

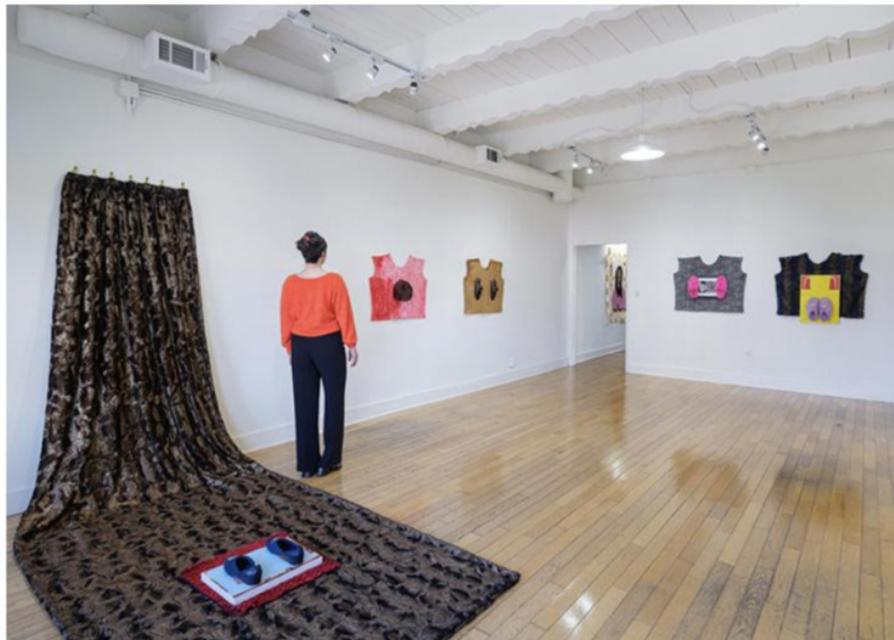
Melrod, George. "Beverly Semmes, 'Body Shop'," *Visual Art Source*, 24 February 2026.



Beverly Semmes, "Body Shop"
by George Melrod

Official Welcome, Los Angeles
Continuing through February 21, 2026

It's now been over thirty-five years since Beverly Semmes first emerged in New York as a trailblazer in the use of clothing as a sculptural material — and as metaphor. And she did so in a memorably big way, presenting giant grey coats with their arms connected in a loop; vast streaming dresses of indigo velvet and billowy pale blue organza which flowed off a wall as from an opened flood gate; expansive lakes of brilliant royal pink or blood orange velvet that pooled from a single gown.



Beverly Semmes, "Body Shop," installation view at Official Welcome, 2026. Foreground, "Duck Slippers."

All images courtesy of Official Welcome, Los Angeles. Photo: Evan Bedford

Blending issues of bodily representation and feminist themes with postmodern formalism and critiques of consumerism and gender roles, her approach was rooted in the exhilarating dynamic of the early 1990s. With their lavish textures and lush materiality, her works felt both saggy and sensual, an aesthetic stepdaughter of Eva Hesse and Meret Oppenheim. She also shared themes with Robert Gober in the form of her haunting bodily allusions; Charles Ray for her playful exaggerations of scale; and Janine Antoni with her repurposing of ostensibly feminine materials.

Beneath their seductive surfaces, the works were always cagey and pointed. Over the years, Semmes has organically expanded her practice to embrace such disparate mediums as ceramics, photography, video and performance, which have pushed her work beyond the realm of easy expectations. Her painting incorporates a vibrant hodgepodge of patterns and colors, while her fashion explorations with Carwash Collective paraded a funky patchwork aesthetic — more like a collaboration between Betsey Johnson and Jessica Stockholder than Christian Dior.



Beverly Semmes, "Fur & Bit," 2025, faux fur, canvas, slippers, epoxy, 28 x 34 x 5".
Photo: Evan Bedford.

A recent retrospective last fall at Tufts University (Semmes' alma mater) testified to the breadth of the artist's expansive oeuvre. As if in counterpoint, her current solo show, archly titled "Body Shop," flaunts her ability to condense her sprawling plus-sized visions to a compact scale. Works are created specifically to accommodate the gallery's limited square footage. Whatever they might lose in spectacle, these playful studies more than compensate for in intimacy, approachability, and sheer witty weirdness.



Beverly Semmes, "Two Legs, Two Pitchers, Two Shoes," 2025, faux fur, ink, acrylic over photograph printed on canvas, Vesace slippers, epoxy, 16 x 22 x 5". Photo: Chris Kendall.

"Body Shop" offers one larger work and eight mixed media wall pieces suggesting sleeveless bodices composed from fabric, painting, drawing, photos and notably, an array of women's slippers, amplifying the Cinderella symbolism flowing through the work. While her fabric fantasies have previously implied a consumerist critique, here it becomes overt, focused on the ideals of shopping for comfort, luxury, and style. A new persona adds up to a better you.

Despite their concision, the works glean freely from some of the artist's most iconic themes and strategies. Among them is the "FRP (Feminist Responsibility Project)," in which she attempted to negotiate a feminist response to pornography by painting over photos from old porn magazines, replacing the overt imagery with a subtler iconography that felt more acceptable to a feminist eye. While "correcting" male-oriented porn, the works remained open to the shared motives of pleasure, temptation, and consumption. And although oblique, the intimations of sex and luxury lining these new works add a sense of cheerful titillation.



Beverly Semmes, "Medusa," 2025, faux fur, canvas, painting on printed canvas, slippers, epoxy, 36 x 38 x 8". Photo: Evan Bedford.

"Fur and Bit" offers a pair of fur-lined Gucci slippers, with their little gold clasp, on a bodice of golden-brown faux fur, with its hints of upscale equine sophistication. As with all these works, it's pinned directly to the wall, an allusion to their origins as textiles, but the effect here is unnervingly sharp. The protruding slippers are placed roughly where a woman's breasts would be, as substitute symbols of gender-oriented comfort and desire. Mounted on the wall, the work feels reverential, but laid on a floor it could be a mistaken for a throw rug.

The most opulent piece, "Two Legs, Two Pitchers, Two Shoes," sets a pair of ornate Versace slippers atop a small painting melding curtains, patterns, and a woman's splayed legs in knee boots — a motif repeated from her "FRP" series — atop a chartreuse faux fur bodice. The gold and black circular pattern of the pricey slippers suggests nipples, making it her sexiest evocation of foot-focused fetishism. Here it's the slippers that you're tempted to slide into.



Beverly Semmes, "Hat," 2025, velvet, canvas, fur, hat, stuffing, 27 1/2 x 34 x 5". Photo: Evan Bedford.

Several works highlight her painterly patterning. "Medusa" sets a pair of fuzzy lavender slippers on a small rectangular painting with splayed legs, while the gray faux fur bodice is adorned with vertical blue stripes. "Curly" sets bright pink Balenciagas atop a scumbled black line drawing and a gray faux fur bodice with an oddly similar look. "Checkers" conjures retro-styled domesticity with plain blue slippers set with glittery pale green discs, atop a black-and-white checked bodice.

"Flowers and Dots," while lacking slippers, resembles a gauzy Impressionist field of florid green and carmine, bedecked with numerous sewn pink flowers and circles, imbuing her decorative patterns with what could be a profusion of nipples or uneasy allusions to bodily injury. In "Hat," a round fur hat occupies the center of a pink velvet bodice; despite its assertive symmetry and luxuriousness, it seems mole-like and out of place.





Beverly Semmes, "Flowers and Dots," 2025, velvet and polyester, 30 1/2 x 36 x 1/4".
Photo: Evan Bedford.

Harking back to Semmes' larger works, "Duck Slippers" (originally part of a single installation with "Hat"), mounts a plush skirt-like curtain of fabric off the wall, so it spills across the floor. A peculiar mud-brown pattern suggesting hoof prints, it glows lustrous gold in the refracted afternoon sunlight. Its base serves as a place mat for a pair of old-timey men's slippers depicting mallard ducks. In this case, the slippers are actually in position to be worn, not just ogled, while the plush brown plume suggests a magic carpet pathway ascending to another realm, albeit in style both strange and ironic.

Given how renowned Semmes is for her large-scale work, it's a treat to be able to experience her works in a format that's so playful and intimate. Although eclectic and challenging, they're also undeniably inviting: enticing enough to rope you in and mischievous enough to make you puzzle over them. Merging body and consumer fetishism with a healthy dose of surrealistic pillow talk, her obscure objects of desire continue to fascinate, tantalizing with their quirky visions of class, comfort and couture. Pinned to the wall in tactile immediacy, they remain at once saucy and seductive and forever out of reach.



George Melrod has written hundreds of articles on contemporary art and culture for such publications as ARTnews, Art in America, World Art, American Ceramics, Details, and Vogue, among others. In the 1990s, he was the New York critic for Sculpture magazine, and wrote a regular contemporary art column for Art & Antiques, for whom he worked as a Contributing Editor. A native New Yorker, he moved to LA in 1998, and has since contributed to websites such as artcritical and artillery. From 2007-2017 he served as editor-in-chief of art ltd. magazine.