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TO GIVE THE NEWS IMPARTIALLY, WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOR

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FINEARTS

Beverly Semmes makes blown-glass vessels, such as "Egg Basket," that are intended to be nonfunctional.

New York artist Beverly Semmes will be featured in a solo exhibition at Hunter Museum



'Starcraft'

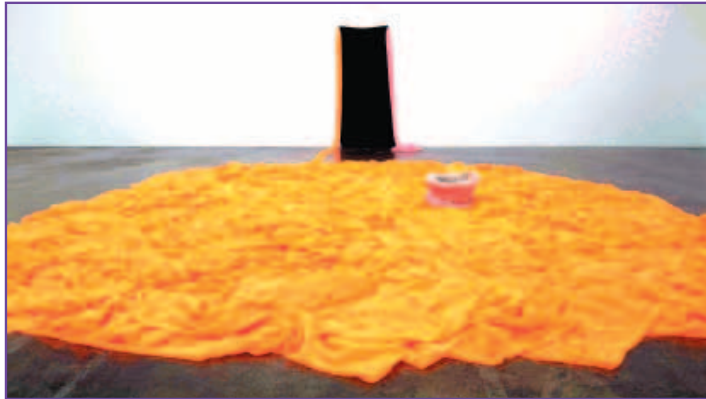
BY ANN NICHOLS
STAFF WRITER

Beginning May 15, visitors to the Hunter Museum of American Art can see sculptural dresses, photographs, collages, blown-glass vessels, ceramic pottery and a video installation by Beverly Semmes. The artist uses this variety of mediums to challenge the conventional definitions of craft and "women's work" by constructing nonfunctional items from traditional materials such as clay, fabric and glass.

"Treading the line between fantasy and reality, Semmes evokes visions of fairy tales through her lush dresses, distorted vessels and striking photographs," said Nandini Makrandi, curator of contemporary art for Hunter Museum. "All of the work is extremely tactile and brilliantly colored — from the luscious velvets in the fabric pieces to the thick clay in the ceramic 'sketch-pots.'"

The 52 pieces that will be in the show have been created since the 1990s. The focal point of Semmes' exhibit is her series of three dresses that range from 7 feet to 30 feet long. These large-scale silk and velvet dresses are "the mainstay of her work," according to Makrandi, and evolved from costumes she designed for her photographs and videos.

Throughout her career,



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

"Prairie Dress" is one of a series of three large-scale dresses that Semmes constructed for the exhibition.

Semmes has explored the themes of body and landscape, as well as contradictions — the beautiful versus the grotesque, the idea of absence and presence, and fetish and fascination.

In 1991, she began making ceramic and glass objects— typically functional items but in Semmes' hands, they were transformed into empty, nonfunctional, vessel-like forms. Assembling the dresses with these pottery and glass objects illustrates what Makrandi describes as the strength of the artist's work.

"What I see as the common thread is her ability to take materials and forms that have been made for centuries — dresses and pots — and push them in new directions," she said. "The intense

colors and sensual tactility of both dress forms and pots invite discussion of feminist imagery and desire. The works on display here investigate literally where the pot meets the dress."

Semmes, a resident of New York, grew up in Washington, D.C., and has ties to the South as her grandmother was a native of Chattanooga. She has exhibited in Denmark, Ireland and throughout the United States.

The exhibition continues through Oct. 23.

The museum, 10 Bluff View, is open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Friday, Saturday; noon-5 p.m. Wednesday, Sunday; and 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday. Call 267-0968.

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