

Art in Review



TALWAR GALLERY, NEW YORK/NEW DELHI

Muslin-and-steel “Bird Song” sculptures by the Indian artist Ranjani Shettar at Talwar Gallery.

Ranjani Shettar

*Talwar Gallery
108 East 16th Street
Flatiron district
Through Jan. 30*

The Indian artist Ranjani Shettar was born in 1977 in Bangalore, a technological hub of a largely rural South India, and her sculptures reflect contrasting aspects of that environment. The large suspended pieces, each called “Bird Song,” in her third solo at Talwar, are based on armatures made of stainless-steel tubing bent into curves. Over them Ms. Shettar has stretched muslin soaked and stiffened with a tamarind-kernel paste — a traditional glue used by village toymakers — and colored golden-brown with kamiri, a dye made by fermenting rusted iron and sugar cane. The results are semi-translucent, shadow-casting mobiles that look like a cross between kites, bas-

kets and the half-abstract birds of Georges Braque.

Smaller, wall-hugging sculptures in the second gallery use the same stretched-cloth format, but here the armatures, though invisible, are studded with carved wooden tool handles that radiate outward like spokes from a wheel or rays from the sun. The effect is both lyrical and homely, with the different shapes suggesting the taut tops of drums and pieces of thin, flat bread.

The most recent piece, “Waiting for June 2,” is little more than a handful of unpainted terra-cotta shards, shell-like and organically formed rather than hand-sculptured, and grouped together. Like most of Ms. Shettar’s work, it

represents a strain of Indian contemporary art still overlooked in a global context: abstract work that wears Indian-ness lightly but still stands apart from familiar international forms, themes and styles. The profile of such work may be on the rise, judging from Ms. Shettar’s still-young career, which has included appearances in major biennials and one-person museum shows in the United States and Europe. At the same time she continues to live and work in South India, drawing on it as a source of material and inspiration.

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