

Grand Rapids Ballet: Debuts 'Four Temperaments'. PAGE B2

CONNECTED DISCONNECTED

Contemporary Dutch sculptor comes to Meijer Gardens

BY JEFFREY KACZMARCZYK
JKACZMARCZYK@MLIVE.COM

GRAND RAPIDS — When you think of great Dutch artists, you think of Van Gogh, Vermeer or Rembrandt.

All painters, all men.

Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park this week opens an exhibition by Hanneke Beaumont who is neither.

Work by the contemporary Dutch sculptor, who focuses on the human figure, will be seen in "Connected and Disconnected: The Sculpture of Hanneke Beaumont," opening Friday.

"Although the history of Dutch art is dominated by painting and painters, Beaumont is one of the most celebrated Dutch sculptors working today," said Joseph Becherer, vice president and chief curator of sculpture at Meijer Gardens.

In 2007, a large bronze by Beaumont, "Stepping Forward," was installed permanently in front of the headquarters of the European Council of Ministers in Brussels. Her work has been part of several

curated by Becherer explores Beaumont's command of the human figure, representing a universal type, neither male nor female.

"As a figurative artist, Beaumont has created a figurative type utilizing techniques that combine to suggest psychological penetration," Becherer said. "The portrayed mood of her evocative works is moving and memorable."

The exhibition that runs through April 28 includes rarely exhibited large-scale terra cotta sculpture from early in her career to recently completely and never-before-shown cast works arriving straight from her foundry in Italy.

Most of the work will be displayed in the galleries. One sculpture will be installed in the Lena Meijer Tropical Conservatory.

As a sculptor, Beaumont describes herself as a "clay person."

"What I express is the fragility of human experience," she said. "Clay is very fragile. Unless you fire it, it can dissolve. It would dry and slowly fall apart. Or if you set it in the rain, it would dissolve."

She also prefers to leave most of her work untitled.

"I liked that you can touch it and form it. It's more physical. You can feel it," she said. "It's very present. Once it's there, it's there."

She can't say why so few Dutch artists have had a similar preference for sculpture.

"I wouldn't have an explanation for it," she said. "The tradition of painting, has been very strong in Holland and Flanders."

During the country's "Golden Age of Painting," during the 17th century, there were some well-known, Dutch sculptors.

"They went abroad," she said with a laugh.

Beaumont, who lives in Brussels and in Pietrasanta, Italy, where her works are cast, will be in West Michigan to discuss her art with Meijer Gardens' members at an exclusive event.

She said she's impressed with the collection and grounds of Meijer Gardens.

"It's very international and very contemporary," she said. "It's becoming an important place. It has its spot among the important places."

She also was pleasantly surprised to discover West Michigan's



Sculptor Hanneke Beaumont works on a piece.

visited last year.

"It was very nice to see Dutch names. To me it looked very familiar," she said. "A lot of people I met still were speaking some Dutch. It was nice."

IF YOU GO

'Connected and Disconnected: The Sculpture of Hanneke Beaumont'

Where: Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, 1000 E. Beltline Ave. NE

When: Friday-April 28

Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays (until 9 p.m. Tuesdays only);

11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sundays.

Admission: \$12 adults, \$9 seniors/students, \$6 ages 5-13, \$4 ages 3-4, free for ages 2 and younger.

Info: Call 957-1580 or go online to meijergardens.org

"Terracotta # 29," by Dutch sculptor Hanneke Beaumont.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



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In 2007, a large bronze by Beaumont, "Stepping Forward," was installed permanently in front of the headquarters of the European Council of Ministers in Brussels. Her work has been part of several international expositions.

Beaumont's work has been seen frequently in the United States in the past decade, and two of her works, titled "Number 25" and "Number 26," are part of the permanent collection of Meijer Garden's Sculpture Park.

But this is Beaumont's first major retrospective in the U.S.

"I certainly think it's the most important place that I've brought so many works together," she said.

The exhibition

curated by Becherer explores Beaumont's command of the human figure, representing a universal type, neither male nor female.

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She also prefers to leave most of her work untitled.

"When you have a title, you pretty much feel that forces you to think in a direction. If you leave it neutral, they will interpret it in their way," she said. "I like it when people feel free to interpret a sculpture."

Despite the rich tradition of Dutch painting, Beaumont said she always preferred working in three-dimensional art.

"I liked that you can touch it and form it. It's more physical. You can feel it," she said. "It's very present. Once it's there, it's there."

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She also was pleasantly surprised to discover West Michigan's Dutch heritage, which she was unaware of the first time she

visited last year.

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