



Above: Terry Adkins, *Shenandoah*, 1998. Concrete, steel, rope, and silicone, 47 x 55.9 x 76.2 cm. Right and detail: Huma Bhabha, *We Come in Peace*, 2018. Bronze, 2 views of installation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

his component objects remain tied to their origins, to their jobs in the sphere of labor, and always refer back to their original function in some way. The viewer senses that these objects have philosophically crossed from one situation to another while maintaining their identity. For instance, wall-hung steel and wood ice saws, prime exemplars of this crossover effect, were used on a thick sheet of ice during the performance of *Firmament*, which was written for The Lone Wolf Recital Corps, a multidisciplinary collective founded by Adkins in 1986. (*Firmament* was part of a 2005 performance at the Bronx River Art Center during his exhibition, “Black Beethoven: Recital in Nine Dominions.”)

Native Son (Circus), reconstructed for this exhibition, consists of an array of cymbals placed in a semi-spherical pile on the floor. A mechanism, concealed under the bronze heap, strikes each cymbal at irregular intervals. In Adkins’s use, the cymbals partake in the crossover effect by concretely maintaining their identity without intention of transcending it. It is this process that takes the viewer somewhere beyond sculpture’s physical presence and into the domain that Adkins referred to as “essence.”

—Kay Whitney

NEW YORK

Huma Bhabha

Metropolitan Museum of Art

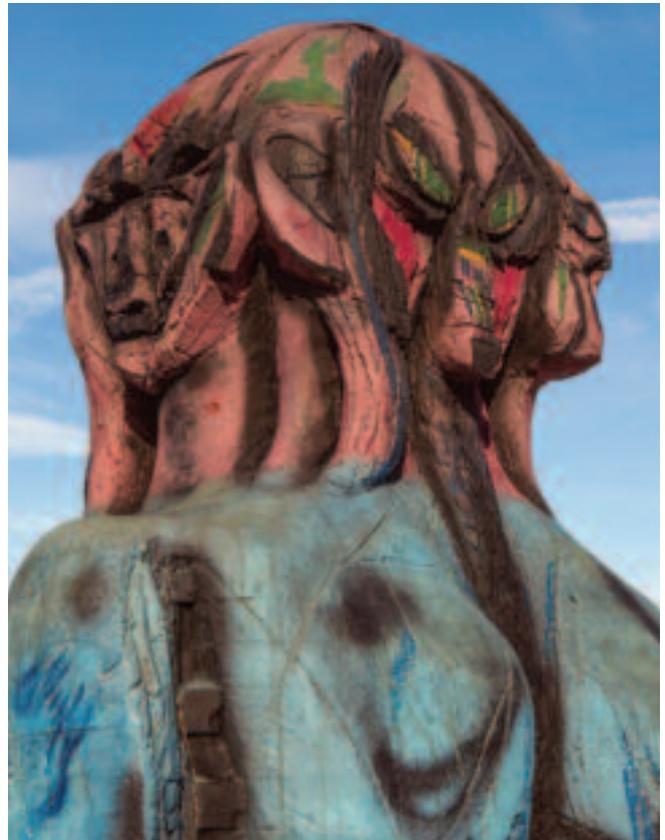
In *We Come in Peace*, Huma Bhabha’s Cantor Roof commission for the Met (on view through October 28, 2018), a monumental figure stands 12 feet tall, its five-sided head staring in all directions. The giant’s hands and feet, long hair, and big ears seem gender-neutral, but pointed breasts signal female and a big bulge below the waist could indicate male. The all-seeing one’s body is black from the hips down, turquoise up to the neck, and pinkish-gray on top. Its various markings include star-like scarification on the breasts, pink dots on the buttocks, scars up and down its back and arms, a five-sided blue star tattoo on its left hip, and colorful scratches on the legs and arms. The figure faces north as humans of all ages wander freely across the roof taking selfies.

A second figure, *Benaam* (Urdu for *no name*), cowers or bows before the giant. This prostrate creature has large human hands and a tail

of lumpy protuberances that, according to the exhibition catalogue, may be excrement. Almost completely covered by a black body bag, this abject being most closely resembles a human-like rat.

Cast in bronze from Styrofoam, wood, plastic, and cork, *We Come in Peace* alludes to numerous refer-

ences from art history, science fiction, and contemporary culture—so many, in fact, that a selective background reading list includes Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Arundhati Roy’s *Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy*, and Philip K. Dick’s *VALIS*. Bhabha’s title comes from the 1951 movie *The Day the*



Earth Stood Still in which a masked humanoid comes out of a spaceship to tell astonished Americans, “We have come to visit you in peace”; but the earthlings overreact and shoot the creature, whereupon a giant robot from the spaceship fires back at the attackers. Knowledge of the movie is not essential: we’re all familiar with over-reaction and the escalation of confrontation. Even if the giant is sincere, its reception may not be warm and cordial.

The relationship of this ambiguous message to contemporary life is complicated by further references. The catalogue reveals that the giant also draws inspiration from Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* and other sci-fi films; sculptures by Giacometti, Picasso, Dubuffet, and Rodin; the Buddhas of Bamiyan, Afghanistan, and India; and paintings by Georg Baselitz and Cy Twombly. At the Met, such polymath influences are reinforced by the collection, from the ancient stone monoliths in the lobby to works displayed throughout the galleries leading to the roof.

Although the relationship of Bhabha’s figures is not clear, *We Come in Peace* seems to be protecting the nameless one. In some religions and cultures, it is proper to bow to a leader, a direction, or a symbol. Perhaps this giant, with its all-pervasive hybridity, signals a future when difference, of whatever kind, will be accepted and honored. Or it may symbolize a dictator/monster using false historic narratives to gain power. Bhabha’s dramatic and thought-provoking work epitomizes a quality that a Met senior curator once told me he seeks: “I look for art I don’t yet fully understand.”

—Jan Garden Castro

NEW YORK

Ranjani Shettar

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Though Ranjani Shettar, who turned 40 last year, is a mid-career artist (at least by Western standards), her



work remains youthfully lyrical, and close to nature in ways that evade her closest American counterpart Sarah Sze, whose work is busier and more mechanical. Shettar’s impulse feels conservationist and ecologically oriented, but it also responds to the works of Sze and Teresita Fernández. Shettar’s use of materials in *Seven ponds and a few raindrops* (2017), her recent Met installation, is deliberately earthy, as captured in the descriptive title. Seven earth- and copper-colored amoeba-like forms, made from stainless steel covered in tamarind-stained muslin, hung from the ceiling. Constructed in two layers—the top perforated with open circles underlain by a flat, ground-like terrain—the ponds cast shifting shadows around the space. Leaf- or raindrop-like extensions made their way slightly beyond these

supports—lighter, more earth-colored attachments drawn out from the open upper level, and darker, cupped ovals moving outward from the solid planes beneath them. The title clearly orients any interpretation toward nature, but the work also establishes itself as a nonobjective sculpture. Like much of Shettar’s work, the forms fall somewhere between natural realism and abstract design.

Hung from a low ceiling, *Seven ponds* felt like something come from far away. And so it did. Unlike many foreign-born artists who show in New York, Shettar remains in India, close to her formal and personal origins. Most of her powerfully expressive works are organic, referencing a rural setting even when hung in mid-air and not particularly resembling landscape, as in *Seven*

Ranjani Shettar, *Seven ponds and a few raindrops*, 2017. Stainless steel, muslin, and tamarind dye, 2 views of installation.

ponds. Here, the installation not only balanced in open space, but also between modes of seeing. Contemporary sculpture consistently raids nature these days for both form and inspiration, to the point where such borrowing has become almost a cliché. Such is not the case, however, with Shettar’s work.

The detailing of *Seven ponds* is exquisite. The delicate imagery works toward an overall subtlety across the installation. The ponds are arranged in a descending semicircle, with the lowest set close to the wide entrance. The work is quietly lit within a dominating darkness. It becomes clear that the raindrops