DIANE SIMPSON

Diane Simpson's enigmatic constructions exist in an ambiguous space that is neither totally sculptural nor totally flat. These hybrid images are mythical structures transmuted from Simpson's visual data bank of vernacular structures. Their apparent rational form gives these mysterious, unknown objects a sensibility their oddity denies. This sense of involved dichotomies at play is primary to the evolution of Simpson's constructions.

Her structures (made either of triple-ply corrugated board or, more recently, acid-free archival board) appear to be drawings that have transformed into objects. More precisely, they are drawn forms literally extracted from the two-dimensional plane yet retaining reference to their flat matrix even when they have become involved with the "real," literal space of the third dimension. Often her pieces seem to be emerging from the wall; if her condensed planes are self-containedly freestanding, they echo or reach back to their initial flat environment rather than looking outward toward an expansive volume. They are sculptural drawings, and in this sense are visually amphibian, coexisting in two spheres. They are "sculptural" forms that could only have been perceived with a "painter's eye."

This eye, in Simpson's case, is visually nurtured by the pre-Renaissance isometric perspective of medieval art and, most particularly, the slant perspective of Japanese scroll paintings and Persian miniatures. This uptilted perspective of oblique angles dictates her perception of form and is responsible for the shallow space of her pieces. Her constructions, which are primarily concerned with frontality even when they are freestanding, are dimensional isometric drawings conceived with a front and back more than in the round. The sense of "roundness" in her pieces is more illusory than real. This helps explain the initial essential disorientation of space that transfers the viewer into a realm where these peculiar structures of eccentric image take on a serene surreal energy.

Coinciding with Simpson's "painter's" view of space and plane is the integration of drawing in her work. This drawing either reiterates the structural elements of the piece or the structure of the material itself. Incorporating the textural motif of the sawed corrugated furrows that are exposed at the edges of the planes as a drawn outline of the structure, Simpson also rubs the entire surface of the piece with wax crayon or Prisma pencil, giving a faint coloration; but, more essential, in the process she exposes the continuous line of the underneath ribbing of the corrugation so that this lin- becomes an integral portion of the structure. Elsewhere actual structural planes will be contradicted by or incorporated with illusory, drawn planes. This obsessive focus on drawing plus the nature of the material itself reiterates the inherent ambiguity in each piece. The touch of drawing and the material itself combine to establish a general sense of approachability and vulnerability in her work at the same time the clarity of form evokes an impersonal remoteness.

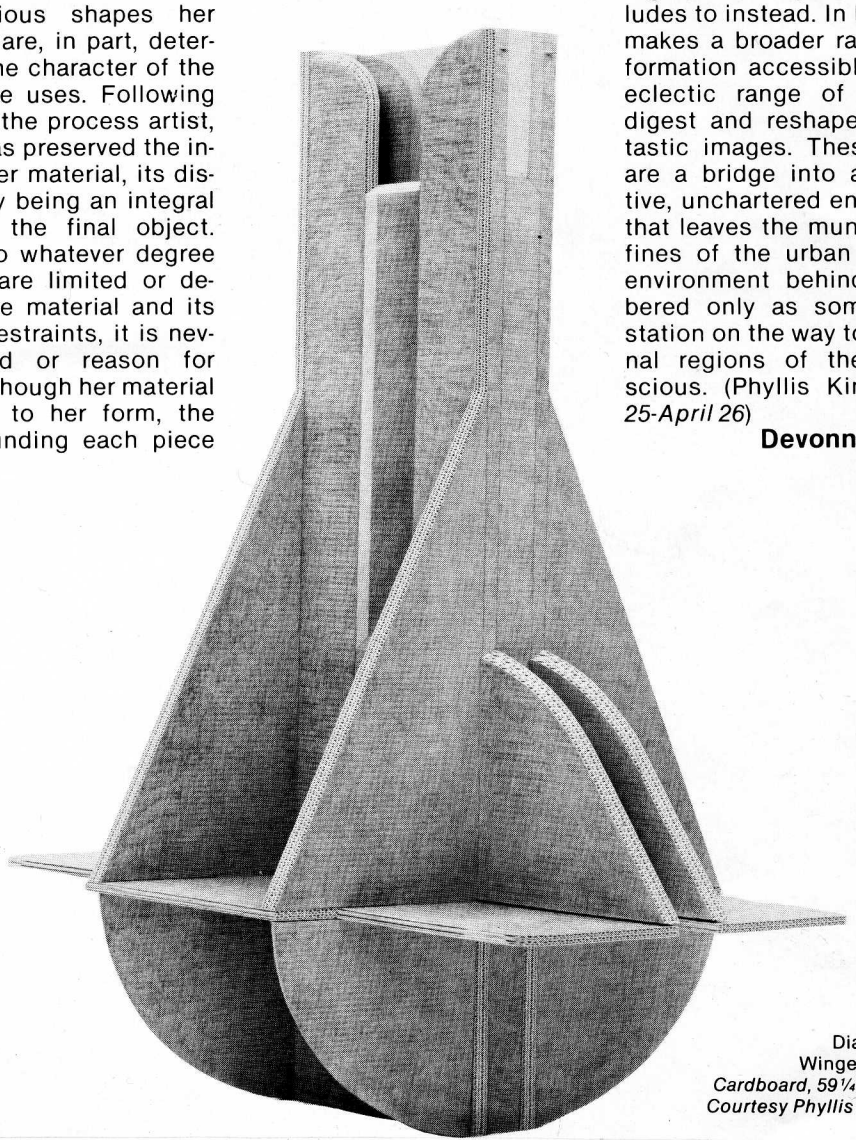
The curious shapes her forms take are, in part, determined by the character of the material she uses. Following the lead of the process artist, Simpson has preserved the integrity of her material, its distinct quality being an integral portion of the final object. However, to whatever degree her forms are limited or defined by the material and its structural restraints, it is never the end or reason for the piece. Though her material is intrinsic to her form, the idea surrounding each piece is a transmutation of an actual, observed, usually man-made, object through metamorphosis. Her touchstone is the real world, but through intuitive transformations she leaves this real matrix and enters into a subconscious realm that evolves her art and life data into unique formal amalgams. These objects seem oddly rational rather than emotionally curious—they make the inexplicable seem understandable.

If the art influences that describe how Simpson presents her art are eclectic, the sources that give rise to her images are diverse. They are primarily based on man-made objects and solidly influenced by the urban industrial environment rather than nature. Though she is affected by actual objects in real settings, one of the primary means of inspiration has been the photographs of these objects. This acceptance of the photographic image as the matrix for her objects helps explain her natural proclivity for flattening three-dimensional forms. Quite often, ideas for pieces are provoked by photographs in catalogues or manuals, or by photos of old industrial or vernacular objects and structures—kilns, silos, carriages, radiators.

Her pieces, which often evoke the sense of being inhabitable structures or architectural fragments, are not really specifically inspired by "high" architecture or buildings per se. If she refers to man-made objects, it is to those that are utilitarian, to those buildings or structures that have not felt the impact of an architect, that were evolved, like her own constructions, out of an intuitive solution to a structural or functional need.

In keeping with her inclination to flatten objects, portions of buiding facades are often more interesting to her than entire structures. Though she refers to the "real" world for her inspiration, it is often the "real" world of the photographic image that she alludes to instead. In her case it makes a broader range of information accessible, a more eclectic range of forms to digest and reshape into fantastic images. These images are a bridge into a speculative, unchartered environment that leaves the mundane confines of the urban industrial environment behind, remembered only as some remote station on the way to the internal regions of the subconscious. (Phyllis Kind, *March 25-April 26*)

Devonna Pieszak



Diane Simpson,
Winged Biwa, 1979.
Cardboard, 59¼ x 48 x 17½".
Courtesy Phyllis Kind Gallery.