

Glueck, Grace, "Art In Review: Beverly Semmes", THE NEW YORK TIMES, 8 November 1996.

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

Art in Review

By Grace Glueck

Beverly Semmes
'She Moves'
Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris
120 Park Avenue, at 42d Street
Through Jan. 4

'Big Silver'
Michael Klein Gallery
40 Wooster Street, SoHo
Through Nov. 30

That department store euphemism "for the larger woman" takes on new dimension when applied to the garments constructed by Beverly Semmes. Eerily, they also move. At the Whitney Museum at Philip Morris, Ms. Semmes's plain but truly monumental frock of yellow rubber, hung in a yellow boxlike structure 10 feet high, vibrates relentlessly with the aid of a motorized clothes hanger. As the dress dances, its yards and yards of sleeves snake busily around the red-carpeted floor.

At the Michael Klein Gallery, there's a shift of scene. The protagonist here is a mountainous dress, made of silver lame-like material and hooked to a motorized pulley that lets it rise and fall at a majestic pace. At its high point of 12 feet, you can see it's a dress; as it falls, it collapses into a silvery sea of its own material (at least 100 yards), losing its dress form to that of a seascape.

By way of accent, Ms. Semmes has placed around the dress several of her large, primitive-looking ceramic vessels, roughly textured and glazed in lucent whites and pinks. Is she suggesting that the dress, originally commissioned by the Smith College Art Museum for a Semmes show there, is also a container, an enhancement for the body that's poured into it?

Because of their size, the dresses are funny objects, like garments made for the fat lady of the circus. But, like any everyday object taken out of context and gigantized, they also carry a suggestion of menace, not least because they serve as body surrogates. In any case, Ms. Semmes's use of fabric to create sculptural presence is impressive. GRACE GLUECK