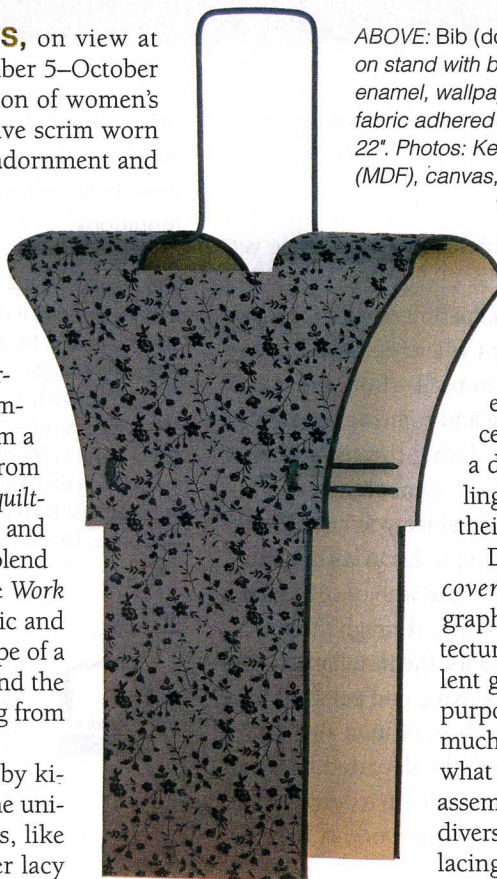


Diane Simpson: cover-ups

DIANE SIMPSON: COVER-UPS, on view at Alfedena Gallery in Chicago (September 5–October 11, 2008) challenged our usual notion of women's clothing as a self-expressive decorative scrim worn close to the skin for the purpose of adornment and beautification.

In contrast, Simpson's fabric constructions are more like body armor or ecclesiastical vestments. They seem like shields or shelters, meant both to protect and to confer a kind of official power upon the wearer. The protection offered is more symbolic than physical though. Made from a quirky mix of materials that range from the domestic to the industrial—*Bib (quilted)* combines vinyl, felt, waxed thread, and aluminum—Simpson's constructions blend delicacy with toughness. Others, like *Work Belt*, fashioned from corrugated plastic and electrical cord in the approximate shape of a kitchen apron, blur gender roles to lend the frail human form an authority missing from ordinary garb.

A work like *Tunic* seems inspired by kimonos, its flat boxy shape recalling the unisex design of those garments. Others, like *Vest*, with its tapered waist and sheer lacy



ABOVE: Bib (doodle) (detail view, left, and shown on stand with background, right), 2008; Gatorboard, enamel, wallpaper, ink, UV protected fabric, wood; fabric adhered to Gatorboard with glue; 92" x 36" x 22". Photos: Ken Simpson. CENTER: Vest, 2006; wood (MDF), canvas, fabric, paint, cord, aluminum rod, waxed linen thread; fabric adhered to wood with glue; 53" x 31" x 7". Photo: James Prinz.

fabric stretched over an aluminum frame, seem intended for the female form. Designed to reveal and expose even as it contains and conceals, this provocative object looks like a diaphanous shield and calls to mind lingerie and corsetry, which, after all, are their own kind of armor.

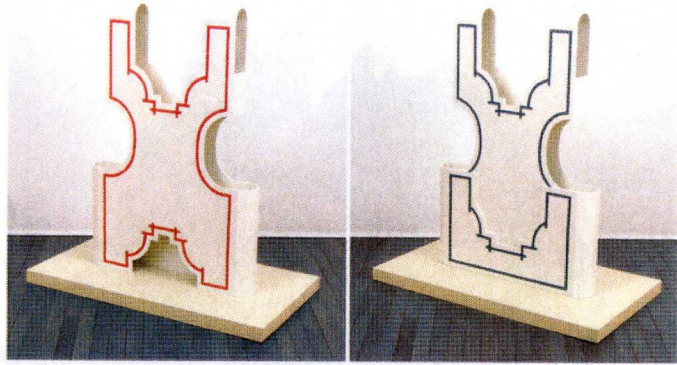
Displayed alongside some of Simpson's *cover-ups* were structural drawings on graph paper that looked more like architectural renderings than dress patterns and lent gravity to the work by supporting its purposefulness and solidity. Simpson is as much a sculptor as she is a fiber artist, and what the drawings don't show is how she assembles her works, using techniques as diverse as riveting metal, wrapping fabric, lacing electrical cord through scored and

folded plastic, and sometimes stitching or gluing fabric to aluminum frames.

Simpson has called clothing "architecture for the body." Her drawings support that idea, but her new work seems to go even further. In *Vest (red/grey)* she creates architecture for both body and personality. Even when they're see-through, these rigid architectural costumes stand in and stand up for any mere individual who might wear them.

Finally, on a sad note, this reviewer bids goodbye to Alfedena Gallery, which closed in December of 2008 after two ambitious years in Chicago. Sometimes it's not longevity but quality that marks a gallery's success, and that is certainly the case here. When Alfedena opened in January 2007, this reviewer called it the best new mainstream gallery in Chicago, and for two years it fulfilled that promise with dazzling shows by important artists in one of the city's more elegant spaces. Alfedena will be missed. 🍷

The gallery website is www.alfedenagallery.com. Simpson's work will be on view in the traveling group exhibition *Concurrent*, which will open on January 23, 2009, at University Galleries in Ben Shahn Center, William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey, www.wpunj.edu/arts_culture. The show will move on to the Heuser Art Center Gallery at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, in August of 2009, art.bradley.edu.



ABOVE: *Vest (red/grey)* (front and back views), 2008; wood (MDF), enamel, canvas; fabric adhered to wood with glue; 41" x 28" x 5".

BELOW: Drawing for *Bib (quilted)* (left), 2006; pencil on vellum graph paper, 29" x 20" (unframed); and *Bib (quilted)* (right), 2006; vinyl, felt, aluminum, thread; handsewn with waxed linen thread; 49" x 24" x 6". Photos: Ken Simpson.

