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Ranjani Shettar: Dewdrops & Sunshine

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Curiously concocted sculptures and installations that seem to organically grow out of the walls



Enter the NGV International's newest gallery, Contemporary Exhibitions, and you will find yourself transfixed by an ethereal sight: gigantic, buoyant bubble-like creations with wings that seem to float in the air, casting strange but captivating shadows on the gallery's walls.

The work – playfully titled *Sun sneezers blow light bubbles* – is the creation of a 34-year-old Bangalore-based artist, Ranjani Shettar, whose sculptures and installations inaugurated the gallery on November 4.

‘Sun sneezers’ refers to the propensity of some people to sneeze when exposed to sunlight. Shettar created the work for Contemporary Art in Boston, known for its open glass walls. Her sun sneezers were inspired by the sunlight animating its galleries and she got down to work with her characteristically eccentric range of materials and media: stainless steel wires, muslin cloth and tamarind paste (a kind of legume used in Indian cooking, textiles and crafts).

The work encapsulates the elements that make Shettar’s works exciting. First, is a preoccupation with natural phenomena, such as sunlight, vegetation, water, living organisms. Second, is an intrepid experimentation with materials ranging from automotive paint and steel to latex rubber and beeswax. Third, is her ability to play with form-shifting shapes and volumes. Her installations seldom seem to sit vertically on the floor; they are either suspended in air or growing out of walls or hanging as nets from floor-to-ceiling. In turn, they imbue the gallery with a surreal, sensual dream-like quality.

The works have been carefully selected by the NGV curator Alex Baker – who lobbied for Shettar’s works to open the gallery – to give us a glimpse into Shettar’s wide oeuvre. “I was attracted by the materiality of her works,” he says, “and also by the way they refer to ecology and nature but in a sculptural and non-didactic way.”

Words by Chetna Prakash