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“Beverly Semmes: Starcraft” exhibition fills Eleanor D. Wilson Museum at Hollins



STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS | The Roanoke Times. Photo taken October 3, 2012.
"Olga," 2007 by Beverly Semmes

New York-based artist Beverly Semmes re-imagines dresses as landscapes. Or at least that’s one way to interpret the giant dresses she creates that hang on gallery walls, their trains spilling out to cover large swaths of floor. Her traveling exhibition, “Beverly Semmes: Starcraft,” fills all three galleries of the Eleanor D. Wilson Museum at Hollins University. The show also includes photography, video, pottery and glassware creations.

Museum director Amy Moorefield said that when she was a student at Virginia Commonwealth University in the 1990s, she saw an exhibition of Semmes’ work at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. “It left an indelible impression.”

That VMFA exhibition was curated by Margo Crutchfield, who was hired in June as the curator-at-large for the \$94 million Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech, scheduled to open in 2013. On Nov. 29, Crutchfield will give a lecture at Hollins about working with Semmes.

Unlike some other artists who focus on women’s clothing or craft items, Semmes’ interests lie less in making political statements and more in taking things considered everyday objects and presenting them as sculpture.

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STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS | The Roanoke Times.
Photo taken October 3, 2012 Beverly Semmes
photograph, "Figure on the Ground" 1998

“Historically these have been classified as women’s work or what women would wear,” said Moorefield. Though Semmes’ work does touch on matters of gender and identity, Moorefield said, “I think she’s more interested in landscape and how objects take up space.”

Creating the dresses on a scale so large that they can’t possibly be worn is part of what requires the viewer to consider them as art rather than clothes.