

## International art exhibit comes to Hickory Israeli sculptor brings one-woman show to art museum



Cole Boggs, 4, and Henry Nichols, 4, of Hickory, listen to the sound of 'The Softness of Iron' exhibit by Israeli artist Orna Ben-Ami at the Hickory Museum of Art.

Robert C. Reed | 05 February 2009

HICKORY - Visitors to the Hickory Museum of Art's "Softness of Iron" exhibition will find themselves in a hall filled with familiar items that have been re-imagined and forged of iron.

Thin, cold sheets of iron were bent and welded to form the two ruggedly delicate wine glasses resting on a rough-hewn linen tablecloth. In the far end of the room, a welded quilt completely covers the form of a homeless person lying on a park bench.

The sculptor, Orna Ben-Ami said she created the figure on the bench for a joint Arab-Israeli exhibition whose theme was "Open House." Many of the other entrants created more traditionally domestic scenes, but Ben-Ami tends to avoid standard representations, opting instead to create works that convey a sense of whimsy and lend themselves to a variety of interpretations.

"I don't do peace doves and kitschy things," Ben-Ami said with a smile.

Her specialty is reinterpreting familiar objects by presenting them in uniquely expressive forms. She does not sculpt people; she creates objects as evidence of the people they symbolize.

She said her goal is to represent personal truth and experience in forms and objects that allow observers to arrive at their own interpretations through their own experiences. "I enjoy it when they see their own story — that's what excites me the most," Ben-Ami said.

Since arriving Monday in Hickory from her home in Israel, Ben-Ami has interacted with Hickory residents and watched them react to her work. In that time, she has spoken to Hickory and Catawba County schools' art teachers.

Bringing Ben-Ami's work to Hickory was an easy choice for Hickory Museum of Art's Executive Director Lise Swensson. "I saw her work and I thought, 'Wow — this would be great,'" Swensson said.

Although it wasn't easy and it took the coordinated efforts of a lot of people to make it happen, Swensson was able to bring an internationally acclaimed sculptor's work to Hickory without charging admission.

International Arts & Artists was able to put this exhibition together with the assistance of the government of Israel. This project has been supported by the Unifour Foundation and the United Arts Council of Catawba County through the North Carolina Arts Council, with funding from the state of North Carolina and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The 29-sculpture exhibit opened Jan. 10 and will run through April 10.