

# Fleeting forest flames

A top Indian artist is transforming the space at Third Floor Hermes with her wooden works

deepika shetty

Singaporeans will be familiar with the distinctive Flame of the Forest trees in havens of jungle greenery on the island, but it is also the name of an artwork on show here by one of India's top contemporary artists.

Ranjani Shettar has used wood to construct shapes reminiscent of seeds in a pod for her intriguing site-specific installation, *The Flame Of The Forest*, which consists of a total of four works that make up her debut Singapore exhibition of the same name.

The tree is considered sacred in India, and with its crimson crown and pale bronze leaves, it has the power to change the look of an entire forest.

Shettar's installation similarly trans-

forms the exhibition space at Third Floor Hermes in Orchard Road.

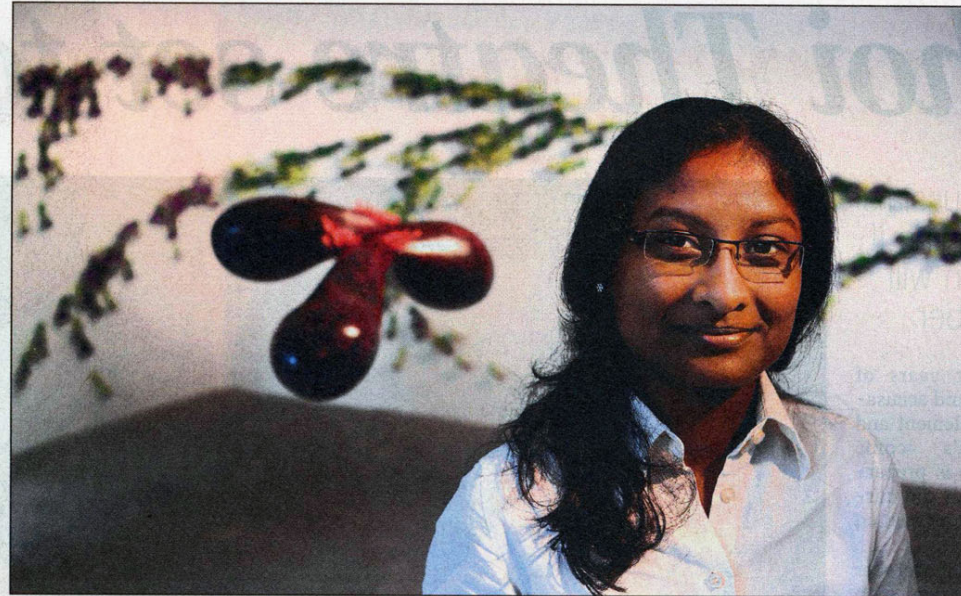
The soft-spoken 34-year-old artist, who is based in a village about eight hours away by train from the southern Indian city of Bangalore, says: "I have been intrigued by the Flame of the Forest, which I see near my home and several parts of India.

"It is not the prettiest of trees, yet when its leaves fall, you get what looks like a dramatic carpet. The ground gets covered and everything around it is transformed."

Driven by this idea, Shettar created the four new works for the show that reflect her artistic practice of challenging the distinction between craft, sculpture and art.

She works with traditional Indian toy makers who cover her sculpted wooden works with lacquer.

Two wooden sculptures filled with an orange "growth" are placed on the floor, while a third is suspended from the ceiling. Alongside the brown and orange creations is a stunning wall filled with green and purple tubular forms. They appear like free-floating forms.



Indian artist Ranjani Shettar's new works for her debut Singapore show are inspired by the power of the Flame of the Forest.  
PHOTO: JOSEPH NAIR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

view it

## FLAME OF THE FOREST BY RANJANI SHETTAR

Where: Third Floor Hermes, Liat Towers, 541 Orchard Road

When: Till June 5, 10.30am to 7.30pm daily  
Admission: Free

Shettar gets her inspiration from her natural surroundings: "I live in a tropical place and that somehow influences my art. There are certain things like mushrooms which sprout almost organically. I go for that effect on wood.

"The work on the wall is an attempt to capture a fleeting moment, something like a wind blowing through a paddy field. It is something I love to observe."

She was born in Bangalore but as her irrigation engineer father was sometimes transferred in the course of work, she grew up in several small Indian towns.

In 2000, she completed her Master of Fine Arts degree specialising in sculpture

at the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath in Bangalore.

"Growing up in small towns shaped my artistic sensibility. I always noticed the little things around me, like the way a touch-me-not plant responds to touch or the way seasons change the look of the trees and make a place look different."

Shettar, whose work is in private and museum collections including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, has had several museum shows in the United States and Europe.

Most recently, New York's prestigious Museum of Modern Art featured her work in an exhibition titled *On Line:*

*Drawing Through The 20th Century.*

She has also participated in several leading contemporary art events including the 10th Liverpool Biennial last year and the 9th Lyon Biennial in 2007.

However, she prefers to shun the limelight and enjoys living in her village home, which took her and her artist husband three years to build.

"I love being there. It is a place where I am surrounded by nature. We grow our own vegetables and there is enough time to think, observe and focus on the art. My imagination is triggered and sparked by life around me and by light and nature."

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