

SOUTH BOSTON

# Her work is twisted — and admired

## Artist's talent in balloon sculptures bursts through

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Naomi Greenfield's balloons have gotten her face-to-face kudos from Paul McCartney, a pass to the Democratic National Convention, and a spot on NBC's "Today" show.

And when the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston opened its new South Boston Waterfront home last month, her balloons were part of an exhibit there, too.

Your typical party-sword balloon artist, she's not.

Last Sunday, the 28-year-old Somerville resident spent much of the day creating a 5-foot rendition of Marilyn Monroe — wearing braces — for a bat mitzvah. Armed with a fistful of colored balloons, Greenfield explained the process of creating and assembling the inflated icon.

"First I did the feet, then the body, the head and then the dress, which was made in four different pieces," she said.

A Newton South High School graduate, Greenfield will return to her native city Feb. 10 to teach a class in balloon twisting for both children and adults at Newton North High.

Greenfield, an associate producer at FableVision Inc., an animation and interactive design studio on Congress Street in Boston, said she started "twisting balloons" at the age of 13 in a determined effort to combat a fear of bursting balloons. She faced her latex demon head-on and learned to create the basics, like dogs and flowers.

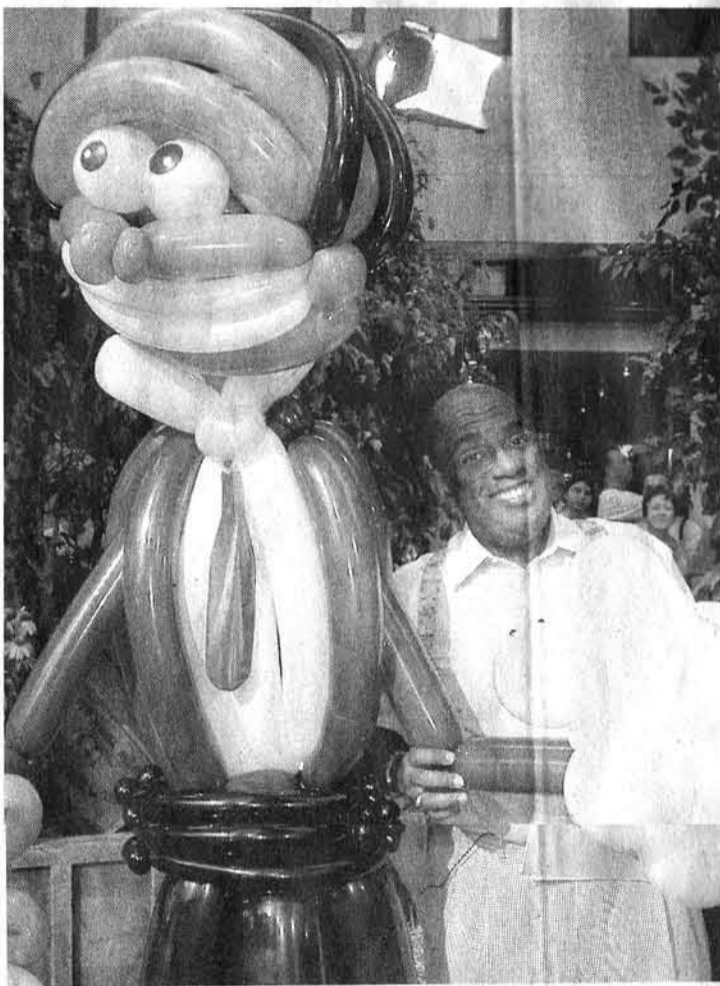
It wasn't until 2002 that things began to get serious. She was living and working in New York, and on a slow day surfing the Internet she came across "Twist and Shout," a balloon-twisting convention that was being held in Peabody.

With the click of the mouse, Greenfield entered an entire subculture.

"I figured I'd go back to Boston, see my family and friends, and check out the convention, because it was the weirdest thing I'd ever heard of," she said.

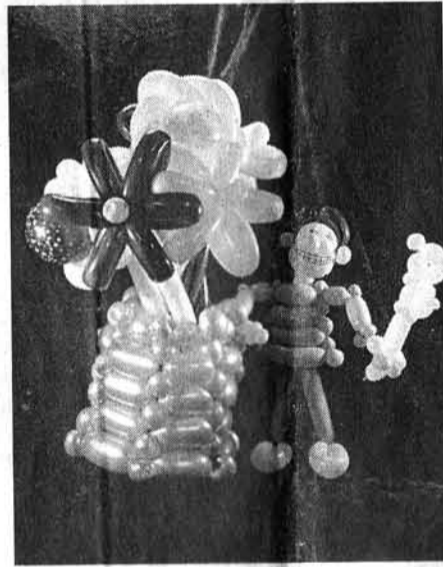
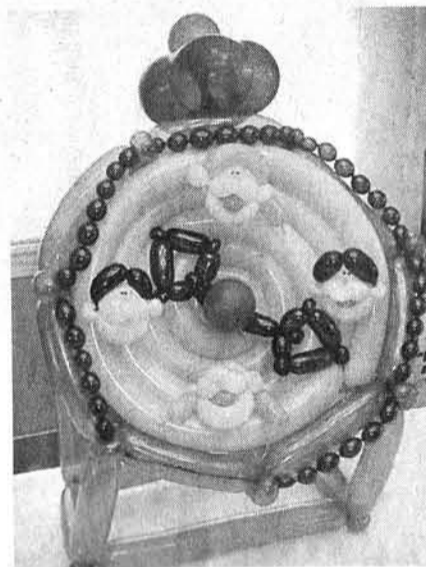
After meeting the people proficient in building the airy creations, she thought such conventions would make a great documentary.

Within a year, she was follow-



INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART/BOSTON

A lightjet print by Jane D. Marsching on display at the Institute of Contemporary Art puts the balloon artist in a virtual Arctic landscape creating an Eskimo boat, while (at left) NBC-TV weatherman Al Roker snuggles up to an air-filled likeness created by Naomi Greenfield.



Among Greenfield's many creations are a clock, dentist, dancer, and an oversized Paul McCartney she created for his dressing room at the Super Bowl in 2005.

ing a trail of balloon conventions that took her and film partner Sara Taksler from Burlington to Austin, Texas, to St. Louis.

The result — "TWISTED: A Balloonumentary," narrated by Jon Stewart of "The Daily Show" — has been submitted to a number of film festivals throughout the country, Greenfield said.

Many of the people in the film told Greenfield they got into balloon-twisting after having lost their job; the craft enabled them to make some money while doing something fun and happy. When Greenfield found herself out of work she opted to take their advice. She set up a website and began advertising.

Her success, well, ballooned. "I say yes to a lot of things be-

cause I like new experiences," said Greenfield, so when she received an e-mail from artist Jane D. Marsching asking her to build an 8-foot-long "umiak," or Eskimo boat, she accepted the challenge.

Marsching explained that her photographic exhibition, called "Arctic Then, 2006," would use scientific models of Arctic Circle terrains as the basis for virtual landscapes that include vaudevillian performers performing feats of wonder.

Marsching's work, including a 3D image featuring Greenfield's

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NAOMI GREENFIELD  
Balloon artist, on accepting challenging projects

creation, will be at the ICA through March 11.

One of Greenfield's first experiences with major venues came in 2004, when she wanted to get onto the floor of the Democratic National Convention in Boston on the night John Kerry was giving his acceptance speech. Desperate for a ticket, she made a button that said "Will Twist Balloons for Floor Pass," went outside the FleetCenter (now the TD Banknorth Garden) and started making balloon animals.

"I was making donkeys and

red, white and blue hats when this guy came out, looked at me and asked if I was serious. When I told him yes he handed his over and said, 'You're really dedicated.'"

Last summer, when NBC was looking for someone who made balloon animals, Greenfield got the call.

The "Today" show flew her to New York and asked her to build a sculpture of weatherman Al Roker. Greenfield was up to the challenge and after eight hours produced an 8-foot-tall likeness.

"The next morning they sent a limo to pick us up. It filled the 14-person car."

Greenfield's moment with Paul McCartney came in 2005, while she was working as a production assistant at the Super Bowl and

the former Beatle was headlining the halftime show.

"My producer knew I made balloon sculptures and told me if I wanted I could make one for his dressing room," said Greenfield. She made a large McCartney playing a guitar, and was called into his dressing-room trailer for a personal thanks.

"Look at that! It's brilliant!" she recalls McCartney saying.

To see more of Naomi Greenfield's work and view a clip of her "Today" show appearance, go to [Redballooncompany.com](http://Redballooncompany.com). To view a trailer of "TWISTED: A Balloonumentary" go to [eliotlives.com](http://eliotlives.com). For details on her Newton class, visit [newton-communityed.org](http://newton-communityed.org).

**CATCH THE BALLOONS**  
Check out a photo gallery and links to video shows at [boston.com/globe/cityweekly](http://boston.com/globe/cityweekly)