinduism's most sacred trees

Joy of lacquer

Ranjani Shettar coaxes sensuous, almost erotic, sculptures using lacquered organic forms, writes **MADHVI SUBRAHMANYAN**

WHY does sculpture have to be monochromatic? So asks Ranjani Shettar, the creator of colourful site-specific sculptural installations titled *Flame of The Forest* on display on the third floor of the Hermes store on Orchard Road.

Interested in exploring colour in sculpture, Shettar presents her first exhibition in Singapore based on the familiar tropical tree of the same name which is found in Singapore and in countrysides throughout India.

During the hot summer months, the trees have brilliant crowns of blossoming vermilion flowers that light up the entire forest with their hues. With its sheer power and beauty, it is no wonder that this sacred Hindu tree would capture and engage the mind of an artist.

Drawing her inspiration from this tree, Shettar – a young and rising star of contemporary Indian art – transforms the gallery space at Hermes with her site-specific installations.

Launched in 2006, the Third Floor at Hermes has been showcasing non-commercial site-specific works by young contemporary artists. Hermes art spaces can be found in Brussels, Bern, Seoul, Tokyo and New York, and these dedicated spaces offer a unique form of corporate patronage in the arts.

Curated by Emi Eu, director of Singapore Tyler Print Institute, the focal point of Shettar's show is a colourful wall installation in purples and blues called *Green Breeze*.

Multiples of green bud-like shapes are installed on the gallery wall in a way that makes the wooden forms appear to be blowing in a gentle breeze. "This work is meant to catch the fleeting moment of something, like a breeze flowing through a padi field," explains Shettar.

The other works in the show are called *Flame of the Forest* and *Remembrance From Last Night's Dream*. These works are made in teak wood and rosewood



'This work is meant to catch the fleeting moment of something, like a breeze flowing through a padi field'

– Sculptor Ranjani Shettar on her site-specific installation art *Green Breeze* (top). Another work on show is *Remembrance From Last Night's Dream* (above and right) which has a sensuous form

respectively and have sensuous and almost erotic orange organic forms in lacquered wood emerging from within the crevices of the wood.

"This is the first time I am showing work all done in only one medium – wood," explains Shettar. "Generally, I work in all kinds of mediums, whatever I find in my immediate environment from beeswax to latex, to PVC pipes."

Born in Bangalore, India, Shettar is known for bold experimentations in a wide range of materials. She is best known for her delicate installations that blend references of the natural world with the man-made, and the landscape with the urban landscape.

Shettar's works have been shown in several biennales and are part of many permanent museum collections around the world.

One of her earlier works *Just A Bit More* was a suspended web-like installation made with thread and beeswax first presented at the Sydney Biennale in 2006 and has subsequently been acquired by Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York for its permanent collection. Another installation that made quite an impact on art enthusiasts comprised of very interesting basket forms woven



with metal. She procured the metal bands for the basket from a car junkyard and made the work titled *Me not me, Buy Me, Eat Me, Have Me, Me, No Not Me*. This work makes a commentary on consumerism and can now be seen in the permanent collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. At a young age of 34, Shettar has gained considerable international recognition especially for her recent exhibit in the show *On Line: Drawing through 20th Century*, at MOMA, in New York.

She has also had solo shows in other places like the Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas (2008-2009) and Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, Massachusetts (2008).

"I primarily respond to space, though the material I use to make sculpture is also important. I am constantly observing materials around me and looking at their possibilities. For me my materials could be from anywhere, materials can trigger an idea or the idea requires a specific material. I often look at craft material and use craft techniques," explains Shettar of her process and choice of material.

For several years now, Shettar has been working closely with the toy-makers around Bangalore. "What the toymakers do for a living is quite different and I have used their skills to make these lacquered works in wood to express a certain concept," she adds.

The lush colours of lacquered wood have brought in a wide colour palette to Shettar's site-specific installations, no longer restricting her to the monochromatic world.

Through her colourful forms and her unique style of mediating space, Shettar expresses subtle aspects of nature in her installations, be it the organic growths in bright orange or the breeze sweeping through the green padi fields. Although small with just four works, Shettar's show manages to encapsulate "the spirit of this beautiful tree and the sensuality of nature".

The exhibition Flame Of The Forest is on at Hermes on the Third Floor, Liat Towers, 541 Orchard Road until June 5