

Art in Review



TALWAR GALLERY, NEW YORK/NEW DELHI

Ranjani Shettar's "Flight of the Butterfly," in coffee tree wood, with automobile paint and bolts.

Ranjani Shettar

'Night skies and daydreams'

Talwar Gallery
108 East 16th Street, Manhattan
Through Sept. 27

One of Ranjani Shettar's diaphanous, constellation-like sculptures of hand-molded wax beads and cotton thread, installed at the entrance to "On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century," at the Museum of Modern Art, made a stellar introduction to that 2010 show. A new, similar piece, called "Tuntoroo," fills a room at Talwar Gallery. And here, in a way that wasn't obvious at MoMA, light plays a big role in the work, as patterns of shadows cast on the wall compound its intricacy and emphasize its apparent fragility.

Ms. Shettar was trained in art school in Bangalore, India, but has always found formal sources for her abstract work in materials associated with the craft traditions of Karnataka, the southwestern state where she lives and works.

For another, very different suspended piece from 2007, "Fire in the Belly," she carved more than a dozen largish biomorphic shapes from local acacia wood, painted them a glossy, metallic yellow-green and suspended them at varying heights. They suggest a school of morphing amoebas, or a bunch of Brancusi's gone rogue.

A 2014 sculpture, "Flight of the Butterfly," stands on the floor but looks as if it could easily lift off. It's composed of gnarly light-weight coffee-wood branches bolted together to form a tangled enclosure and colored with bright turquoise automotive paint. The branches are oddly homely; they look like bones. The paint is thick and unpretty. Ms. Shettar has done nothing to hide the metal bolts that hold everything together.

A resulting slight sense of awkwardness is what makes her art so persuasive: It indicates that the hand is there; the material is unelevated; the technology is organic. Pure abstraction, with its implication of perfection, is beside the point. In Ms. Shettar's transubstantiated modernism, local nature and culture have their way.

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