

NEW ART EXAMINER

ART & VISUAL CULTURE FROM THE GREATER MIDWEST SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2001

DIANE SIMPSON

SYBARIS GALLERY
202 E. THIRD ST.
ROYAL OAK, MI 48067
248/544 - 3388

Chicago post - Minimalist artist Diane Simpson courts polyvalent hybridized forms. Coaxed out of such diverse cultural references as Shaker furniture, Japanese ritual and architecture, and antique armour and clothing, and employing banal industrial materials like aluminum and fiberglass, this exhibition of eight sculptural forms asserted Simpson's complex vision.

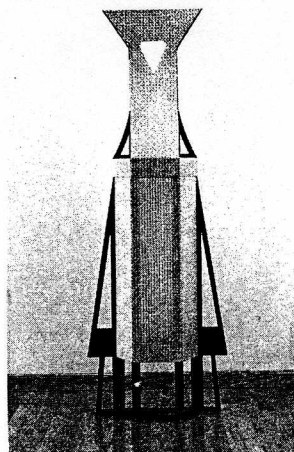
Study drawings that accompanied four of the sculptures reveal the humble origins of the process that powers Simpson's underlying poetry. Executed in pencil on vellum graph paper, each measured drawing --- as if it were a dressmaker's pattern or an engineer's rendering of a machine part -- isolates and schematicizes a section of an Elizabethan gown. In three of the drawings small prints of the gowns taken from an encyclopedia are collaged onto the paper's surface. The pictured clothes are characteristically courtly ensembles, with multiple folds and layers, and undergarments with structural elements to hold the skirts in position. The dresses' sleeves resemble erotic lilies.

Through the artist's reworkings, the gowns depart from their original function to become vehicles for Simpson's poetic alchemy, which is then realized in three dimensions. Objectified in the drawings as mechanical parts, the sleeves become metaphoric containers or anonymous scoop-like apparati, suggesting entryways, ducts, gathering devices, or harvesting tools. When further transposed from shop drawings into sculptural constructions made of industrial materials as well as fabric and wood, they make a formidable leap, becoming symbols or even heraldic emblems that might have narrative histories. The works oscillate between two spheres: As objects articulated through craft and handwork, they reference domestic and feminine history; as fabricated industrial objects they reference a public, patriarchal domain. Suspended from the ceiling by the wood armatures traditionally used to display kimonos, these enticing hybrids have conflicted aesthetic identities that range from alter

piece to circus trapeze to bondage device.

The forms' alchemical passage from mechanical renderings to alter pieces is magnified further when they seem to lose all connection to outside referents and become enigmatic abstractions. *Apron* and *Apron II*, freestanding mannequin-like sculptures whose skeletal structures are composed of fiberboard and clothed in faux fur and industrial fabric, seem to shift seamlessly from female figures to architectural forms. *Formal Wear* from 1998, a black construction resembling a kimono, even suggested a Disney cartoon figure to one overheard audience member. These abstracted heraldic emblems invite multiple readings, and the ceremonial aura that surrounds them promotes a meditative consideration.

Glen Mannisto is a poet and editor of *Trait: A Regional Journal of Art and Culture in Michigan*.



DIANE SIMPSON
Apron, 2000. Polyester, industrial fabric, wood 65" x 23" x 6"