

ART

To sculptor, her human figures portray universal feelings

DAN TRANBERG

Special to The Plain Dealer

Contessa Gallery in Legacy Village is known for showcasing works by big-name artists of the past, from Rembrandt to Picasso. But co-owners Steve Hartman and Karen Tscherne also are passionate about modern-day masters, many of whom are far from household names.

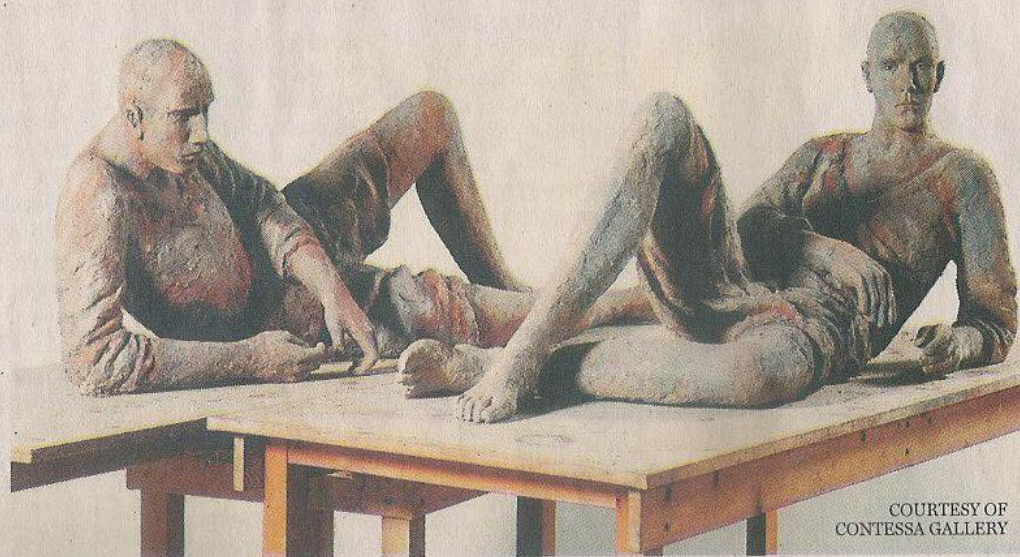
The newest addition to Contessa's expanding roster of distinguished living artists is acclaimed Dutch sculptor Hanneke Beaumont, who will be spotlighted in a solo exhibition of new work opening Friday. The artist, who divides her time between her studios in Brussels and Pietra Santa, Italy, will make her first trip to Cleveland next weekend.

Beaumont has been exhibiting extensively in Europe since her first solo show in 1983 in Brussels. She made her American debut in 1997 with a solo show in New York.

Her work often is monumental in scale, consisting of one or more human figures made from terra-cotta clay or cast in bronze or iron. They are sometimes paired with sparse geometric steel forms.

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Hanneke Beaumont has said that she is "very much a clay person," a persuasion apparent in the bold way the sculptor carves her forms (such as "Terracotta 78 & 82"), leaving their surfaces rough and unrefined.



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PREVIEW

Contessa Gallery

What: "Hanneke Beaumont: New Works," a solo exhibition by the noted Dutch sculptor.

When: Opens with receptions from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Artist talk both nights at 7:30. Runs through Sunday, June 22.

Where: 24667 Cedar Road, Legacy Village, Lyndhurst.

Admission: Free but reservations requested for receptions. Call 216-382-7800, or go to www.contessa-gallery.com.

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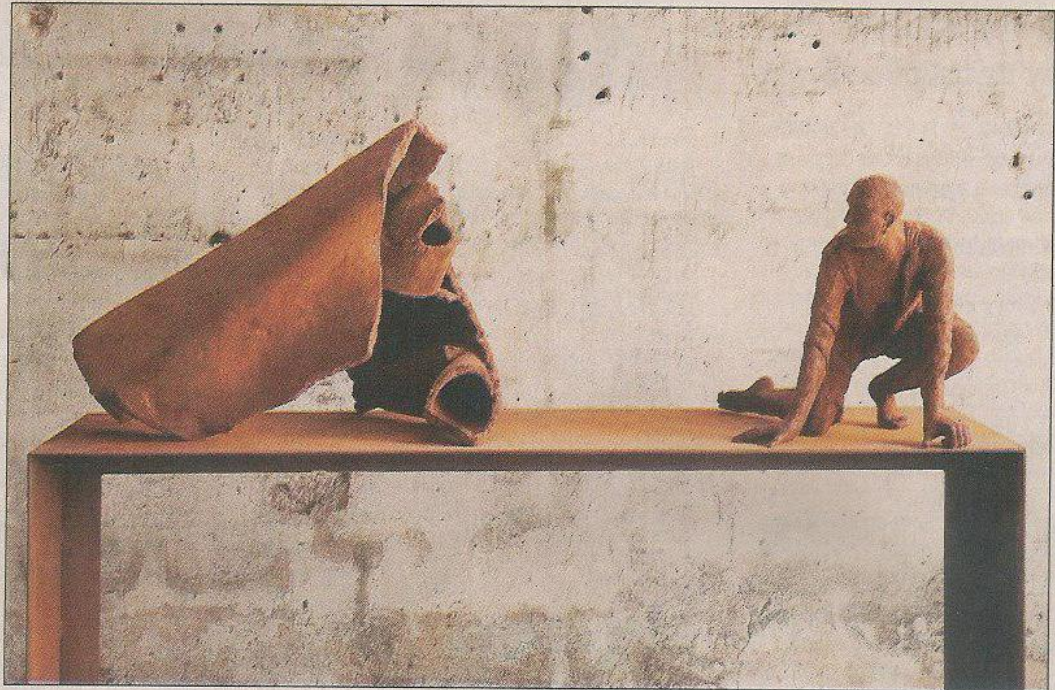
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PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF CONTESSA GALLERY

Dutch sculptor Hanneke Beaumont's "Cast Iron #45" will be part of her one-person exhibit opening this week at Contessa Gallery in Legacy Village in Lyndhurst. It is her only American show of new work this year, according to Contessa co-owner Steve Hartman.

ART

FROM E1

Human figures portray universal feelings

Contessa first featured her work about a year ago in a group exhibition called "The Art of the Garden" and has since brought her sculptures to major international art expositions, including Art Miami in December and this year's Los Angeles Art Show.

Now, Contessa is deepening its commitment to Beaumont. "Ours is the one and only U.S. show of her work this year," Hartman said.

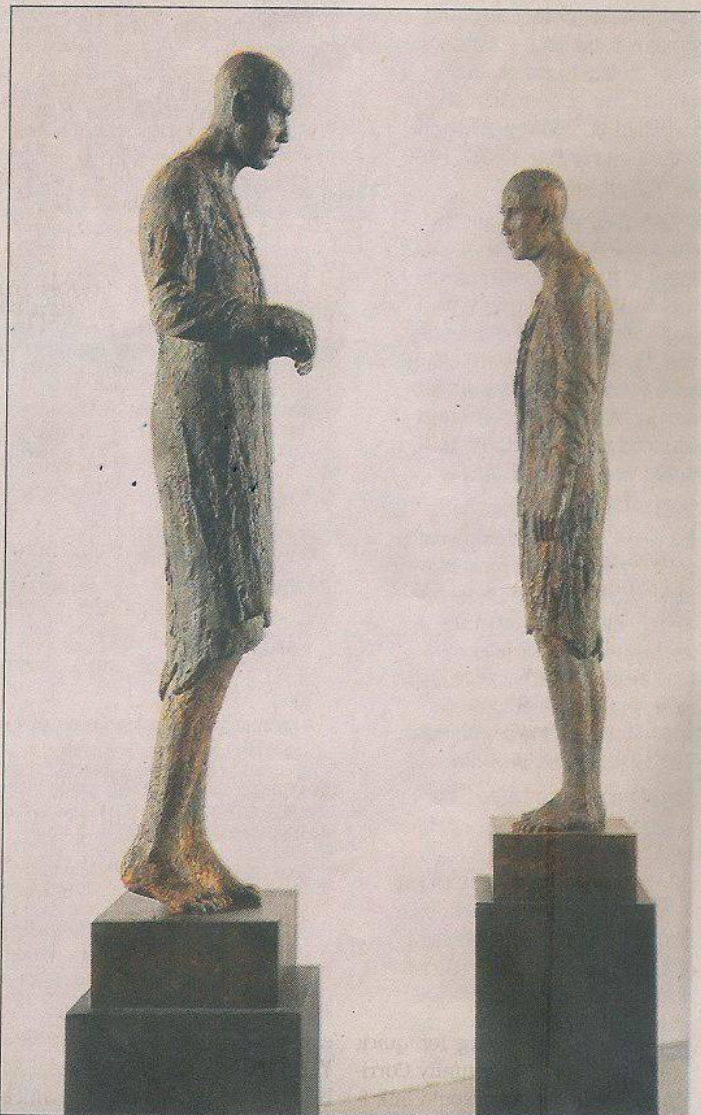
The exhibit will include clay, bronze and cast-iron sculptures as well as a selection of Beaumont's drawings. Prices begin at about \$6,000 for small sculptures and top off at around \$175,000 for large-scale works.

Speaking by phone from Europe, Beaumont said that long ago she used to work from live models but soon changed her approach.

"I stepped away from working with a model because it was too academic. I wanted to put into the work what I feel," she said. "I wanted to express what happens within humans."

Though many of her haunting figures have a lifelike presence, they are not about anatomical correctness. The ideas they communicate often are expressed through a combination of their posture and their subtle facial expressions.

"Some people have said they have blank stares, but I don't think



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"Some people have said they have blank stares, but I don't think they do," Beaumont said. "To me, they are all different, like they are all from one big family."

The similarities among her figures, which are hairless and draped in generic, gownlike garments, often make them appear to be of indeterminate gender.

About that perceived androgyny, Beaumont said, "I always made them that way before even thinking about it. It just came that way, and then it became fashionable or trendy.

"But for me it came automatically. They are universal human beings. Sometimes they are more male or more female, but it's not about that. It's about universal human feelings, like courage or melancholy."

Beaumont's involvement with her materials is arguably as impor-

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tant as the way she conceives her figures.

"I am very much a clay person," she said. That fact is apparent in the bold manner in which she carves her forms, leaving their surfaces rough and unrefined.

Mute and motionless as her figures appear, her sculptures never are really static.

"I let the material speak," she said.

While Beaumont remains far better known in Europe than in the United States, Hartman is determined to broaden her American audience, adding, "I think she is one of the greats of our time."

Tranberg is an artist and writer living in Cleveland.

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