

Staff, "Beverly Semmes Exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art", IRISH MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, October 1996.

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Beverly Semmes Exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art

The first one-person exhibition in Ireland of the work of the American sculptor Beverly Semmes opens to the public at the Irish Museum of Modern Art on Wednesday 2 October. Beverly Semmes: New and Recent Sculpture comprises 10 of Semmes's characteristically large, dramatic clothing pieces, all created in the last four years, and 10 earlier photoworks of smaller wearable garments.

Beverly Semmes's monumental sculptures and her smaller fabric creations are a delightful and provocative fusion of personal fantasy and social commentary. They explore the power of clothing and its ability to influence, and even define the self - who we think we are, how we choose to represent ourselves, and how we are seen and defined. The strangely distorted bodices and elongated arms of Semmes's dresses, with their profusion of colours and fabrics, present rich psychological terrain. Her exaggeration of clothing forms to surreal extremes, result in sculptural creations that reflect a concern, shared by many contemporary artists, with the politics and psychology of identity.

Scarlett, 1994 is a typically striking work, a 71/2 foot long 'dress' of scarlet crushed velvet with skirt and arms flowing down the gallery wall and spilling luxuriantly onto the floor. In Green Braided Dress, 1992 the collar and shoulders are of a normal, though greatly enlarged, dress, which is then contorted into three pairs of plaits stretching to the ground. Two new works have been made especially for this exhibition. One, Twister, 1996 is one of the first works in which a kinetic element is introduced. In all of the larger, more recent works the human figure is absent - but made all the more visible by its very invisibility. This 'presence of absence' resonates throughout Beverly Semmes's work with both dramatic and telling effect.

In contrast, the small scale photoworks and film stills each depict a costumed figure, frequently in a landscape with the shapes and textures of their costumes mimicking their surroundings. Figure in the Purple Velvet Bathrobe and Cloud Hat, 1991 depicts a figure standing on a sandy point overlooking the ocean. Her voluminous, purple robe falls in thick folds, like a waterfall or a stream that will lead to the ocean below, while her cloudlike hat is barely distinguishable from the sky.

Born in Washington, DC, Beverly Semmes lives and works in New York City. Solo exhibitions include shows at the Sculpture Centre, New York, ICA, Philadelphia, Camden Arts Centre, London, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, DC, She has shown in many group exhibitions in the US and in Dusseldorf, London, Nova Scotia and Ontario. Her Four Purple Velvet Bathrobes was one of the most memorable works in IMMA's From Beyond the Pale season in 1994-95.

Beverly Semmes: New and Recent Sculpture continues until 16 February 1997.