



Flame of the Forest 2011
Collection of Talwar Gallery
New York/New Delhi
and the artist, Bangalore

is based on plants that turn their leaves to the sun; indeed, the sculpture evolved in response to natural light in the artist's studio. The stalks resemble a living organism, part plant, part animal, bringing together the simultaneous opacity and translucency of skin. *Heliotropes* relies on the flatness and whiteness of the gallery wall as a stage or screen that provides a contrast to the work's organic rawness. As with many of Shettar's sculptures, shadows play an integral role in the work as they add further formal complexity to the limb-like structures.



Another sculpture that takes its cue from the world of flora is *Flame of the forest*, 2011. In this work, Shettar explores a contrast of finishes by juxtaposing untreated wood and painted and lacquered wooden elements. Inside, an expertly carved and joined teak wood wheel sprouts gleaming orange nodules. This gesture is similar to that presented in *Transitions*, in which orange, shiny gulaganji seeds stand out against raw neem wood. The title of the sculpture, *Flame of the forest*, refers to the tree of the same name that grows in India (and elsewhere) that has orange and crimson blossoms and is considered sacred by Hindus.

Not only does the tree metaphorically evoke fire because of its intensely colourful flowers, but its wood is used in fire rituals in temples and homes; both ideas are seemingly the subject of Shettar's sculpture, as the orange teardrop shapes inside the wooden wheel suggest both flowers and flames. *Flame of the forest*, which is installed on the gallery floor, draws our attention downward, in contrast to the suspended and wall-bound works in the exhibition, providing the viewer with yet another sculptural experience.

The buoyant presence of *Sun-sneezers blow light bubbles*, 2007-08, follows Shettar's logic of suspending forms in space, except the forms have little volume when compared with *Transitions* or *Fire in the belly*. The work is inspired by the genetic propensity of some humans to sneeze when exposed to bright sunlight – yet another example of Shettar's interest in how natural light affects living organisms. The work was originally created for an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Shettar was struck by the sunlight animating the project gallery at ICA, where she was invited to show, and embarked on making a sculpture that embraced this given condition.² The sculpture comprises several parts.

(overleaf)
Sun-sneezers blow light bubbles 2007-08
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Heliotropes 2005-11 (detail)
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industrial perfection of surface and colour, the untreated acacia beneath is destined to crack over time, the paint flaking off where the wood opens itself up to the elements. Although this has yet to occur, it is Shetty's desire that it will. The bright green paint on the natural wood is an unlikely union, all the more accentuated by the object's eventual cracking. Suggesting at first glance the finish fetish objects of California Minimalism, *Fire in the belly* will ultimately be the opposite – an entropic work of art steeped in change rather than embodying a static, gleaming perfection. The title (and the colour of the sculpture) refers to the beacons of fluorescent green light that emanate from the abdomens of fireflies. *Fire in the belly's* suspended green forms elegantly suggest how we encounter fireflies in the darkness, not so much as insect bodies, but rather as light and colour in and of themselves.

While *Fire in the belly* explores the phenomenon of light radiating from within a living organism, other works investigate how sunlight prompts reflexes in living things from without. *Heliotropes*, 2005-11, is composed of limb-like structures made of vulcanised latex that conjure plant stalks with openings reminiscent of mouths. They seem to emerge from the wall with a purpose. The title of the work

expanding my vocabulary as an artist, [and] I was looking to suspend heavy wood and create an air of lightness. I was trying to float forms in thin air, at least virtually, using fishing line ... suspending heavy wood, each on a string by itself, created a dynamism to the whole composition. There is an element of chance in how you see the sculpture, in terms of how it positions itself in space according to movement of air in the space. Fusing gulaganji seeds into wood, I could create a contrast and texture that could create a sense of life.¹

In this statement, Shetty also raises an important idea that informs much of her work: the phenomenology of engaging with the sculptures. There is not one fixed point on which to focus one's gaze on the sculptures. The encounter one has with *Transitions*, and other works presented in the exhibition, changes according to the viewer's location and also in accordance with the movement of the work itself when we interact with it in the gallery, which generates gentle flows of air that cause the sculpture to move while we look.

Fire in the belly, 2007, consists of biomorphic shapes made from acacia wood, painted with automotive paint, and suspended from the ceiling. Despite a near

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